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ABSTRACT

This paper describes two approaches to differentiated staffing. The first approach involved reorganizing teacher staffing by creating a career ladder to permit hierarchical staffing without freezing faculty in positions that would limit growth, fix rewards, and destroy morale. The career ladder allowed the use of teachers and paraprofessionals in teams organized to provide different services to students, with roles determined by the learning task at hand and the students' need for mastering that task. This approach tended to result in a rigid hierarchy, which assumed that certain teacher functions are always of greater importance than others. However, student needs shift constantly, and an effective teaching team should shift accordingly, which is the objective of the second approach to differentiated staffing. The second approach involved performance contracting in which teachers, working in teams, submitted bids to the school board, thereby competing with colleagues for contracts to accomplish specified teaching tasks with results measurable in terms of student achievement. (PD)

DIFFERENTIATED STAFFING: The Second Generation

By Peter B. Mann

Differentiated staffing, like happiness, means different things to different people, and the controvery over it seems destined to intensify before it is resolved.

While school boards, administrators, and teachers across the nation continue to debate just what differentiated staffing is, it is being turned into something else again in the Mesa public schools.

Fenwick English, director of the Mesa, Arizona, project which is financed by the U.S.Office of Education, calls it "second generation" differentiated staffing. He also calls it a potential answer to demands for "accountability" in education, and a sort of in-profession "performance contracting" aimed at raising individual student achievement.

Whatever it is called, he says, Mesa's version of differentiated staffing--if it works--will be a model for fundamental reform in the public schools.

To understand the second generation, English says, it is essential to understand the first. He is as well qualified as anyone to explain differentiated staffing. Before taking the reins of the Mesa project in the summer of 1970, he spent five years directing the much heralded, pioneering effort at staff differentiation in the Temple City, California schools.

In the simplest terms, he says, differentiated staffing is the

specialization of teaching functions, a division of labor which allows each teacher to do what he or she does best in helping students to learn. But differentiated staffig is much more than that.

One thing it is not, English says, is a disguised version of that old teacher nemesis, merit pay. He concedes that some school boards and superintendents have tried to use it that way, reinforcing teacher animosity and undermining the concept's promise, but the two simply do not equate.

Merit pay rewards teachers adjudged, in some ill-defined manner, to be superior to their colleagues, even though they perform the same duties and have equivalent training and years of service. Differentiated staffing, on the other hand, provides additional pay only for teachers assuming special responsibilities; it does not discriminate between equals.

"A merit pay plan," English says, "doesn't alter the structure of the school. It leaves it intact....But differentiated staffing does change the structure. It changes the roles and responsibilities of teachers, and it pays them more for the assumption of additional duties."

SCHOOL STRUCTURE

The key to understanding differentiated staffing is to analyze --and see the need for changing--the structure of the school, which has roots extending deep into the history of American public education.

Essentially, the public school of today replicates a structure begun in 1848 when the first graded school was established in Quincy, Mass., English says. That school was founded on the assumptions that a single teacher could teach all subjects, that a student's mental age matched his chronological age, and that all students shared the same learning needs.

The three basic components of a school, he says, are content, process, and structure. In the Quincy-style school, these components have been more or less constant. Now, because of all that has been learned about learning since 1848, they must be treated as variables.

Educators have recognized this need to some degree, English says, and many changes have been made in content and process. These changes, however, have been insufficient. While they have accommodated man's expanded knowledge and incorporated the use of new media, they have not affected the basic school structure.

"In most schools," he says, "now as over one hundred years ago, teachers do most of the talking and kids do most of the listening. Teachers teach, but children don't necessarily learn. Despite all the talk to the contrary, schools are still teacher-centered and teacher-dominated."

When he speaks of school structure, English means the way time, space, and staff are used. Historically the use of each has been characterized by uniformity: classrooms of the same size accommodating the same numbers of children; like periods of time being assigned for different tasks: teachers trying to "be all things to all pupils."

"The graded school," English sys, "was a pre-scientific invention. Our educational fathers advocated it before the advent of IQ testing, before we really knew much about the vast differences in mental ability between students....

"Our efforts have gone into making teachers aware of pupil differences, but forcing them to maintain their roles in a structure which was organized on the principle that such differences do not exist between children...."

Even in secondary schools, where the need for subject area specialization by teachers has been recognized, English says that the specialization "has been organized ancillary to the main role of the classroom teacher as the person who can be all things to all pupils."

In other words, the school's structure--its allocation of time, division of space, assignment of staff--continues to focus on the education of students as groups rather than as individuals.

"Our instructional programs are dominated by teaching to groups," English says. "We have much literature on individualized instruction, and the need for it, but it is primarily at the theoretical level..."

While the theories are widely accepted, rarely have they been translated into successful practice. Most attempts to individualize instruction, in fact, have focused on reducing the size of the student group.

But smaller class size is not the answer, English says. It

merely refines, rather than changing, a structure in which "teachers are too burdened with the shift of a group or groups to have much real time to individualize what they do with children."

Once it is recognized that children learn in different ways and at varying rates, it is only logical to adjust the school to these differences, using time and space flexibility and applying each teacher's special abilities where they will produce the maximum results in learning.

In practical terms, this means setting learning goals, determining what specific learning (and teaching) tasks are involved in reaching them, diagnosing each student's status and needs in relation to the goals, grouping students in constantly shifting arrangements (from independent study to large lectures) according to their needs, assigning teachers to teams which in toto are equipped to help students accomplish the designated learning tasks.

Differentiated staffing then, is a division of teacher labor to fit student requirements; a restructuring of school time, space and staffing patterns so that the focus is no longer on teaching but on learning, no longer on the teacher but on the student, no longer on the group but on the individual.

THE FIRST GENERATION

Specialization is not entirely new to public education. School administrators traditionally have been assigned differing roles arranged in a hierarchy. Teacher specialization, however, has been almost exclusively on a horizontal plane, with all teachers playing esentially the same role but on varying grade levels or in different

subjects.

Under differentiated staffing, according to English, teachers perform different tasks within grade levels and subject areas. For example, a team of primary teachers might include one who excels at diagnosing pupil difficulties in reading or arithmetic, another who excels at teaching the required skills, and others who can transmit concepts and influence attitudes toward learning.

When the Temple City experiment began five years ago, the basic approach was to reorganize teacher staffing by creating a "career ladder" to permit hierarchical staffing without freezing faculty in positions that would limit growth, fix rewards, and destroy morale.

The career ladder allowed the use of teachers and para-professionals in teams so organized that their numbers provided different services to students, with roles determined by the learning task at hand and the students' needs for mastering that task.

"The question then," English says, "was,'Can it be done?'-- not 'should it?' but 'can it?'" He believes the Temple City program has proven not only that differentiated staffing can be done, but that it should be done. Among several reasons, he calls particular attention to these:

. Teacher specialization improved learner achievement. "The greater the degree of specialization in the teaching of skills and disciplines, even in the elementary grades, the higher the achievement of the pupils."

. Changing teachers and groupings on a flexible time schedule did not

damage the students' sense of security, as some feared. "We found teachers pretty insecure on many occasions, but not very many kids. In fact, sometimes teachers hid behind the kids. They would say, 'That's not good for the kids,' when what they meant was, ' I don't like it.'"

- There was "considerable success" in changing boys' attitudes towards school, largely because flexible grouping and scheduling made the program "more activity-based, with greater variety, more movement, increased stimulation.
- The program began in one school and now has spread to Temple City's other five, because it has been evaluated as highly effective, a major improvement.

With that record, why isn't Temple City's version of differentiated staffing simply accepted as a model for other school districts? Why is the second generation necessary?

Because, English says, the first generation was developed in response to "a teacher problem," that is, finding a way to spotlight teachers' strengths and buttress their weaknesses. "Now, we're looking for a pupil solution, trying to build a bridge between the teacher's functions and the pupil's needs."

While the career ladder provided a means of assigning different tasks to different teachers, it tended to result in a "rigid hierarchy" which assumed that certain teacher functions are always of greater importance than others, English says. Student needs, however, shift constantly, and the most effective teaching team would be one which could change accordingly.

In other words, the most important member of the team should be the one whose talents are most appropriate for the immediate task, and the hierarchy should be fluid, not fixed.

THE SECOND GENERATION

The point of the Mesa project is to establish realistic student learning objectives and to devise a fluid arrangement of teacher roles to insure that the objectives are met. Although the project is one in a nationwide network funded by the U.S. Office of Education to develop workable methods of staff differentiation, it is unique in the approaches it will employ.

With an initial fifteen-month grant for $152,000 from USOE, the project began modestly enough. Three schools --Fremont Junior High, Holmes and Lincoln elementaries were selected as the early testing grounds, because faculty members there voted overwhelmingly in favor of giving it a try.

Polling the faculties was only one of several steps considered essential to launching the project. Other essentials were the support of the district school board, Superintendent George Smith and his staff and, perhaps most important, the cooperation of the Mesa Education Association.

If the project shows promise in the early stages, English says, USOE funding is expected to be extended to three years and the project is intended to encompass the entire Mesa school system (twenty-five schools, more than twenty thousand students) by the end of that period. Without the backing of the district power structure, and particularly the teachers, the chances of demonstrating promise

would be nil.

An impressive array of outside resources has been aligned to help Mesa. Aside from USOE, English and his staff have access to guidance from the Center for Differentiated Staffing at the Claremont (California) Graduate School and the Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory (SWCEL) in Albuquerque, N.M. Arizona State University's college of education has donated office space to the project staff, which subcontracts with ASU for materials, services, and professional consultation.

At present, each pilot school is developing and refining its own version of the "fluid hierarchy" of teacher roles. Within each school, in fact, different teams use different techniques, adapting to the particular needs of the students and the special talents of the teachers and their aides.

For differentiated staffing to approach its potential for improving instruction, English believes, this variation from team to team, and from school to school, is necessary. Just as individual students have characteristics of their own, so do groups of students, teams of teachers, and school communities. The use of time, space, and staff, as well as the development of learning objectives and teaching techniques, must be adaptable to the special characteristics of both individuals and groups.

Variations make it impossible to capsulize what is happening in Mesa's pilot schools. English offers this generalization: A "universal process" (differentiated staffing) is being applied to all

three schools, but each school's faculty is developing its own organizational plan, and each team is devising its own operational plans.

The significance of the Mesa project, however, may lie not so much in what is underway as in what is ahead: weekly monitoring of student progress by computer, and performance contracting by teachers.

Even with the most flexible use of time, space and staff, English says, it is difficult to track, and respond to, the quick and constant changes that occur in the attitudes and achievements of the individual student. The project staff believes that a computer program could be developed to monitor these changes, translate them into needs, match the needs with teaching resources, and feed the team the information necessary to regroup and reassign on a weekly basis.

Preliminary discussions have been held with electronic data processing specialists at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, and they are interested in developing such a program, English says.

Formidable as this challenge is, it pales beside that of introducing performance contracting by teachers. Performance contracting already has stirred a storm of controversy among educators, primarily because several school boards around the nation have contracted with private firms to guarantee that students reach specified achievement levels within given periods. (If the firms fail to deliver, the boards don't pay.)

Contracting with consultant firms outside the established framework of education carries obvious implications which have placed teachers and their professional organizations on the alert. They question not only the revolutionary effects on the profession should such practice become widespread, but the wisdom of linking learning inextricably with the profit motive. Heat has been generated, too, by charges that reading achievement successes under a performance contract in Texarkana resulted not from greater teaching knowhow but from test directed teaching. Now, educators' eyes are staring (if not glaring) at Gary, Indiana, where for the first time the management of an entire public school has been turned over, on contract, to a private firm.

In Mesa, this threat to the organized profession will not exist, English says. There, performance contracting will enter through the front door, with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Mesa Education Association and the district's teachers. Working in teams, teachers will submit bids to the school board, competing with colleagues for contracts to accomplish specified teaching tasks with results measurable in terms of student achievement.

MESA-STYLE CONTRACTING

As English outlines it, the contracting process will start with the setting of an educational goal by the district school board, employing the expertise of district personnel or outside consultants to diagnose the status of the student group involved and to set reasonable objectives for a stated period of time. For example, achievement testing might reveal that fourth grade students in a

particular school are reading at the third grade level, on the average; and attitude testing might reveal that some of the students dislike schools, others come from deprived backgrounds, still others have language difficulties, and these are the major causes of their lagging achievement.

From this information, specifications would be drawn for raising achievement to grade level or higher for all these students within, say, a single school year. These specifications then would be set forth by the board in a "request for proposals" (RFP) issued by the board to district teaching personnel. Proposals submitted by teaching teams, English says, would summarize approaches to be taken; detail the staffing, materials, and supplies, facilities and supporting services required; and include a total cost figure. The board would award the contract on the basis of economy and the apparent soundness of the plan.

Once the contract was awarded, the teaching team would be in complete charge of the program, determining how to use its members' individual talents, how to spend the funds, how to divide the share set aside for teacher salaries, how to shift leadership roles, how to monitor progress how to assess and meet the needs of the individual student.

Beyond this brief outline, the RFP approach to differentiated staffing has not been spelled out. It is so new, so experimental that English frankly admits that many formidable obstacles must be overcome and innumerable questions must be answered. As it was five years ago in Temple City, he says, the prime question today is not

should it, but can it be done.

THE TRIAL RUNS

To find out, English and his staff are working with the Mesa Education Association and the faculties of the three pilot schools to develop procedures for implementing inhouse performance contracting.

For the first test, English and James K. Zaharis, assistant project director, have developed an RFP for submission to the Holmes, Lincoln, and Fremont faculties. In turn, each faculty is preparing a proposal or bid to fulfill the RFP specifications. The three schools will be competing for a maximum of $20,000 in project funds. The dollars for the schools will be allotted on the basis of how well the schools have fulfilled the specifications and how well they can argue their cases during the scheduled negotiations. This trail run will be strictly a project affair, with the project staff and one of the pilot schools as the contracting parties. English anticipates awarding the contract by the end of this January.

Based on what is learned in the process, the Mesa school board will undertake a trail run of its own this spring, probably in March, English says. This effort, in which Mesa Education Association negotiators will participate to insure equal treatment of each bidding team of teachers, will be "a dry run using Monopoly money," he says.

If the RFP approach works, English sees it as a major step toward "building bridges between teacher functions and student needs," toward perfecting the differentiated staffing process. He also sees

it as a means of accomplishing these related goals: transforming the teacher into a full professional with the necessary support to serve his client well, and insuring that schools are accountable for the progress students make and the money boards spend.

If RFP doesn't work, it is likely to be because of the profound questions, not yet answered, which it raises regarding the economics, the politics, and the power structure of public education. Some samples:

- What happens to a teacher's annual contract if his salary depends on belonging to a team which submits a winning bid?
- What happens to professional negotiations on behalf of all district teachers by their organization?
- What role does the principal play when his school is being run by a series of semi-autonomous contractors?
- What happens to school financing when dollars are allocated on the basis of particular tasks rather than average daily attendance?
- What happens to teacher training and certification programs when specialists replace generalists?
- What happens to state-prescribed curriculums, textbook adoptions and tenure laws?

English readily concedes the answers to these questions--and many many more-- are unknown. But he believes answers can be found if the results of performance contracting are striking enough to make the search worthwhile.

Even if RFP proves unworkable, he is convinced that some way will

--must --be found to individualize instruction in mass education, and differentiated staffing offers the best hope of finding that way.

"It's not a panacea," he says, "not a cureall. It is a process and any process can be refined. Our experience shows that differentiated staffing is an improvement over the traditional process. Whatever form it ultimately assumes, the second generation should be even better."