
October 1970

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Recommended Citation

McNair, Mary (1970) "The Growth and Development of Curriculum Leaders Or How To Harvest Your Own Crop," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol4/iss3/2>

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THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM LEADERS

Or

How To Harvest Your Own Crop

by Mary McNair

There might be situations where one can imagine that it's true that there are "too many chiefs and not enough Indians," but most professional educators would probably agree that such is not the case with curriculum leaders for the classroom teachers. Most school systems cannot begin to provide the trained personnel — the chiefs, as it were — who can assist teachers in specialized areas of the curriculum. At best, one finds one or two coordinators in a district struggling to answer the demand for in-service training, introducing new ideas, and generally "watch-dogging" the inputs and outputs on a K-12 continuum. In fact, it might be enlightening sometime to take a survey and discover how many teachers have *never* had contact with a curriculum coordinator!

The Livonia school district faced this issue several years ago, in 1966, to be exact, and decided to explore some alternatives. One solution would have been to add two or three resource personnel to the staff of the Coordinator of Language Arts/Social Studies. These people would have served as visiting consultants, but inasmuch as there are thirty-five elementary schools in the district, it was felt that this would have been sadly inadequate. The ideal arrangement, of course, would be to have a specialist in every building, readily available to teachers. But where would such experts come from? The answer became fairly clear — Livonia would "grow its own!"

Therefore, a plan was adopted

whereby school principals, in conjunction with their staffs, would identify a teacher on the staff who had special interest in, and perhaps aptitude for, language arts and social studies, who would serve as the Curriculum Representative at the building level. The plan included additional pay, which was not a great deal. The significant motivation for a teacher was the opportunity to develop leadership skills and to gain expertise in the curriculum areas of reading, spelling, creative writing, language mechanics, and social studies.

Following is the Personnel Department bulletin which is sent to the schools when candidates are needed for the position of Curriculum Representative. (The subjects of Math/Science also have a specialist in each building.)

"Job Description:

To work under the direction of the principal as part of the local leadership and resource team in the improvement of the instructional program of the school.

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. To periodically meet with the system coordinator for the purpose of gaining new insights and knowledge of innovations in teaching techniques, to share, in turn, with local school personnel. This may be done through workshops, demonstration classes, conferences with individual teachers, etc.

2. To assist classroom teachers in local buildings with planning instructional units and to act as an easily-accessible resource person to his staff.

3. To aid the principal and the system coordinator in organizing workshops and/or

demonstrations for the representative's own staff.

4. To be knowledgeable in matters of building equipment and materials, assisting in making them available, arranging for their maintenance, and assisting in the selection of new materials or replacement items.

5. To help insure a proper balancing of the instructional program within his school.

6. To designate conference periods during which he will be available for teachers of his building staff."

While the foregoing is a specific description of the position, the representatives themselves agree that their role continues to evolve as they work with their staffs, and as they gain skills and grow in ability. They see themselves properly as part of the faculty, and not as part of the administration. They are not authority figures, but operate in the gray zone of liaison between administration and staff. This is not always easy!

In terms of *PERSONS*, the representative is a classroom teacher, and has an assigned class of students for which he is responsible. In addition, he is a member of the staff of teachers in the school building to which he is assigned. His immediate superior is the school principal. In other words, the key person the representative must satisfy is the school principal. However, the school principal must effectively coordinate the affairs of the staff, the pupils, the parents of the community, and nonparent taxpayers. In order to complement the school principal, therefore, the representative must be able to operate smoothly at the human relations level. He treads a tightrope between principal and teachers. If he can make the teachers feel good, the good feeling spreads to the front office. If he can make the principal feel good, the pleasantness spreads to the classroom teachers. How does the good feeling come about in the area of curriculum? The answer seems to lie not just in curriculum content, as such, but in interaction with people. The representative needs skill

in communication, and needs skill in interpreting the clues to attitudes and feelings. The representative needs to know that his skill in communication does not mean that he is the agent who always does the communicating; that is, he is not a tale-carrier, a bearer of complaints and grievances between two camps. Rather, the representative arranges for clarification, and sees to it that the lines are open.

There is one other person with whom the representative is closely associated, and that is the subject coordinator who is responsible for providing in-service education for the group of representatives. The subject coordinator is not a superior with authority over the representative, any more than the representative stands in a position of authority with respect to teachers. The coordinator is a person with expertise and background in subject matter and techniques of teaching. The coordinator's superior is the regional director, who is also the direct superior of the school principals. Therefore, the coordinator also operates in the gray zone of liaison. The representative, then, is an extension of this office into each school building. Because coordinator and representatives are closely connected, it would appear that mutual respect and rapport is imperative to insure smoothness of operation.

Summarizing, in terms of *Persons*, the curriculum representatives are classroom teachers with extra responsibilities. The extra responsibilities are of an advisory nature. In order to operate effectively in this capacity of advisor, one must be open to advice from the school principal and the coordinator, and must be able to dispense advice to one's peers in a non-threatening manner.

In terms of *PROCESSES*, the representative functions, as stated above, as an advisor. Perhaps "sharer" would be a more precise term. This sharing takes place on several levels. The representative needs something to share. He gains

background by meeting with the coordinator at regularly stated intervals. Sometimes meetings are held before or after regular school hours. Sometimes the representative is given released time from his classroom to attend meetings. Meetings sometimes are general; sometimes, they are in the form of workshops; sometimes they closely resemble a classroom, where the representative is the student and the coordinator is the teacher, or an outside expert is brought in to be the teacher. In the past, general meetings have been concerned with planning for workshops, or sharing of problems and solutions, or examinations of new materials. Workshops have been held in the past to demonstrate effective techniques for teaching new materials, where each representative has been responsible for a presentation. Instructional meetings have been held where the focus has been on explaining the theories and rationale on which new curricula are based.

Inasmuch as the coordinator is a most knowledgeable person, is the receiver of the most recent publications, and continually studies research in curriculum content and learning theories, he has much to share with the representatives. A great deal of this information is background, and it is not the intention that all of it must necessarily be communicated to the building staffs. The representative does help teachers, however, explore as much theory as they express a desire or need to know in order to understand why certain suggested teaching strategies are outlined in guides they are using. Demonstrations of such strategies are presented by the representative at the building level. Teachers are released from their classrooms to participate in these demonstrations and discussions.

Representatives, according to the job specification, also make themselves available to teachers to answer questions of various kinds, to help secure materials, and to offer suggestions for activities in the classroom.

Representatives, under the guidance of the coordinator, have examined textbooks in order to understand how they are written, and how they are organized. Again, this work is not necessarily shared with staffs, but the discoveries the representatives make while going through this process are invaluable in answering questions teachers might ask about why certain courses of study were chosen for the system to follow.

Representatives sometimes meet in small grade-level groups to plan ways of developing concepts and generalizations. The results of these meetings are shared with the entire group, usually in a workshop setting, and also with building staffs.

In general sessions, representatives are able to disseminate effective teaching ideas they have gleaned from their buildings. In this way, representatives serve as a clearing house. Such ideas as are presented can be discussed and analyzed in the light of the background knowledge the representatives have been developing as to the latest research about learning.

In general sessions, also, the representatives are able to share concerns they have, resistances they meet in their various buildings, and ways of dealing with such resistances. In these sessions, the representatives are able to gain support and encouragement, and clarification of the gray zone in which they operate.

In summary, the representatives attend system meetings, which vary in content and process from general sharing sessions, to workshops, to classroom seminars, and the representatives hold building meetings which range along a parallel continuum.

In terms of *PROPERTIES*, the representative deals with curriculum materials. This includes textbooks, maps, transparencies, audio-visual equipment, and the like. The representative studies these materials in the light of theoretical background, so he is able to explain their uses to teach-

ers. In the main, he is a gatherer and dispenser of materials, a consultant regarding effective use, rather than a librarian or mechanical engineer. The representative does become a collector in his own right of samples of new textbooks, of reprinted articles, of prepared units, mimeographed lists and bibliographies, which come his way from the coordinator and other representatives. He shares this material with his staff as the occasion arises.

To highlight some of the details of the daily activities of the curriculum representative, particularly those carried on with teachers, the following might be typical.

The curriculum representative talks to teachers informally in the lounge or in the hall or in the classroom, and in manner and word suggests he is "open for business" and would welcome requests for help. The representative looks and listens, and makes notes about the kinds of help he might offer. Many times nothing specific can be observed, in which case the representative merely interacts with teachers, making general comments about reading and spelling, children's behaviors, interests, and so forth.

The representative gives help of various types upon request. He looks up materials, finds books, answers professional questions about organizing units, suggests creative activities, lists specific skill development techniques. The representative sometimes thinks of himself as a *Resource Catalog*.

The representative listens to tales of triumph, and rejoices with the teacher. He listens to plodding details of plans which have gone awry, and both commiserates with and supports the teacher in his efforts. He sometimes thinks of himself as a *Reaction Post*.

The representative organizes grade-level meetings for exploring a new curriculum being tested by the staff. Teachers are released for the meeting and substitutes take their rooms. The representative discusses the theory behind the new program, understanding

of which is necessary in order to implement the plan effectively. The rationale is explained, the structure is pointed out; the representative explains the research which makes following the design a necessity, and helps teachers appreciate the freedom within the structure which allows them to use their individual teaching styles. In this case, the representative sometimes operates as a *Book Agent*.

The representative organizes and plans a demonstration lesson, or a series of such lessons, to help the teachers see teaching modes in action. The teachers are released by substitutes for these demonstrations. The representative follows the plan of previewing for the observers that which shall be seen, particularly departures from present practices, then follows with the demonstration lesson. Afterwards, he leads a discussion, or a question-and-answer session. The representative in this case is a *Performer*.

The representative helps conduct some staff meetings on days especially negotiated on the calendar for curriculum study, and brings to the staff as a whole the latest information on trends in curriculum. The representative tries to do this in the most effective way possible, which means, usually, actively involving the teachers in the learning process. The representative who is trying to wean the staff away from the lecture method, for example, avoids the lecture method. The representative who is trying to persuade teachers that one learns most effectively when one is involved in actively questioning, actively seeking, uses the process of induction with the staff so that it may experience the approach at first hand. In this case, the representative is a *Model*.

The representative follows through. He occasionally makes his way around the building asking if anyone has had any trouble trying the new process. He might innocently ask a teacher what her objectives are when asked for

assistance in developing a unit. He occasionally, being human, may assume more interest than is displayed. He knows that at times he is a *Disaster Zone!*

In essence, the role makes heavy demands on one human being, and calls for a repertoire of behaviors and skills. Can one person be so adaptable, so resourceful, as to fill this role successfully? To recapitulate, he needs to operate as a Resource Catalog, a Reaction Post, a Book Agent, a Performer, and a Model, and at times the negative, unwelcome Disaster Zone. Along with this, he continues to be a Student, learning all that he can, and is still Teacher to a class of elementary school children. Livonia's curriculum representatives are doing their utmost to prove that they are equal to the challenge.

The plan has been followed for almost four years. Some changes have taken place. For example, there is now a salary differential for experience as a representative. Many fine, capable leaders have developed, and principals are strongly in favor of having such "firing line" assistance. There is,

naturally, much more involvement of all teachers in curriculum development and implementation through in-service work, and much more attention given to problems of individual teachers and children. Livonia, through this plan, has been able to pilot and adopt programs and train teachers to teach effectively several projects requiring re-tooling of skills, among which are the Taba social studies, Botel spelling, and Sullivan reading programs. When evaluations of such piloted materials are needed, the representatives provide a knowledgeable group from which to draw data.

Probably the most helpful message for other districts to draw from Livonia's experience is that teachers themselves are a potent source from which to select potential leaders. Choose the stock with care, plant in fertile soil in a salubrious climate, foster and nourish generously, support staunchly, and then stand back and allow to grow. The yield will be perennial!

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