PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

Aid to Curriculum Development

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ALL professional personnel in the school program are, to some extent, generalists in the areas of human growth and development, and have some understanding of personality development and learning theory. Nevertheless, a need has developed for several kinds of specialists to work as a team in facilitating the intellectual, personal and social growth of each child.

This need has developed because the classroom teacher, as one of the specialists, cannot be expected to possess all of the understandings and professional skills inherent in the various disciplines to meet the unique needs of each child whom he teaches. It is no more reasonable to expect such a super-person in the classroom than it is to expect any one lawyer to meet all the legal needs of 100 citizens, randomly selected, or to expect any one medical doctor to meet all the health needs of each of the 12 to 15 hundred individuals who might come to his office during the course of a year.

Contrary to beliefs sometimes expressed, specialization among professional staff in the school program has not come about because the teacher has too many students. Rather, specialization has developed because of our vast amount of knowledge about human growth and development, motivation, and learning as well as about environmental influences which affect the life of the child and determine, to a great extent, his ability to develop to a maximum his intellectual, personal and social potential.

It is no more reasonable to expect that the teacher will have the understandings and skills to provide the therapy needed by a child to overcome emotional components inhibiting learning than it is to expect the counselor or the school psychologist to be a specialist in methods of teaching arithmetic or language arts. On the other hand, it is reasonable to expect that a child might need the therapy in order to profit from the teacher’s guidance in learning arithmetic and skills in reading.

Staff members in pupil personnel services can make unique contributions to curriculum development. These professional specialists are in a position to render
contributions because they work in different ways, as well as in different settings, with students and their parents. For example, the school social worker is in a position to give information regarding the attitudes of both parents and students from different subcultures of the society represented in the student body. Such information can be invaluable to principals, curriculum supervisors, and teachers as they plan programs designed to interpret the school’s philosophy and objectives.

The speech therapist can give information which will assist language arts teachers in developing learning activities designed to improve the communication skills of students. The school counselor can share information concerning theories of vocational development with teachers at all levels as they guide students in exploring their vocational aspirations and the world of work.

The school psychologist can assist in an appraisal of the academic achievement of an individual child or a group of children and share in the interpretation of findings which can influence, not only the subject matter content presented in the classroom, but also, methods used in both individual and group learning activities. The clinical psychologist can share information with the staff concerning the psychological climate of a given room, or the total school, which can be of value in curriculum planning.

In these ways and many others, specialists in pupil personnel services can work cooperatively with other specialists, such as the classroom teacher, the school administrator, and the curriculum supervisor in planning sound subject matter content, methods of instruction, and other activities designed to enhance the intellectual, as well as the social and personal, development of each student.

Changes Needed

While no one is likely to question the importance to curriculum development of contributions such as those suggested above, we must face the harsh realization that in a great majority of schools today these contributions are not being made in any systematic manner. If schools were organized in such a way that these and similar contributions were significantly influencing curriculum development, we probably would not have a situation in which some 30 percent of our youth leave the school before completing the normal twelve-year program and where as many as another 30 percent complete the twelve-year program in a way that is not personally meaningful to them as well as to their parents. Many factors contribute to such a situation, but only intelligent (and perhaps more aggressive) leadership on the part of school personnel will remedy this situation.

In order to create a climate in which the contributions of pupil personnel services might significantly influence curriculum development, a number of basic changes need to be made. For example, classroom teachers must have released time to work with other specialists in gaining a better understanding of the emotional needs of each child in his classroom. The teacher who has the sole responsibility of 30 elementary students for six hours a day, or of 120 to 150 different students during a school day, does not have the time or the energy to participate in intelligent curriculum planning. Adequate time for systematic consultation with profes-
sional specialists, such as the school counselor, the school social worker, and the school psychologist must represent an integral part of the teacher's professional life. Too frequently, teacher consultation with other specialists occurs only when a crisis has developed with a given child. Crisis-oriented consultation, quite naturally, tends to focus upon rehabilitation and remedial approaches. Thus, we often find teachers and personnel services specialists engaged in extinguishing a whole series of brush fires in contrast to focusing upon preventive approaches which can be incorporated in curriculum planning and program development.

In addition, pupil personnel specialists cannot be expected to contribute significantly to curriculum development until at least two goals are achieved:

First, there must be a more favorable ratio between the number of students (or teachers) and specialists in pupil personnel services. For example, the school counselor cannot be expected to have much impact on either students or the school program when he is responsible for coordinating the special services of anywhere from 400 to 1500 students. Under the most ideal circumstances, the school counselor cannot work effectively with over seven different teachers. This implies a counselor-student ratio of one full-time counselor to approximately 225 students.

In schools where the large majority of the students are from culturally and economically deprived environments, there is a need for one counselor to four or even fewer teachers. The same can be stated concerning the school social worker. If we assume that some 15 percent of our elementary and secondary school students, as a result of family attitudes and the nature of the family constellation, are experiencing problems of school attendance which are impeding their intellectual, personal and social growth, it must be realized that no one full-time school social worker can work effectively with over 30 teachers, which implies the ratio of one social worker to each thousand students.

Second, school counselors as well as other staff members in pupil personnel services must be professionally prepared. At the present time, approximately ten percent of the school counselors have completed the minimum two-year graduate program in counselor education recommended by the profession (4). Of those school counselors who have completed the first year of this two-year minimum program, some two-thirds received their preparation in counselor education programs which did not meet minimum standards set by the profession (2, 4). The school counselor who is not professionally prepared cannot be expected to make unique and significant contributions to curriculum development. The same is true of school social workers (often called visiting teachers because they do not have professional preparation recommended for school social workers) and school psychologists, as well as other members of the pupil personnel services staff.

**Preparation of Specialists**

Trends in the preparation of pupil personnel services specialists would indicate that these staff members will, in the future, have even more to contribute to curriculum development. For example, there is more emphasis upon assisting the prospective school counselor in developing a theoretical frame of reference from which
he can seek direction as he works with students, parents and other specialists in the school program, such as classroom teachers (1,3). Also, staff members in pupil personnel services are becoming more aware of the importance of the concept of reinforcement of positive experiences (1). If used wisely, this is a powerful technique which can give confidence to the child who is having difficulty, as well as communicating to him that he is a person of worth and dignity who is valued by those attempting to help him.

Within programs of preparation, there are opportunities to learn more about the nature of consultation and to experience consultation under supervision. Increasingly, the prospective school counselor is recognizing that he, as a specialist, must work with the teacher who is also a specialist. For either of these specialists to work in isolation places a limitation upon the potential positive impact in the facilitation of learning, personal, and social development.

The consultative relationship is a mutually enhancing one in which specialists of equal professional status, each offering unique understandings and professional expertise, share ideas and develop approaches to more adequately meet the needs of students and their parents.

Systematic consultation involving personnel services specialists, teachers, school administrators, and curriculum supervisors, provides the means for implementing the contributions of personnel services specialists to curriculum development. Supervised experiences in consultation during the professional preparation of personnel services specialists and within the preparation programs of teachers, school administrators, and curriculum specialists are crucial in fostering the subsequent development of consultative relationships in the school which can have significant impact upon curriculum development.

These, and other changes in both preservice and in-service preparation should result in pupil personnel service staff members who are more open individuals. Such staff members should have the capacity to continue to develop professionally as they share ideas about curriculum development. If this objective is obtained, their contributions to the school program can be significant.

References
