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ABSTRACT

A far-reaching 1968 study on teacher aides revealed that very little was known about the aid that aides supposedly provide. It was found that there is some direct relationship between the use of aides and action programs to improve instruction. Some general points crop up regularly: 1) Teachers who have aides usually will not do without them. 2) Teachers who are contemplating having aides often are very apprehensive about sharing the classroom with another adult. 3) Training programs need to be developed at which both the teacher and aide learn to work together. 4) Teacher aides are performing three categories of services: supervisory, clerical, and instructional. 5) Teacher aides generally express satisfaction with their jobs, but complaints relate to the teacher's over-expectations or under-expectations of them. The roles must be defined. The rest of us might just play our roles by supporting the several differentiated staffing studies now under way and withholding judgment until the relevant data have been gathered and analyzed, and by staying off the bandwagon until more is known about the advantages and disadvantages. Many years may elapse before we really know what aid to education the teacher aides have provided, but the future looks bright. (JS)

DO TEACHER AIDES AID AMERICAN EDUCATION?

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Recently a teacher, a principal, an education professor and a student gathered at the Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory in Albuquerque to view a video tape made of elementary rural students. The class being depicted perhaps was not typical in that it had 26 students, a teacher, and two teacher aides; and the students and adults all appeared to know what they were doing and why they were doing it!

After about ten minutes of viewing the tape, the teacher asked the question that was on everyone's mind, "Which one is the teacher?" The professor pointed at one of the adults, the principal at another, and the student and the teacher "guessed" at the third adult. And all were correct!

The question of whom is doing what may not at first flush seem relevant, but when considered with a number of other variables, it becomes highly relevant. In point of fact, the answer may result in one of the most significant substantive and organizational changes to overtake American education during the past 200 years.

For some time now we have expected teachers to be all things to all people. Some term this relationship between the student and the teacher the "Old Red Schoolhouse" organizational pattern. This arrangement not only wasn't good enough for our generation, but time makes it no more palatable for children.

The more than 80,000 teacher aides we now find in our schools are living evidence that at least some people recognize the fact the self-contaminated classroom is obsolete. Not only do the knowledge

and population explosions make the job of the teacher unmanageable, but the realistic attempts to individualize instruction with emphasis on performance criteria rather than on time criteria, i. e., semester, hours, Carnegie units and so forth, demand a new look.

Initially, teacher aides appeared on the educational scene to help reduce or eliminate those activities that are necessary, but which do not exactly require a college education to handle. That to which we refer is all too familiar to teachers. The Virginia Education Association in a 1967 study found that elementary school teachers were spending 3.4 hours during the regular school day on non-instruction activities, i. e., running the ditto machine, supervising the lunchroom, selling tickets at the football game, etc. These may all be important, but they also have little to do with the need to improve instruction.

During 1967-1968 the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NEA) conducted a far reaching study on teacher aides. The TEPS Commission found that very little was known about the aid that aides supposedly provide. Working with state TEPS groups, the Commission identified some 200 schools that used teacher aides in one capacity or another, and each of the schools had one or more other innovative efforts underway--team teaching, non-graded elementary schools, computer-assisted instruction, flexible-scheduling, etc. The reference to be drawn is that there is some direct relationship between the use of aides and action programs to improve instruction. There is no doubt, however, that in those schools where aides have become members of the instructional team, the role of the teacher has changed significantly. (A listing of the 200 innovative schools is

contained in a booklet titled Selected Demonstration Centers, available from NCTEPS at $5.)

While there definitely are more questions about teacher aides than answers, there are some general points that crop up with regularity:

1. Teachers who have aides usually will not do without them.

2. Teachers who are contemplating having aides often are very apprehensive about sharing the classroom with another adult. A considerable degree of this anxiety arises from those situations in which the teacher is not expected to participate in the selection or training of the aide--the aide simply arrives, often unannounced, on the first day of school!

3. Training programs need to be developed at which both the teacher and the teacher aide learn to work together. This obviously requires more expenditure of time than merely one short training session prior to the opening of school. A preschool program, and regular in-service sessions are necessary. A review of current practices reveals as many as 300 programs designed to train the teacher aide. But only a handful of programs are designed to help the teacher use an aide after he gets one.

4. Teacher aides are performing three general categories of of services:

   a. Supervision--help students across the street, meet the buses, walk students to the restroom, supervise the cafeteria, and monitor the halls.

b. Clerical--type, run the ditto machine, grade objective-type tests, locate materials in the library, and arrange for use of audio-visual equipment.

c. Instructional--perform relatively low level instructional tasks such as reading stories to elementary children, providing tutoring assistance to older students, and occasionally taking over as a substitute when the regular teacher is absent. Many educators are strongly negative about aides having any responsibility for instruction, but the fact remains that many aides do teach.

5. Teacher aides generally express satisfaction with their jobs, but when complaints are aired they often relate to the teacher's over-expectations or under-expectations of them.

A case in point is the Navajo woman employed as aide in a Southwestern classroom trying to read a story to second graders while the teacher was off in an adjacent room showing a youngster how to dust furniture. It's just barely possible that there was a little confusion over role identification!

However, the other side of the coin relates to those aides who feel their competencies are not being used to the fullest. Often, these persons possess college degrees, and may know more about a given subject than the teacher. If their qualifications are not utilized in a worthwhile manner, the school will not be getting its money's worth and the teacher will be saddled with still another problem instead of receiving the assistance she has a right to expect. However, the teacher who lacks self confidence may feel threatened, and

justifiably so, by the presence of the well-trained individuals. In fact, one survey revealed that 14 percent of the teachers questioned felt their professional status was being just so threatened!

The literature is replete with the contributions made by teacher aides as evidenced by the lengthy bibliography at the end of this article. Aides are here to stay, but the profession is divided over what to call them--teacher aides, paraprofessionals, supplementaries, auxiliary personnel, etc. But whatever we call them--these people who give teachers support--we must make certain that we do not cease our explorations for more and better ways of aiding education simply because we have added a single body to the educational team.

Dr. Don Davies, former Executive Secretary of NCTEPS and now Associate Commissioner of Education in charge of the new Bureau of Educational Personnel Development, points out that the way we organize schools and the way we utilize staff typically does not make it possible to accomplish the aims of education. We must reorganize to improve education!

The coming of the receptivity of aides in the classroom has been accompanied by the recognition that there may be better ways to reorganize our schools than by sticking with the establishment theory that the only viable approach is to reduce class size from 34 to 33, or from 28 to 25. Rather than talking about numbers we are beginning to talk about what should be happening to students. And when we talk about learning activities we need to consider who does what with whom! The teacher aide has had more to do, in our opinion, with changing education than the technological advances the profession has made, but between the two major modifications are possible.

When the aide came into the classroom it was necessary to examine the roles of two people, i. e., aide and teacher. Successful programs clearly demonstrate that clear delineations of responsibilities are essential. Example--student goes to teacher requesting permission to go to the restroom. Teacher responds by saying "no!" The student goes to the aide with the same question, and the aide responds by saying "yes!" Who is running the ship? (The example may be over simplified but it has happened, or something similar, in almost every family--if you can't get what you want from father go to mother.)

The rules must be defined, not only for the students but for the teacher and aide as well. When this has been done to the agreement of both, the results can be satisfying to all concerned. The definition of rules has indicated a greater expansion of the teacher and his staff idea than that which exists in most schools. Further differentiation of rules is possible and promising.

Teachers and school board members have long been concerned about the single salary schedule by which teachers have been rewarded for growing older on the job and for taking "in-service" courses. But neither of these criteria may be particularly related to instructional competency. While some educators advocate "merit" pay to provide incentive to those who go "above and beyond," most reject the concept because it simply gives one teacher more money than another for essentially the same number of students and the same responsibilities.

We believe that one reason approximately 60 percent of today's new crop of teachers who won't be in the profession five years from

now is because the job often is personally unsatisfying and financially unrewarding. It is unsatisfying because the teacher must be omni-capable--psychologist, lecturer, custodian, recreation leader, secretary. It is unrewarding because one teacher can put every ounce of his energy into the job and still receive exactly the same paycheck as his 8 to 4 counterpart. It is common knowledge that good teachers often are promoted away from students and the classroom into "administrative" jobs that pay more. What kind of nonsense are we perpetuating when we seek ways to get good teachers out of the classroom?

Any problems that we have had with teacher aides are worth it because of the potential they have helped uncover. Through grants from the Education Professions Development Act, at least three school districts are trying to find ways to reorganize both professional staff and non-professional staff to better meet the needs of children.

Differentiated staffing studies are now underway in Temple City, California; Kansas City, Missouri; and Beaverton, Oregon. Professional associations have led the way in these localities.

All along the line teachers, administrators, board members--and students, in some instances--have worked together on the tasks of identifying the rules played by various members of the instructional team, training professional and non-professional personnel to fill those roles, determining responsibilities and financial renumeration considering certification requirements, and defining evaluation procedures and criteria.

Unlike some educators who spend much of their time reinventing the wheel, these pioneers are charting unknown waters, and the going is likely to be slow and frequently frustrating. Professional

associations do do more than talk about welfare issues. If what they are doing makes sense--and we applaud their efforts because they are treading where some of the rest of us have feared to venture--all of education stands to gain. Those of us on the sidelines must not expect them to have all the answers. The rest of us might just play our roles by supporting such studies and withholding judgment until the relevant data have been gathered and analyzed, and by staying off of the bandwagon until more is known about the advantages and disadvantages.

Perhaps the full significance of differentiated roles is not apparent at first glance, but consideration of the changes needed in teacher education programs convinces one pretty quickly of the ramifications. Many leading teacher education programs already have built teacher aide alternatives through the career ladder patterns into their system.

Only three school systems have been singled out for mention here, but it would be possible to take a look at an entire state for direction. Florida, following the trials and tribulations all of us remember so well, now is in the process of pulling together the leadership of the FEA and the State Department of Public Instruction in a concentrated effort to analyze the plus factor for differentiated staffing. A number of selected demonstration centers likely will be selected before the close of the school year Other examples could be mentioned, but specific citations are available from the U. S. Office of Education.

Remember the description of the video-tape reviewing exercise at the beginning of the article? Is there any wonder that it might be

difficult to determine which adult was the teacher? We are now able to determine behavioral objectives for students; perhaps we will soon be able to identify the behavior that can best be performed by specific people on the instructional team, be they professionals or non-professionals. As we define the roles and responsibilities we also can determine the appropriate award systems (for one alternative refer to the article on differentiated staffing prepared by Dwight Allen for WCIENS--available from National Headquarters--$.75.)

We may find that many years may elapse before we really know what aid to education the teacher aides have provided. Certainly, change is slow but the future looks exceedingly bright.