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ABSTRACT

The Urban Teacher Corps was developed to attract and train young men and women to teach in inner-city schools and simultaneously to have them experiment with and develop curriculum materials appropriate to urban youngsters, particularly in terms of increased motivation and involvement. The three essential components of the training program which are described and illustrated in this document are (1) a supervised internship providing for immediate immersion in classroom teaching on a half-day basis under the close supervision of a team of experienced teachers, coordinated by a carefully selected master teacher; (2) a series of after-school seminars involving outside experts from various fields and offering credit toward the master of arts in teaching degree; and (3) direct involvement in the community through after-school, volunteer projects and interaction with the Community Development Center. The reality-based seminars investigate the following areas: (1) sociology of urban life (emphasizing school-community relationships); (2) psychological disciplines (emphasizing various roles of the inner-city teacher and the behavior of urban youngsters); (3) methods of teaching (emphasizing approaches which permit a great deal of student-teacher interaction); and (4) curriculum materials (emphasizing continuing creation by the interns of their own units and lessons, examples of which are included). Included also is an organizational chart depicting roles and relationships of the variety of people involved in the program. (JES)

THE URBAN TEACHER CORPS

1963 - 1968

DESCRIPTION AND PHILOSOPHY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Staff Development

Public Schools of the District of Columbia

May, 1968

THE URBAN TEACHER CORPS

Background

Now that the urban poor have been discovered, "experimentation" and "innovation" have become the catch words of urban education. Projects abound and experiments multiply, yet visible change in the operation and quality of inner-city schools remains imperceptible. And that lack of visible change will continue, we believe, unless we improve the training of the classroom teacher--the real agent of educational change.

Much has been written about the defects of our urban schools. Indeed, it has become quite fashionable to blast them, to call for a complete over-haul and to damn any resistance to innovation. To hear one diatribe is to hear them all. The plain fact is that the malaise afflicting inner-city schools will not vanish with words; we cannot drown it in a sea of rhetoric. But the illness may begin to disappear if concrete efforts are undertaken to improve the quality of teacher training for urban schools. We think the Urban Teacher Corps is an important first step in that direction.

Initially conceived in 1963, what was then the Cardozo Project in Urban Teaching received support from the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. The project sought to attract and train young men and women to teach in inner-city schools and simultaneously to have them experiment with and develop curriculum materials that would be relevant and meaningful to urban youngsters. Returned Peace Corps Volunteers seemed to be ideal candidates for such a venture. The assumption was that the sense of commitment, desire to serve, flexibility, understanding, and energy found in many volunteers - and so necessary for effective teaching-would be applicable to the inner-city school. Between 1963 and 1967, sixty-one interns have tested that assumption. Two died in training, and a few have settled down to raise a family. Of the 56 who completed the program, however, 42 are teaching either in urban schools, the Job Corps, or overseas, or helping to develop educational materials.

Our experience has indicated that although returned Peace Corps Volunteers have proved to be excellent recruits for teaching, they are not the only source of potential quality in teaching. Hence we have broadened our recruitment

to include recent college graduates, civil right workers, women with children in school, and VISTA Volunteers.

As before, we seek to train teachers for inner-city schools. Clearly, the trainees must be helped to know their students--who they are and how they learn; know how to teach--be technically proficient; and know what they are teaching. To equip these young men and women with the skills, knowledge and sensitivity necessary to meet these demands is our task. Traditional means of training teachers, unfortunately, have in some cases left a sour taste in the mouths of teachers, and students. Investing more money in the training of interns to teach conventional material in a conventional manner denies the spirit of experimentation that pervades our efforts.

Description

Before describing the program, it might be well to examine some premises upon which our goals are based. Our assumptions concern the student, teacher, training of teachers, methods, and curriculum materials.

1. Student

Many inner-city youngsters lack the essential skills of writing, reading, computation and reasoning necessary for effective participation in our society. The school, and not the student, his family, its income, or neighborhood bears the major share of the responsibility for this inadequacy.

Though the bulk of our students seldom work up to their capacity--additional commentary on the education they have received--many of them have been seriously underestimated in what they are capable of learning and achieving. After a lengthy exposure to the curriculum, methods and teaching currently used by most urban schools, too many low-income youngsters, deprived of the encouragement and means to succeed, come to believe what teachers and grades tell them--they are failures.

2. Teacher

The teacher is the catalyst in the process of learning;

the student, his family, curriculum are all contributing factors but it is the teacher who guides and directs the learning process.

Teachers possessing intelligence, commitment, flexibility creativity, and concern can have significant impact upon inner-city youngsters.

The number of excellent teachers in urban schools--and a core of such teachers exists in almost every school--are sadly out-numbered by ineffective, unconcerned, and ill-prepared persons occupying space in classrooms.

The conventional role of the teacher, to teach five classes, to handle another assignment with a homeroom, and to do all the clerical trivia that accompany teaching in a city school in an anachronism. Class load must be reduced and combined in a program of increased contact with students inside and outside of class.

3. Training of Teachers

Traditional means of training teachers, especially for those entering urban classrooms, have failed conspicuously. We sincerely believe that reasonably intelligent, mature, concerned men and women, though lacking the requisite pedagogical courses, can cross the gulf between layman and professional teacher in one year.

By totally immersing the trainee in the classroom from the first day of school under the close supervision of experienced teachers, theory is married to practice. Interns can discover for themselves what teaching is all about. Telling the prospective teacher what to do and what to expect in a classroom six or twelve months hence ill-prepares that neophyte for teaching.

A team composed of a regular faculty member and interns can integrate experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm into an enriched learning environment for the less-experienced members of the team, while simultaneously providing the ingredients of sound teaching for their students.

4. Method

The teacher-dominated, text-oriented, student recitation-type classroom simply has not met the needs of inner-city youngsters. Such a classroom environment ultimately alienates students and confirms in their minds that what happens in school is divorced from reality. We feel, therefore, that an approach which maximizes interaction between teacher and student, between student and student, draws out ideas from students rather than pours in facts, will engage youngsters and, perhaps, motivate them to learn.

5. Materials

Much of the curriculum material in use now deadens interest and hastens dropping out. Materials emphasizing relevance, people, and controversy will have payoff in student motivation. We believe also that materials that include racial and cultural diversity may encourage students tc think better of themselves.

The School

Consider Cardozo High School. There are over 2200 students of whom less than ten are white. The faculty ranges from a core of dedicated, well-qualified teachers down to the usual number of time-servers. Although the school serves a population including middle-income professionals--white and blue collar workers--it is primarily a low income area. Characterized as a "slum" school by the press (a term bitterly resented by students and faculty), Cardozo has a difficult time fighting this and other labels, mainly because the school is situated in an area that supports such stereotypes. Three of every ten families in the Cardozo area earn less than $4,000 per year. Four of every ten youths do not live with both parents. While 13% of the city's population lives in the Cardozo area, 22% of the city's juvenile delinquents come from this area. Over 20% of the people in the area are on public assistance. Such a sampling suggest the multiplicity and complexity of the problems confronting the community and its schools.

It would be foolish to pretend that this program alone can solve these problems. This is not a panacea. There is no promise of instant success. At best, the project can suggest directions to take and alternatives to grasp. If effective, it may indicate how inner-city schools can up-grade the quality of instruction.

Program

Basically, the program concentrates on classroom teaching. Each intern teaches two classes in the junior or senior high school or a half-day at the elementary level, under the close supervision of experienced teachers who also teach. The classroom, in effect, becomes a virtual laboratory for experimentation. Interns have agreed that this emphasis in the program has been the main strength of the project.

In a real sense, however, the seeds of success for such a program rests on the team leader. He must have extensive classroom experience, familiarity with current curricular innovations and a firm grounding in subject matter and methodology. Often separated, theory and practice unite in the team leader. Rather than define the role of the team leader in abstract terms, let a former intern describe what happens between herself and the master teacher (a term used interchangeably with team leader):

> "What goes on in the dialogue (between intern and master teacher) is extremely difficult to describe, but the continuity, frankness, humor, and concern which the master teachers bring to their jobs constantly engages the intern in meaningful evaluation, questioning, and understanding. The fact that the master teacher is also in the classroom is infinitely important, for not only does the intern benefit from observation of the master teacher, but the master teacher can evaluate the successes and failures, problems and strengths of the intern not only in terms of what he knows and observes of the intern, but also in terms of what he knows and understands of the kids in school. The master teacher is also there constantly, when the impressions of the difficult session, the misfired lesson, the

> glorious success is fresh and full. That is the time for evaluation and understanding even if the master teacher has not been in the classroom for that class.
>
> Another advantage of the closeness between the intern and master teacher has to do directly with the subject matter. Not only does the master teacher suggest directions and specific materials in terms of books, units and extensions of materials already presented, but the master teacher has unique perspective to evaluate and develop ideas and implications from material which is successful or unsuccessful in the intern's classroom. If I were to indicate what I thought most important to the peculiar success of this project, I would say that it is the subject and role of the master teacher."

The team leader also has some responsibility along with the specialist for the methods and curriculum development seminars. The seminars introduce theoretical approaches to discipline, testing, questioning, and general methods of teaching. Here theory is filtered through the reality of each intern's classroom experience. And this is as it should be. Here the team leader and specialist provide the latest information in the subject field, act as gad-flies, and drive interns to make sense out of their classroom experiences. Through these seminars, observations, formal and informal conferences, and--most importantly--through the example he sets, the master teacher becomes crucial to the success of the Corps.

Next in importance to the supervised internship are after-school seminars. Interns, staff, and interested faculty members meet several afternoons a week at the school centers to investigate the sociology of urban life, the psychological disciplines, and the methods of teaching. Credits for these courses can lead to a Master of Arts in Teaching degree within two years.

The seminar on urban sociology concentrates on the relationship between school and community. What is the city like? How did the urban school become what it is? Inevitably, discussion turns to the dynamics of power in the city and how it affects the school, the curriculum, and the student. The psychological disciplines seminar investigates the role of the teacher in inner-city schools and the behavior or urban youngsters. The methods seminar in the fall term, taught by each of the specialists, focuses on the problems

arising from the intern's initial confrontation with his classes. How do you control a class? How do you measure your effectiveness as a teacher? These, and many other problems like them arising from the day-to-day classroom experience, ultimately lead to larger, and more important, questions of what content to teach and how it should be taught. Many of the methods seminars have concentrated upon approaches which permit a great deal of interaction between students and teacher and encourage them both to think through problems. We believe that what passes for "learning" to many educationists is the same old accumulation of facts that are regurgitated periodically for the benefit of teachers. We reject this approach, since facts so remembered are soon forgotten. Instead, we stress methods that encourage students to figure things out themselves. Thus, knowledge for its own sake is subordinated to the efforts in getting youngsters to use facts in working out answers for themselves.

In the curriculum materials seminar, held in the spring, the interns examine current curricular reforms and begin creating their own units. Last year, for example, history interns developed units on selected topics in American History, e.g., slavery, Reconstruction, Intervention in World War I, while English interns produced about a dozen on such themes as loneliness, self-discovery, and point-of-view. To produce finely-honed units ready for delivery to teachers in similar schools across the country is not the goal. These units range from mediocre to excellent. The point is to familiarize trainees with how a unit is put together, to think in terms of units, and most important, to demonstrate that they--as classroom teachers--could create material and need not lean on any textbook or packaged material. Such a seminar, when successful, permits a teacher to immerse himself in the very crucial act of making his own lessons for his class, a unique way for teachers to look at curriculum materials nowadays. The course includes methods of teaching and measurement in terms of the curriculum developed.

All of the seminars have two points in common:

1. Discussions are firmly grounded in the reality of the classroom. Saccharine platitudes and wishful idealism, far removed from actuality, are quickly--often mercilessly-torn apart by intern and staff.

2. Seminars are enriched by visiting experts. Educators psychologists, sociologists--all exploring the frontiers of their disciplines share their views with us.

A former intern, summed up best the realism that pervades the seminar program and its potential value:

> "The continual discussion about subject matter, English for me, psychology, sociology, and educational philosophy is not confusing or without discipline because we always are building around the focal point of our experience in class. When I am told that all kids can learn or that some kids are stupid, I can test these assertions against my experience. When I think about the meaning of a poem, I think of how it would be meaningful to my class. When I hear about the psychology of adolescent development, I can think about my students and not an abstract, lifeless body of people who fit under the label of adolescents. When I discuss sociological descriptions of the urban scene, I think of how these statistics, generalizations, and theories can create over-simplified paper-people. The real teaching situation unites knowledge and experience from usually separated sources, not only making the class more interesting, but also giving a significant bond to the varied material."

If the seminar program attempts to sensitize the intern to inner-city youth and provide him with the technical tools of teaching, it leads to a crucial question: What is he to teach?

In history, the purpose is to teach a relevant and interesting course that develops thinking, writing, and reading skills in urban youth. From the first day of school, the interns begin the arduous job of creating lessons day by day. Utlizing materials developed by specialists and interns from previous years and units from special curriculum centers around the country, interns seek to develop materials that may make sense to their students while developing and strengthening important skills. Emphasis is on developing materials that place students squarely in the midst of the learning process. Mistakes, lapses, and failures result, but the raw material of creative teaching--experimentation--fosters an approach to teaching that will

last, we think, long after these interns leave the Urban Teacher Corps. These lessons, called "readings"--duplicated for students on a ditto machine--offer a variety of materials to the students. Primary and secondary sources, poetry, fiction, provide a rich vein of material. Some examples: a lesson on the six-shooter from Walter Webb's Great Plains to illustrate frontier inventiveness; excerpts from Genesis and Babylonian myths to demonstrate cultural diffusion.

Or take a lesson on the Boston Massacre. The standard textbook version is known and swallowed by most youngsters. One intern had his class see a film on the Massacre and followed it up with a "reading" on Crispus Attucks, who appeared briefly in the movie. Students confronted an obvious conflict in sources. Was Attucks as important as the "reading" suggested, or did he play a minor part in the affair? What is the truth? Such questions pose a problem for the student, a problem that, unfortunately, many teachers choose to ignore.

The use of Attucks is not accidental. Few students realize that he was a Negro. Fewer still could understand why a former slave would even be interested in fighting for a liberty that was denied to his racial brothers. Since the Negro experience is inseparabley part of the American past, discussions such as this strike close to the question of what it is to be an American. We believe that the study of the Negro in American History is one meaningful way for teachers to "connect-up" with their students--meaningful in that the study of the Negro may generate pride and respect for one's self, or offer insights into the contemporary Negro's position in America. If so, the efforts are worthwhile.

The interns in English do not have to type as much of their materials on ditto masters, for they utlize paperbacks. Paperbacks are selected primarily to get youngsters to like reading, on the assumption, which our experience seems to support, that many so-called poor readers are simply bored readers. Such students can read and read well if engaged with what they are reading. In order to involve youngsters, the interns choose books that view the problems of adolescents, such as A Separate Peace, Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, Catcher in the Rye, or The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter; or they choose books that present Negro literature in the larger framework of American literature--e.g., Raisin in the Sun, Nobody Knows My Name, Black Boy, and the poetry of Langston Hughes. They try to involve the students in

probing the basic human problems of tragedy, loyalty, and evil. Through a novel like Lord of the Flies, and a play Hamlet, or a film Requiem for a Heavyweight, youngsters may begin to build a platform of values to sustain them in later life.

In effect, literature becomes the vehicle for the teaching of skills and attitudes. If the student can identify either with a hero, or an antihero for that matter, then progress can be made in developing reading, writing and reasoning skills while opening to him other forms of literature. Thus interns seek to engage their students, believing that engagement of the student is the first step toward developing the desire to learn within the student.

The elementary teaching-teams at Grimke share the same beliefs. In the words of the third grade curriculum specialist:

> "Our emphasis...has been to make school a place where children's thoughts and experiences are used as a basis for learning. Thus in reading we are experimenting with new texts depicting urban children and their problems rather than the traditional series involving white suburban types. Washington, D. C. public schools are 90% Negro; at the date of this writing, "white suburban type" readers are in general use. By gearing the reading matter to the children's own interests we are hoping that the desire to read will not only shorten the length of time usually spent in readiness in first grade, but also motivate the children in third grade, for example, to tackle a paperback edition of the life of Harriet Tubman.

Although these texts are at the core of the reading program, we are also experimenting with pictures--from Ebony magazine, "Family of Man," etc.--as levers in exploring the children's own imagination by encouraging them to write their own books in their vocabulary. Non-readers, especially, find reading their own thoughts much easier than beginning from the unknown printed page.

In the area of arithmetic, emphasis is placed on the use of manipulative materials for each child so that he can come to a better understanding of the basic processes. The third grade is branching out into the Greater Cleveland Math program with plastic sticks as aids for each child. The use of toy money

> to role-play experiences and to "buy" items such as milk at milk time (relates) many concepts and skills developed in the classroom to the child's immediate world.
>
> In the other areas of the curriculum we are also building on the child's own experiences. Third graders have Washington, D. C. as a unit of study; but rather than a presentation of the monuments, we (deal) with the Washington, D. C. they know too-to develop how cities became as they are and how change can and should occur...
>
> Basic to all our thinking and planning is the notion that children must begin to know themselves and take pride in what they can accomplish. Therefore, through all subject areas, activities are planned in which children depict themselves in different situations through art, written and oral language, and music."

At the first grade level, specialist and interns are using a structural arithmetic program, more commonly known as "Stern Blocks." Concrete materials as wooden blocks make the number system and number relationships more tangible than conventional curriculum materials. Each child is equipped with a unit block set that enables him to touch, see and feel concepts; the abstract becomes concrete. In social studies, first graders study units on the "self", family, neighborhood and city. Astronomy, magnetism, sound and similar units involve the children in science.

Interns at the secondary or elementary level concentrate on engaging their students. The youngster's experiences becomes a point of departure in discussion or preparation of material. If we accept the proposition, and we do, that any subject matter can be taught to children at any level, then the initial task is to develop materials that replace the incomprehensible, deadening texts and primers which dull students into apathy, and undermine fundamental concepts by rote memorization. Next on the agenda is to develop lessons and units that translate these concepts into materials which exploit the experience and learning style of inner-city youngsters. A difficult task, indeed, but one that our staff and interns are attempting.

To enable each intern to find out more about his students and the community, and thereby equip him to teach better, trainees are briefed in mid-October at one of the Neighborhood

Development Centers in the city. These centers contain staff specializing in housing, legal services, social services, community organization, employment, and consumer information. Neighborhood workers, members of the community who are paid by the United Planning Organization, the agency that operates these centers and coordinates Washington's anti-poverty efforts, organize block clubs and--in general--act as liaison agents between each center and the people of the community.

During September and October, interns spend time familiarizing themselves with the Cardozo area. They also spend some time visiting families of their students.

Upon completion of this orientation period, interns are encouraged to work with students in after-school projects and to do volunteer work in community organizations throughout the city.

During 1967 - 68, for example, interns have been working with the Circle T, Red Cross, and Bowling Clubs at McKinley and the Aviation Club, the Film Club, Girls' Basketball Team, and the Job Orientation Program at Cardozo.

Believing that the best way to know a community, as well as earn its respect, is by giving service, most of the interns are doing volunteer work with such organizations as Barney House, St. Stephen's Church, Fides Neighborhood House, "Future for Jimmy" and Hillcrest Children's Community Center.

Evaluating each intern's impact upon students and families is difficult indeed. A few examples, however, may indicate the nature of contacts taking place.

An intern at Grimke Elementary School wrote:

> "In (one) family I visited, I expected the mother to be less cooperative than she turned out to be. The boy was delighted to see me at his home. I brought his papers and reading book to look over with his mother. He read for her the pages in his book that we had learned and I could see much pride on both their faces. In this particular case, the boy was quite a problem when he first arrived at school, but he has been improving beautifully. The mother and I discussed why this could be so and how we could be sure and continue the improvement. She is most anxious for him to do well, since he is already

> behind a year and his brother is a would-be 7th grader in the fifth grade. I got much more from this parent than I had expected and I think she may try and follow up on some suggestions I gave for helping the boy with his work."

At Garnet-Patterson, one intern said:

> "I try to meet at least once a week with one particularly talented, mature English student, whose abilities and interest are far above the level of the class. He is given out-of-class reading assignments which we discuss informally... He is clearly a student who needs this apart-from-class...stimulation. He is enthusiastic and thus far not truant as was his case last year."

Another intern who has been working with a special project for unwed mothers at Children's Hospital has this to say about her experience:

> "The best part of my tutoring experience with Mary, sixteen year old Negro unwed mother of a darling little baby girl named Michele, was our one to one relationship. What a joy to become involved in a "Socratic" dialogue after the constant frustrations of working with thirty-five noisy teen-agers in a classroom.

I was exceptionally fortunate in being given Mary to work with as she is a bright, motivated, pretty, eager young girl. She lives alone with foster parents and her baby, who was about a month old when I began to tutor Mary.

We started with poetry, then moved on to short stories, creative writing, and a novel. When I asked her to get a library card she did so and brought home two or three books to read. What I enjoyed most was letting her "discover" answers for herself. We had all the time in the world. I could spend the entire afternoon pursuing one point, and focus completely on her learning and growing. (I might add incidentally that I could feel myself visibly relaxing as the afternoon wore on. That was great!) When she answered questions herself, she knew she was intelligent and perceptive. I didn't have to prove it!

After only three months of working with her, I can't report any dramatic changes. What I did notice, however, was the growth in her self-confidence and self-esteem. When I first spoke to her on the phone, her voice sounded rather dull and apathetic. As the months wore on, I noted a more sprightly tone in her subsequent talks. Perhaps the greatest gain for Mary was the development of her confidence, part of which stemmed from my belief in her.

I also enjoyed my relationship with her foster parents. Her mother and I quickly developed a warm, easy rapport, and I felt that she behaved naturally with me. Her father, on the other hand, although sweet, polite, and warm, never seemed to lose a certain shyness.

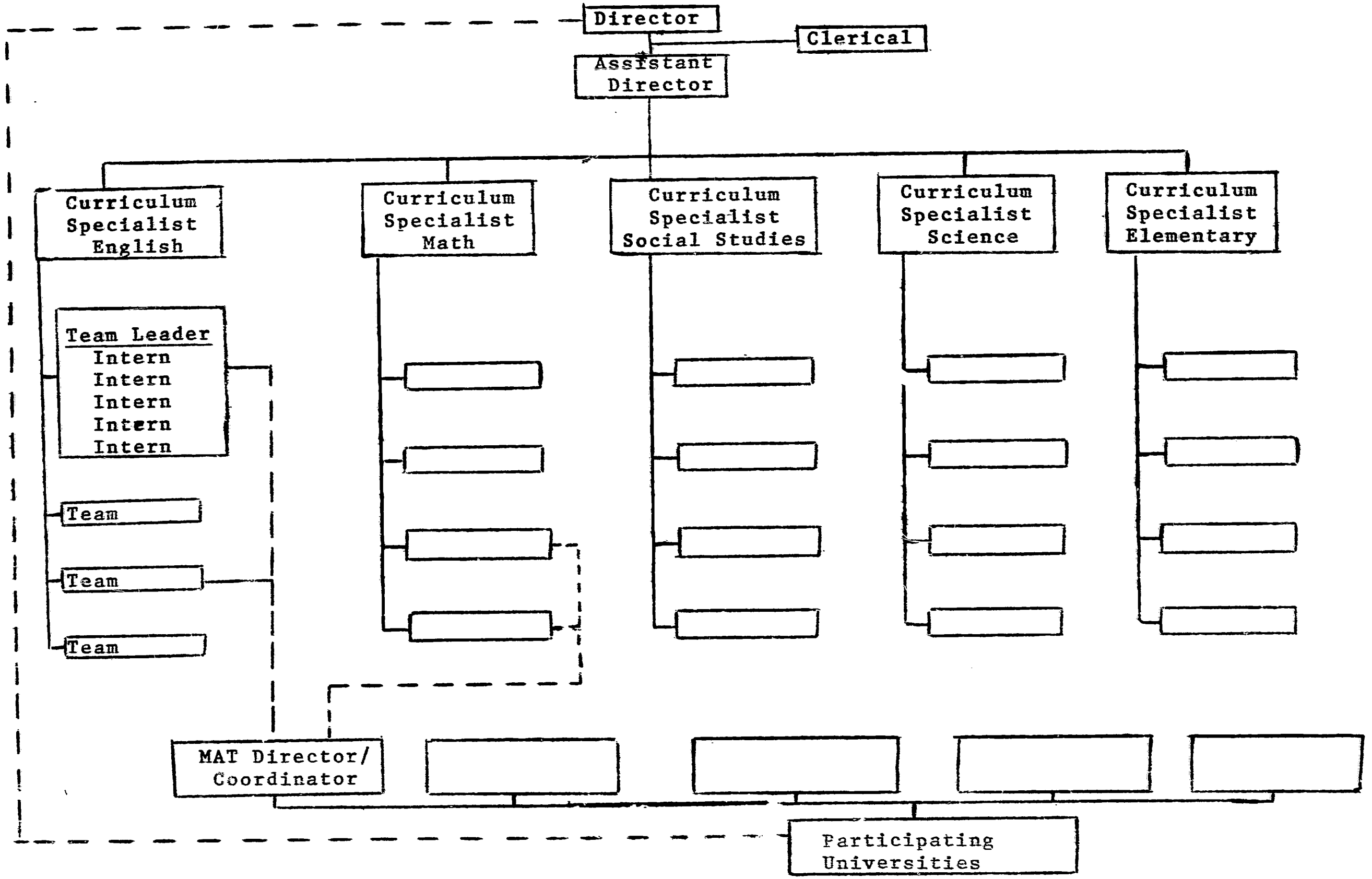
Mary is now enrolled in night school, and I intend to call her frequently to find out how she is doing. She seems determined to graduate from high school next year. I am glad that I had the chance to give her some personal encouragement, and I'm looking forward to my next tutoring experience from DR. Gutelius" Mobile Unit Project."

We feel that this proliferation of the interns into the life of the community will serve to give them a wider knowledge of the lives of their students, greater confidence in themselves, and a firmer footing when they assume their full-time duties next year. What has become increasingly clear to us moreover is that the teacher who knows his students, especially outside of the formal classroom situation, has a greater chance to "hook" those students in the classroom. Certainly, this is not a profound observation. It is, however, an attempt to inject some flesh and blood into a platitude that superintendents, administrators and teachers continually mouth. After all, if we get down to fundamentals, we're speaking of ultimately revising the conventional role of the teacher and school. Teachers should teach half time and spend the other half working with students and developing materials for their classes. To have teachers carrying five classes and a homeroom with an extra assignment; to have subjects in the curriculum that bear little relationship to the reality of the second half of the twentieth century; to employ the same methods and materials that "worked" with youngsters elsewhere--is simply courting

disaster. The "social dynamite" building up in our cities that a prominent educator warned America about a few years ago hasn't abated. If anything, the recent gush of rhetoric and enthusiasm for compensatory programs has obscurred the program. Indeed such programs are peripheral to education. They assume that what occurs during the school day has failed; therefore, one must remediate, enrich, and encourage these deficient youngsters after school and on weekends to improve their performance. Far more effort, ideas and money, we feel, should be poured into reconstructing what happens between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Little progress will be made until the role of the teacher, his methods and materials, and the place that the school must play in the life of the community are dealt with. In effect, the structure of education must be rethought and, ultimately, revised to meet the needs of inner-city youngsters.

The Urban Teacher Corps, with interns teaching, learning, and creating--a blend of laboratory and Academe, a mixture of what is with what ought to be--may well be that very small step down the road to real educational change.

Urban Teacher Corps - 1968-69



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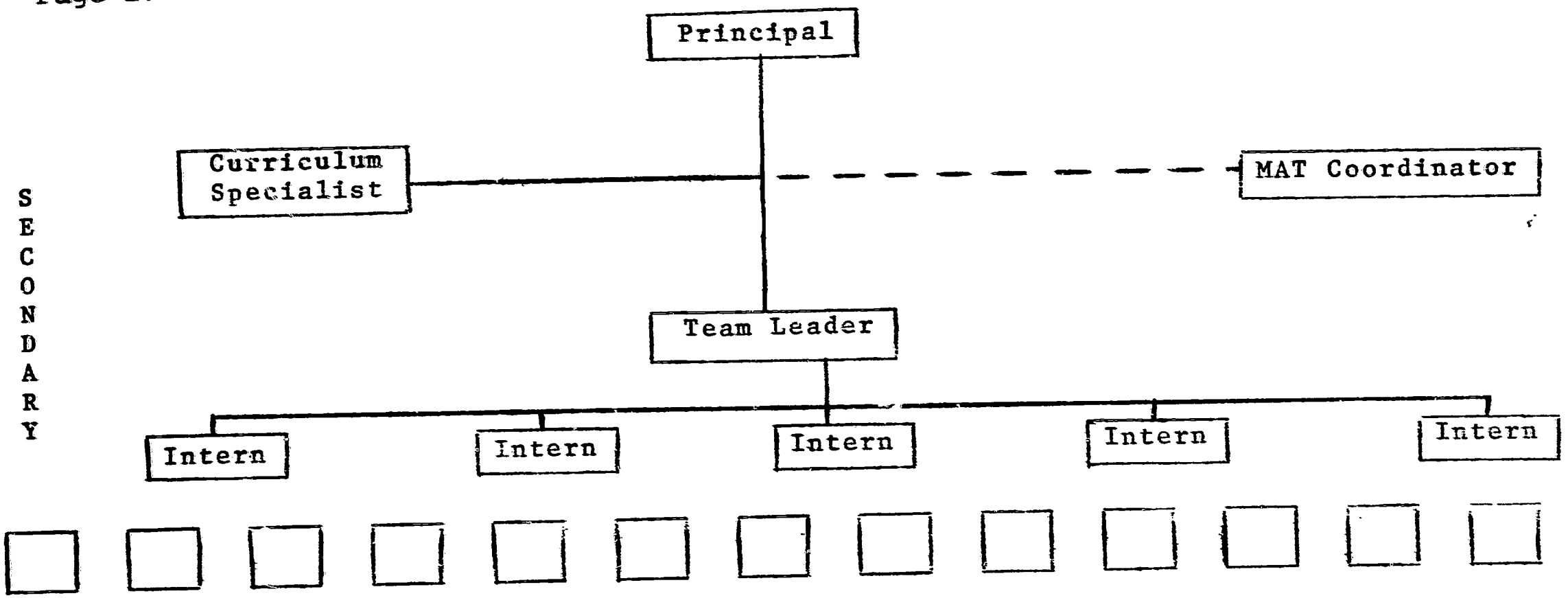
SECONDARY



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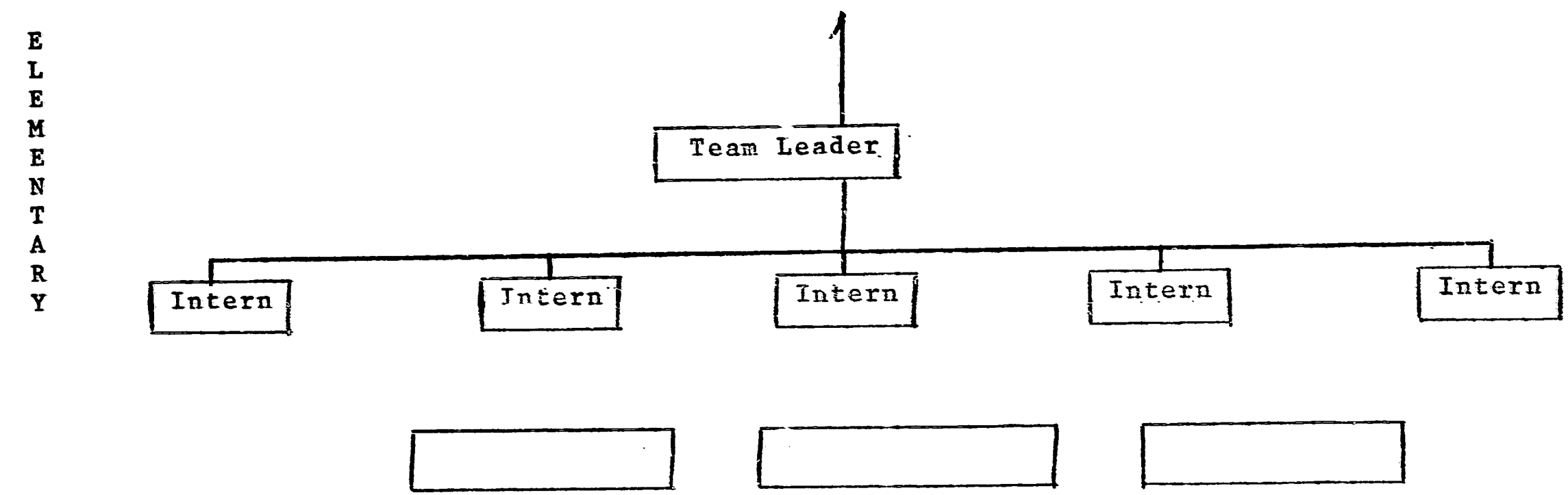

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