

CURRICULUM GENERALIST—

THE *Phi Delta Kappan* recently published an article entitled, "Is the School Superintendent Obsolete?" An editorial in the June 1966 *Nation's Schools* asked, "Are Amateurs Taking Over in Educational Administration?" Now, *Educational Leadership* requests that I write a piece called "Curriculum Generalist—A Vanishing Breed?" If I didn't know better, I'd think the educational establishment was a very anxious group.

The sociologists tell us that concern about loss of status or disappearance of role grows out of the anxiety created among the leadership (the gatekeepers, the "in" power figures) during a period of rapid change. No matter how we deny it, those of us who presently are in leadership roles have a vested interest in maintaining our power and control.

Let's face it, the central office folk represent (at least in the minds of many) a force dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Charles Silberman (in *Fortune*) says, "Reform is impeded by the professional educators themselves, whose inertia can hardly

be imagined by anyone outside the schools . . ." ¹ Later in the same article he states, ". . . it is overwhelmingly clear that one of the principal reasons children do not learn is that schools are organized to facilitate administration rather than learning . . ." ²

It is now common for disenchanting youth to say, "Don't trust anyone over 30 years old." Marie Rasey (among others) has pointed out that, "In periods of stress, the old and wise are not valued. What they know belongs to other days. It is the young who know the little that is known. It is they who must teach. The old complain. The young defy. The old cannot be finished with their complaining and the young find no end to their defiance."³ Unflattering as it is, we are the old guard. (If you don't feel old, think how young the graduates you

¹ Charles E. Silberman. "Technology Is Knocking on the Schoolhouse Door." *Fortune*, August 1966.

² *Ibid.*

³ Marie I. Rasey, editor. *The Nature of Being Human*. The Franklin Lectures of 1956-1957. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959.

A VANISHING BREED?

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hired for teaching jobs this fall seemed!)

For the first time in our history, the world is changing so rapidly that the young live in a world completely different from the one into which their parents were born. This is at the root of some of our communication problems with young people. The alienation and lack of common values are far greater than that experienced between adults "from the old country" and their first-born generation in "the new world." Youth (and young teachers) may be right in their belief that their world (today) is so different from ours (the world we wish still existed) that what we know and say has little utility and meaning.

No doubt exists in anyone's mind that this is a period of major change in education. The concepts of increased technology and the explosion of knowledge so often spoken of seem remote in their application and impact on the classroom. However, most of us have many highly personal evidences of change.

The scholars, the foundations, the

legislators, militant teachers, and the public all have taken a hand at making the superintendents' and curriculum leaders' heads spin. Hours are spent in understanding federal guidelines, courting politicians, initiating federal and state programs, establishing liaison with non-public schools, and meeting with teachers in negotiating sessions. Life is different. Nothing is abstract about these problems!

As a test, think about the way you spent your time two years ago and how you spend it today. If it isn't distinctly different—you're not tuned in. (If you can keep your head while all around you are losing theirs—maybe you don't understand the situation!)

What Is a CG?

My assignment is to ascertain whether the curriculum generalist, in this milieu of dynamic and threatening change, is a vanishing breed.

As a working definition, let's say that the curriculum generalist (CG) is an individual who has responsibility for instruction on more than one grade level and across subject matter lines.

This means an elementary or secondary education consultant or coordinator is a CG. So is the assistant superintendent for instruction—or the superintendent, for that matter. The building principal a CG? Probably, but for this discussion let's stick to the individuals usually housed in the central office.

Who Has Seen a CG?

Is there such a thing as a CG? Yes, Virginia, there are CGs—in theory, at least—although they, like Santa, may exist in spirit rather than in the flesh. There are several reasons why the role of the CG may be an impossible function.

First, I have observed that anyone who has been around long enough to be appointed a CG usually has some area of special interest. Sometimes, because of his background, he gives more attention to the elementary or secondary level to the exclusion of the other. Some are reading “nuts,” or group process devotees, or international understanding enthusiasts. The generalist may be hooked on the Tyler rationale, using it as a framework within which to tackle any and all problems. The CG may make the staff ill when he periodically adjusts his bifocals (female) or knocks out his pipe (male) and profoundly says, “Let's remember to start with the children where they are.” It is at this point that teachers tune him out.

It is difficult for the CG to be totally objective, to focus on all children and youth at all times, to be more than human—yet that is what the job calls for.

How realistic is it to believe any one person can be so knowledgeable and so skillful that he can work with the num-

bers of people and the range of views which are present in most school systems? After all, we are told each child is different and that learning is a highly personal and individual matter. Isn't each teacher different and isn't the curriculum a highly personal and individual matter? Is there any such thing as a general curriculum, and if not, what should a CG deal with?

How can we be sure citizens or teachers want the help of a generalist? Life is complex and moving rapidly, and specialization is seen as the key to progress. *How* to do something now has greater visibility and demand than *why* to do it.

It's a shock, isn't it, to realize your advice and counsel will not be sought? Young teachers don't want theory and philosophy—they value expertise. They may value the curriculum specialist. They may discount the contribution of the curriculum generalist.

Is There Need for a CG?

I've said the role of the CG is unrealistic because of the size and scope of the task and because it is impossible to be as skillful and objective as the job demands. The same is true of the position of President of the United States, Secretary of Defense, mother of twins, or father of the bride. Yet, all undertake functions which must be performed.

A generalist should be able to work with others to *identify long and short range goals*. This function, always important, takes on new meaning in a time when the tempo of change has increased. The opportunity, challenge and dangers of special programs make it imperative that these new activities

be examined in the light of overarching purposes. The lure of federal or state funds can seduce us into initiating programs not in line with our goals. Carefully constructed purposes can serve as yardsticks and help us in decision making. Indeed, when goals are clear, various programs can be woven together to move us more rapidly toward predetermined objectives. Developing new programs, often in haste, is less hazardous when a long-range plan has been developed.

A CG should have the ability to work with others to *continuously assess needs, balance and articulation*. These are factors which influence goals. Undoubtedly, when new elements are introduced into the curriculum, particularly special purpose programs, attention must be given to balance and articulation. Without the curriculum generalist, who would give attention and voice to these concerns?

To work effectively and cooperatively, to set goals or solve problems, means employing a process. The CG has a major responsibility to *help determine the strategies or processes used in curriculum improvement*. Changing the instructional program has always been a complex business. It is becoming more so. A sophisticated educator, skilled in group process and knowledgeable about how individuals learn, can be invaluable.

The CG should *foster teamwork and cooperation and should be concerned with coordinating the efforts of specialists*.

If ever educators needed to work together, the time is now. Yet anxiety over change, lack of public support and understanding, administrative in-

eptitude, and student and teacher militancy are tearing us apart. A major challenge to the CG is to help the school faculty, the pupils and the community pull together. In addition, the proliferation of specialists makes the coordinating role of the generalist more vital than ever.

Communication in its broadest sense is another major function of the CG. He is most often the one who interprets educational needs and programs to the staff, board of education, and community. To do this effectively he must know what is going on locally (an increasingly difficult task). Good relations with staff and a knowledge of promising activities can be a major factor in diffusion of innovation. The CG should not underestimate the effect of his attention and encouragement as a motivational force. His awareness should also include practices in nearby districts, promising national programs, and trends. He should know about appropriate internal and outside resources and use them! Sniffing out opportunities available from state and federal sources is also an important activity.

The CG should *encourage and aid in evaluation*. Once a program in education is initiated, it tends to go on forever. Because of the many pressures, the lack of resources, shortages of staff, priority needs of kids, and federal requirements, we will see more evaluation. The CG can and should be in the forefront in these efforts to see that what is done in the name of assessment is positive, just and helpful in moving his district toward its purposes. If educational change is to result in educational improvement, the CG must

play a leadership role in selecting and using procedures to evaluate programs.

Will Curriculum Generalists Disappear?

The present climate in the schools (and in the nation) is against the CG. The fever to "get things done," and the search for simple, easy and universally applicable answers to complex problems, is not the milieu which respects the person with the values we in ASCD believe the CG should possess.

An individual who is committed to providing appropriate education for all children, respect for the individual, and the encouragement of diversity, often is not welcomed or even understood.

The challenge to the present CG is to develop new skills which are effective in this hostile environment. Dynamic times call for dynamic methods. Do conflict and confrontation, so successfully used in the civil rights arena, have a place as a strategy of curriculum improvement? Have we ever used the techniques of demonstration programs with the same degree of effectiveness as they have been employed by the agriculturist? The social scientists could tell us much about the role of change agents. Have we explored this area?

The CG can retain his values and yet take on new methods. We know he can help the staff cooperatively identify goals appropriate for the learners they serve. Once there is agreement on these, the CG can borrow from the activist some methods which are more in tune with the tempo of today, to move toward these

commonly accepted objectives in a more decisive way.

Can the CG keep his values without losing his cool and without being (or appearing to be) an educational square?

Obviously, if the curriculum generalist can accomplish the many tasks demanded of him, his influence and contribution will flourish, but performing all these functions demands an ever increasing degree of skill. Meeting these new problems demands flexibility.

Only the CG who strives to keep the lines of communication open (in both directions) will remain effective.

Only the CG who continues to learn and grow will continue to make a contribution.

Only the CG who can find the time and energy to meet the ever increasing demands of the job will survive.

It is possible that without these qualities the curriculum generalist may become an educational dinosaur. The exact reason for the extinction of that obsolete species is obscure. One aquatic creature, a contemporary of the dinosaur of 60 million years ago, still survives. He is the coelacanth, the oldest known living vertebrate. The scientific world was excited recently when, after a two year quest, photographer Jacques Stevens photographed, at about 130 feet below the surface, the phosphorescent-eyed, living fossil which ordinarily roams the Indian Ocean at a depth of 2000 feet.

How did the coelacanth survive? He kept his mouth shut; he thought in depth, and he stayed in the swim. That might be a lesson for the curriculum generalist. ☞

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