AS A catalyst, the curriculum generalist may initiate, accelerate or retard specific instructional improvement activities. Curriculum generalists are curriculum workers who are concerned with and have responsibilities for the total instructional program at specific levels (e.g., primary consultant, supervisor of elementary education, director of secondary education) or at all levels (director of curriculum, assistant superintendent for instruction).

The generalist is concerned with all aspects of the total day—achieving balance, organization for teaching-learning, individualizing instruction, classroom climate, and self-growth goals. He serves in a leadership role for this kind of “total look.” Generalists function most effectively when their relationships with special area curriculum workers are clearly understood.

Currently, the curriculum generalist’s function of providing a balanced, though constantly improving, instructional program is being threatened in many school systems. Several developments, such as the employing of many specialized curriculum workers, assigning of high status to curriculum workers in specific areas, reassigning generalists to specialized categories and reducing the number of curriculum generalists at specific levels, have been viewed by many persons as meaning a reduction in the importance of the curriculum generalist. The trend to organize without the generalist at various levels was given momentum by the reorganization of the U. S. Office of Education which moved generalists working in elementary and secondary education into specialist categories.

To persons participating in meetings of ASCD affiliated units, the fears and frustrations of many curriculum generalists have become apparent. Especially concerned have been general curriculum workers at the elementary and secondary school levels. Numerous examples of curriculum decisions being made by persons lacking knowledge of the age group directly affected by the decisions have been cited. Many examples have related to changing organization patterns (e.g., flexible scheduling, non-grading, departmentalization), while others have focused on moving...
specific content into earlier grades (e.g., algebra in seventh and eighth grades, formal reading instruction in kindergarten).

Many factors, such as federal funds for categorical aids, community-wide pressures for specialization, and statements and/or standards established by national professional organizations now necessitate a clarification by curriculum generalists of their responsibilities in the total program of instructional improvement. Further, it is imperative that the function of the generalist be recognized, accepted and supported by superintendents and boards of education.

**Functions of a Generalist**

Generalists, in clarifying their responsibilities, should identify those functions which are uniquely appropriate to them. These would include:

1. Establishing communication among specialists who are working with students at a specific level so each has knowledge of the total program of these students. A generalist is concerned with balance. Balance is a many-faceted “thing.” Just to mention a few, efforts may be extended toward achieving balance in:

   Grouping procedure (size)—providing balance between participation in individual, small group and total group activity

   Grouping procedure (purpose)—providing a balance between achievement, interest, social, special need and special task grouping

   Types of learnings—concepts, skills and attitudes

   Kinds of activities—verbal vs. non-verbal

2. Identifying curriculum needs which cut across all subject-matter areas. Developing positive self-image, involving learners in task-setting responsibilities, promoting creativity and other important curriculum goals may be approached through such questions as: “If our schools were 100 percent effective, how would you describe the products?” or, “What is a good day for the ten-year-old?” These and similar questions should focus the thinking of the specialist beyond his immediate subject-area concerns.

3. Covering gaps in specialized areas. There will always be important subject-matter areas for which there will be no specialist; therefore, generalists must see that attention is given to these areas.

4. Developing readiness for curriculum improvement in specific areas. Knowledge of research and promising practices should give guidance to the generalist as he identifies those areas which most need to be improved within the school system. Frequently this is accomplished by initiating visitation programs, using outside consultants, sponsoring studies and research and introducing publications which have new and exciting ideas.

5. Sharing information regarding abstract vs. concrete, actual vs. vicarious, passive vs. active, physical vs. mental, etc.

   Degree of demand—providing a balance between moments of mental rigor and relaxed reflection, between situations demanding more and situations demanding less individual stretch.

   The specialist works for balance in his area; however, the generalist must blend the segments into a balanced total—from the learner’s point of view.

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projects and programs under way in one school with all schools in the system. Good working relationships usually exist within systems that have an organized way for sharing information about exploratory and experimental projects. In addition to sharing information, the generalist also works for balance between subject-matter areas and among schools involved in exploratory and experimental projects.

6. Providing leadership to determine priorities among curriculum needs. As specialists are aware of needs in their areas and usually have projected programs which exceed finances available for curriculum development activities, it is important that efforts be made to get consensus among all curriculum personnel on needs and activities which should have priorities. Distribution of the limited funds available is often one of the most difficult tasks the generalist faces. When requesting budgets from specialists it is important to determine an approximate amount which will be available and to communicate this along with the request.

7. Assisting in giving evaluation a broader setting. While achievement will be of interest, evaluation of the activity should also include whether or not such established values as good human relations, democratic procedures, and positive attitudes and appreciations are supported. Most evaluation in education has focused on measuring achievement. There are many accepted standardized tests for this purpose. Generalists must constantly be alert to possibilities for gathering data relative to those objectives which have lacked systematic evaluation.

8. Developing an understanding of the why of specific federal programs. Generalists may not agree with the rationale for specific federal funding, but they should know the rationale and be able to explain it to the various specialists. Working relationships are often affected by the availability of funds for some, but not other, areas. This may mean that the generalists will need to give additional support to specialists in areas less favored by federal funds.

Clarifying Role of Generalist

There are many conditions in the school which affect the work of the curriculum generalist as a catalyst. Job descriptions and expected roles, committee structure, relationships of federally funded projects and those projects supported from local funds, frequency and types of meetings, and procedures planned to foster change are all important.

The position of generalist is strengthened by carefully and cooperatively developed job descriptions. Job descriptions should include the relationships which exist between the positions as well as the responsibilities which have been assigned to positions.

There are those who would argue that job descriptions place needless restrictions upon certain individuals. It is my belief, however, that carefully developed job descriptions release rather than restrict.

In a large school system where there are a number of curriculum workers with various responsibilities (generalist, all levels; generalist, specific levels; specialist, specific levels), job descriptions assist in keeping the channels of responsibility known.
Identifying in one's own district the category in which each curriculum worker most appropriately belongs and then considering the relationships which should exist among the various categories result in a better understanding of the possible contributions of the curriculum generalist.

School systems which have a systematic procedure open to all school personnel for suggesting exploration and experimentation usually have clearly defined roles for generalists within the procedure. Having suggestions and recommendations routed through established procedures, usually a series of committees, results in more carefully planned curriculum improvements. An accepted, understandable and functioning procedure for curriculum development is essential for every school system.

At the present time the "partnership" of the federal government with local districts is making available a number of categorical aids. Frequently, in the effort to meet deadlines, federal proposals are being developed for curriculum improvements which are not channeled as are proposals for improvements financed from local funds. In fact, there is in the large school system a real danger that we will develop two layers of curriculum workers of every kind; one layer federally financed, the other through local funds. When the relationships between persons who are working within the school system on federal projects and those who are not is clear, the generalist is able to function more effectively.

It is imperative that there be frequent and carefully planned meetings relating to proposals for improving the curriculum. In such meetings, each curriculum worker's view of the total curriculum should be strengthened and he should also understand more clearly the relationship of his level and/or area in the schools.

To foster curriculum change and improvement, the generalist must establish communication with other school districts, review the research, know the thinking of leaders in education and keep abreast of major developments in the specialized areas. Much assistance is given to the generalist in this area through his professional associations.

All of the conditions seem to have one common goal and that is "open communication." It is only when there are many ways developed for communication to flow that the generalists are accepted in their multi-faceted roles as curriculum innovator, instructional improver, program balancer, and authority on human growth and development.

Today's curriculum generalist must be a specialist. He must specialize in maintaining a broad view of the instructional program. Recognition of this specialization is essential for soundly based instructional improvement.
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