

CURRICULUM GENERALIST IN THE CURRENT SCENE

WILLIAM F. YOUNG

Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Instruction
Public Schools, Dearborn, Michigan

"WE ARE in a period of revolutionary change in education!" Such a statement may be open to question. However, the fact that we are participating in unique, exciting and challenging times is obvious.

We can meet the challenges of these times only if professional educators in local districts work together as co-professionals. Curriculum specialists and curriculum generalists must unite their efforts if we are to attain an improved instructional program. All professional curriculum workers, including teachers, can be identified as specialists or generalists.

Even though we are here devoting our concerns to the generalists, this emphasis should not lead one to the conclusion that all that is needed in education is the use of generalists. It is not a question of either/or but rather a blend of generalists and specialists playing supporting roles in the instructional improvement process.

A curriculum generalist is a person who is responsible for instructional leadership in more than one subject matter area. Such a person could have responsibilities at one or more educational levels. Educators in the positions of superintendent, assistant superintendent for instruction, curriculum director, principal, elementary supervisor, secondary consultant, and junior high school coordinator would be considered curriculum generalists.

A curriculum specialist is a person who is responsible for instructional leadership in one subject matter area. Once again such a person could have responsibilities at one or more educational levels. Educators in the positions of social studies coordinator, art consultant, guidance director, mathematics supervisor, and science coordinator would be considered curriculum specialists.

Need for Generalists

The size, scope and complexities of education today have all contributed to an increasing emphasis on specialists and organizational patterns based upon the principle of division of labor. The very factors that justify a greater emphasis on the specialist also support the increased need for the generalist and amplify the

importance of his role. Generalists are concerned about instructional improvements in all areas of the curriculum with a dedication to the total teaching-learning process.

The generalist clearly has the responsibility to assume a leadership role in the process of curriculum development; curriculum balance; articulation between grades and divisional levels; and integration among the various subject matter areas.

Functions of a Generalist

It might be helpful to look at specific functions for a curriculum generalist. The functions listed below are those written for a central office position entitled Curriculum Generalist, K-4. In performing the functions of the position, this generalist must work with teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, and other central office personnel. The functions of the position are to:

- Help to communicate and implement pertinent findings of current research and new programs in early childhood education

- Initiate and assist in curriculum improvement activities

- Help teachers and principals with teaching methods, instructional materials, and implementation of the instructional program

- Initiate and assist in research projects, experimental studies, and evaluation programs

- Work with the assistant superintendent and area administrators to solve instructional problems of a system-wide or area-wide nature

- Work closely with curriculum committee chairmen and members in planning for committee meetings, participate in the meetings, and carry out committee actions

- Coordinate activities within certain curriculum committees and among other committees

- Keep the total staff informed of new and promising practices and interpret school programs to the community

- Work with the personnel office and universities in placing student teachers

- Carry out assignments as directed by the assistant superintendent.

Competencies Needed

The action words that best describe the appropriate behavior of the generalist in the performance of the above functions are: encourage, stimulate, support, facilitate, guide, influence, suggest, question, challenge, demonstrate, coordinate and lead.

The use of these words strongly implies that a successful generalist must have competencies in the area of human relations. If a generalist is to help teachers learn and grow professionally, he must be able to work effectively with them. He can help release the energies and potentials of teachers that are often stifled. Improvement of the instructional program is a human process, it results from changes in people.

Sensitivity to, acceptance of, and respect for people are essential if cooperative efforts and team approaches are to be fostered. These values are basic to the

co-professional concept. In the final analysis there will be a high correlation between the success of the generalist and his ability to work with people.

In order to assume a leadership role in helping teachers maintain and increase their professional capabilities, the generalist must have a high degree of competency in several critical areas of instruction. The generalist has a clear responsibility to help teachers to:

- Keep abreast of new curriculum developments

- Gain new insights into the teaching-learning process

- Evaluate and use new instructional media

- Improve skills in teaching techniques

- Keep up-to-date with developments in subject matter areas

- Revise goals, purposes, organization, content, and evaluative procedures within programs

- Grow in cultural and personal development

- Review and apply the latest research in education

- Become involved in research at the classroom level.

In relation to the above, the generalist must have knowledge, understandings, skills and abilities basic to performing these leadership functions.

Improving Competencies

The generalist can perform his functions more adequately by improving his competencies. This can be done through participation in activities that will help him keep abreast of the times. Professional growth is imperative. Most of us fall far short of our potential because we do not value growth opportunities highly enough.

There are many excellent activities in which a generalist can and should participate. *Membership in a professional association* and deriving the benefits of that membership in terms of publications, programs and activities in itself is valuable. Related to this is the activity of *reading professional literature* on topics related to a person's responsibilities. The professional literature should include books, yearbooks, journals, periodicals and pamphlets. This is a good way to learn about new ideas, trends, issues and innovative practices.

Membership on regional and state curriculum committees provides another valuable opportunity. Sharing problems, ideas and programs with people both within and outside the local district, can also be helpful. In education we do not have nearly enough "show and tell time." This can be done in *local and regional seminar settings*.

Another growth setting is the *workshop* where local professional staff members can improve present programs and develop new programs. The workshop becomes a significant learning experience for the participants. Universities are another source through which the generalist can increase competencies by taking *graduate courses* on a selective basis. *Consultative help* is available from universities, state departments of education, and intermediate school district offices.

Research institutes and professional *conferences* and *conventions* provide still other avenues of opportunity for the generalist. *School visitations* outside the local district do not occur frequently enough. *Local in-service courses*, co-sponsored by the local district and universities, dealing with special local curriculum problems also have merit.

Utilizing these opportunities requires that the generalist be concerned enough to expend the individual effort to participate in these activities. In addition to individual motivation, there needs to be support and encouragement from the local district—the superintendent and the board of education. The support and encouragement must go beyond “lip service” to include a strong commitment to the concept. Since the provision of time for these activities is essential, a high degree of understanding is necessary. Meeting the expense related to some of these activities is a personal matter. However, many of the suggested activities should be financed by the local district. The local commitment must be strong enough to provide the necessary budgetary support.

The views expressed do not provide the answers for the many perplexing problems we have in education. However, there has been an attempt to identify some of the complexities in education, the challenges we face, and the generalist's role. All of us, whether we are generalists or not, have a clear responsibility to do more and do it better if we are *really* to meet the needs of youth and society in this changing world. ❧

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Fred T. Wilhelms, Chairman and Editor

Authors include:

WALCOTT H. BEATTY
CLIFFORD F. S. BEBELL
RODNEY A. CLARK
PAUL B. DIEDERICH

JACK R. FRYMIER
DORRIS MAY LEE
FRANCES R. LINK
FRED T. WILHELMS

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

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