

## **A Postmodern Idea for Improving Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Carol Ann Tomlinson and Susan Demirsky Allan (2000) put it very well in describing almost any classroom, “All these students have the right to expect enthusiastic teachers who are ready to meet the students as they are and to move them along the pathway of learning as far and as fast as possible.” Postmodern thought provides for openness and flexibility of ideas and practices to achieve the same goal of excellence in educating students. Rotating teacher’s teaching assignment is one idea as a result of the process.**

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### **Introduction**

**T**he calls for higher levels of accountability have led public school districts to push at every level to align all aspects of the school’s business of educating students. Superintendents present a vision, a mission or mission statement is developed to align to the vision, goals and objectives are developed to align to the mission, campus improvement plans are aligned to the district’s goals and objectives and thus the mission and vision, and individual departments are aligned to the campus plan and indirectly to

the mission and vision. However, rotating teaching assignments through the curriculum on cycle can strengthen alignment.

The purpose of the article is to present a postmodern idea for improving instruction while strengthening the accountability system for school districts at the same time. Fenwick English (2003) states “The postmodernist seeks to show that there are always a plurality of options, approaches, and possibilities in a multiplicity of probabilities.” When teachers prepare for meeting the educational needs of students, teachers put together a plan to meet curriculum standards at each grade level. Next the plan is aligned and matched to district and state standards. Afterwards the curriculum is organized listing skills students should be able to demonstrate in every subject at each grade level. A curriculum map follows illustrating when skills will be taught. Teacher lesson plans are developed to meet the curriculum plans. With the common goal in education to educate students to meet life’s challenges, strengthening alignment at the furthest link becomes the most important part to making a full impact. Consider this rotating assignment example: A car salesperson has two years of experience in the sales department, two years of experience in the auto repair department, two years of experience in the parts department, two years of experience in the business department, and two years of experience in the body repair department. One could say that the person knows the car business because the person can meet the customer and business needs at all levels. Now consider this example: A person at the same car business spends ten years in one department only - the sales department. Although the company is aligned, a broader experience allows for meeting the customer or student and the business needs at the same time and at all levels. This model projects what is needed to strengthen the alignment link for students in our schools.

### **The Need**

James L. Gentilucci (2004) conducted research on *Improving School Learning: The Student Perspective*, in which he makes two recommendations:

1. The level of difficulty in the curriculum should be matched with individual learner’s skill level.
2. The amount of repetition in curriculum content and process can effectively reinforce new learning and maintain skills over time, such repetitious work should be used judiciously.

Gentilucci’s research further appeals that students need to take a more academically rigorous curriculum, hire teachers that teach better, and provide more learning opportunities for students at all levels. In another research study conducted by Hill, Rowan, and Ball (2005), *Effects of Teachers’ Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching on Student Achievement*, the study explored whether and how teachers’ mathematical

knowledge for teaching contributes to gains in student' mathematical achievement. A key finding of the study was that teacher content knowledge plays a role even in the teaching of very elementary mathematics content. The authors further suggested, "One strategy toward closing the achievement gap, then, could be investing in the quality of mathematics content knowledge among working teachers in disadvantaged schools."

### **Modern Department Structure**

A modern department structure, in terms of teacher assignments, has always been and continues to be the modern view or assembly line approach of specializing in one area. Take for example a newly hired mathematics teacher. The teacher is assigned to teach Algebra I and Geometry in her first year. The next year the teacher teaches Algebra I and Geometry. For the next eight years the teacher teaches Algebra I and Geometry. Before you know it, the teacher has retired teaching the same two subjects. Although the teacher is qualified to teach all courses in the curriculum, they become specialists in teaching two subjects, three subjects, or one subject. Therefore, creativity in working with all students and expansion of the mathematics knowledge base is limited at best. This is the modernist way, and this is the way that it has always been in the American education school system.

### **Postmodern Department Structure**

Using the example above, the postmodern view departs from the modernist view in that it provides for more openness and influx of ideas. In the postmodern department structure, the same teacher is rotated through the full curriculum. Cycle rotation could take the form of rotation each year, each two years, or each three years. For example: A newly hired teacher teaches Algebra I and Geometry year 1, Geometry and Algebra II year 2, Algebra II and Pre- Calculus year 3, Pre-Calculus and Statistics year 4, and Calculus and Algebra I year 5. The advantages to students, to the teacher, to the campus, and to the alignment of the complete system could bring enormous results. The teacher now becomes very knowledgeable and conceptual in all subject areas, provides better mathematical explanations, constructs better and more focused lesson plans, connects mathematics with relative manipulatives and activities, seeks more creative strategies, and develops a clearer vision for themselves of educating the student on the full curriculum.

### Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the purpose of the article was to present a postmodern idea for improving instruction while strengthening the accountability system of school districts at the same time. If students are going to be held accountable for learning, then schools must take on more postmodern thinking processes that strengthen its most important link – the teacher.

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