

editor's note/ TRACY CROW

LET'S MAKE IT OUR JOB TO FIND SOLUTIONS

I am fascinated by Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), and not because it's a compelling social or technological phenomenon. Every time I hit the "random article" link, I discover an article written by an informed person who has great passion about a very specific topic. I learn, once again, how huge the world is and how much I have to learn.

We live in a world where most of us have to be specialists in our work environments. We develop new skills, we pursue advanced degrees, and information expands all around us. We work to become our school's or organization's authority on SOMETHING.

The problem with developing deep expertise hits you in the face when one person, one student walks into your classroom or office with a very specific challenge, one that you're not prepared to address. What can you do? "That's not my job" doesn't have a place in education.

This is the situation educators face with English language learners and students with specialized needs. Schools often have ESL specialists, teachers who have developed deep expertise in working with ELLs. Most educators, however, are working in schools where the goal is to mainstream children, whatever their learning need. How can schools help educators develop the capacity to work effectively with all students?

The articles in this issue of *JSD* helped me understand some important elements of making this happen. Schools and districts need to provide educators with opportunities to learn about the cultures of the children in front of them, specific instructional strategies that work with specific learners, how each student performs in response to their teaching, how language development needs vary across contexts, and how families can most effectively be engaged in their children's education.

Is the answer to make everyone a specialist in everything? That doesn't strike me as practical. We need educators who specialize in areas we'll never have time to explore, and we need to know how to get to those specialists to help us solve unique problems. At the same time, we must develop our strengths so that we are the expert that others turn to when they have a problem that we can help address. Educators working in meaningful collaborative environments certainly have more opportunities to tap into the expertise in the building — that's the ideal situation.

Until we reach our ideal, we'll each learn as much as we can, and we'll figure out the person to call on in times of need. At the end of the day, I know I'm not ever comfortable saying to someone, "That's not my job." I bet you aren't, either.

I want to mention a couple of changes in *JSD*. I'm resurrecting a feature that Dennis Sparks used to write — the *JSD* interview. (See p. 54 for an interview with educator Sonia Nieto.) I'll be speaking to leaders from within and beyond our field to expand our understanding of education, leadership, and professional learning. This issue also includes a new feature called Snapshots — a selection of additional resources to investigate. Please e-mail me any time with your ideas. ■



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"What we need is more people who specialize in the impossible."

— Theodore Roethke

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