

The Curriculum Administrator and Negotiations

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THE drive for collective power which has characterized the American teaching profession for the past decade or so has been forcing a reappraisal and shifting of many traditional administrative roles in the public schools. At first it was the superintendents who felt the impact. Prior to the era of collective negotiations, the self-image of the superintendent was often that of leader of the instructional staff. This position was reflected in the 1957 AASA Yearbook.¹ As a trained teacher with several years of teaching experience behind him, the superintendent felt a natural identification with the teaching enterprise and a sense of his own leadership role in that enterprise.

The superintendent has been discovering, however, that as teachers organize and begin to use their collective power to further their interests, they no longer look to him for leadership. Instead, leadership emerges from the teaching ranks in the form of executive secretaries, union leaders, bargaining representatives, and the like. The teachers view the superintendent as a key representative of management and relate to him accordingly. At first the superintendent resisted the change

and sought to carve out a role of mediator for himself so that he could serve as a kind of neutral buffer between the teachers and the board of education. The first AASA booklet on collective negotiations took this position.²

Identity Crisis

Many superintendents soon learned, however, that when they tried to play the role of middleman, the teachers were inclined to bypass them and go straight to the board where decisions could be made. The last booklet of the AASA retreated from the position that the superintendent should serve as a resource to both sides and suggested that the superintendent should play whatever role seems appropriate for a particular school district.³ The way things are going, the next booklet of the AASA on negotiations will probably state that the superintendent is the representative of the board of education and

² American Association of School Administrators. *School Administrators View Professional Negotiation*. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1966.

³ American Association of School Administrators. *The School Administrator and Negotiation*. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1968.

¹ American Association of School Administrators. *The Superintendent as Instructional Leader*. 1957 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1957.

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must clearly act as an agent of the board in one way or another in the negotiations process.

The identity crisis which the superintendent has been passing through is now affecting other administrators who are caught in the polarization between teachers and administrators. Among these are principals and curriculum administrators. The chief curriculum administrator of a school district, whether he be called assistant superintendent or director of curriculum, has close ties and working relationships with both the central office administration and teachers.

As implementer and coordinator of board policy in the area of instruction, the curriculum administrator performs administrative functions which result in a measure of control over the activities and choices of the instructional staff. On the other hand, his work with curriculum committees, subject matter consultants, and individual teachers who are working on special projects reflects his direct participation in instructional im-

provement activities with teachers. At this level he may well act as a facilitator and colleague to teachers as he helps to provide the framework in which teachers can make decisions about curriculum and instructional resources.

Unlike the superintendent, the curriculum administrator is in a position to give sustained attention to the instructional program, develop considerable professional stature in the area of curriculum, and relate to teachers as a resource person as well as an administrator. As administration and teaching polarize, the curriculum administrator feels a strong tug in both directions, as do principals and supervisory personnel who also work directly with teachers.

While negotiation agreements are hammered out in school districts across the country, a nagging question⁴ persists about the

⁴ Leslee J. Bishop. *Collective Negotiation in Curriculum and Instruction: Questions and Concerns*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1967.

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relationship between negotiations and curriculum change. Is the negotiations model appropriate in dealing with curriculum development? The curriculum administrator has an important stake in the answer to this question and can, perhaps, be helpful in resolving the question. Teachers are pressing to have more items of all kinds relating not only to welfare and working conditions but also to the educational program placed on the agenda for negotiation. They have experienced success in the use of collective power in matters of teacher welfare and are inclined to extend the impressive thrust that they have already made into other areas for which they feel professionally responsible and which they feel qualified to handle.

Negotiations and Curriculum

Before proposing a role for the curriculum administrator in the era of negotiations, I need first of all to state two assumptions. The first is that the major responsibility for decision making in the area of curriculum and instruction rightly belongs to the teacher. Teachers, for the most part, are more extensively trained than ever before and bring to their task an increasingly sophisticated body of knowledge and skills. They are professionally trained specialists working in their specialized fields of teaching and scholarship. Accordingly, both the substance and process of teaching are their primary responsibility and the leadership for decision making in this area should be assumed by them, as is now typically the case at the college level.

A second assumption is that negotiation is not an appropriate vehicle for improving the curriculum. Matters such as course requirements, curriculum offerings and content, the selection of appropriate learning materials, and the utilization of the teaching staff call for carefully considered professional judgment. The curriculum involves complicated problems which ought to be approached on the basis of insight into the values and aspirations of students, parents, and school personnel, research data relating to the teaching-learning process, and inquiry into the

structure and content of the various realms of knowledge. Such matters cannot be adequately resolved through negotiations which typically are characterized by conditions of stress, power confrontations, proposals and counterproposals, and compromises based often on factors other than sound, thoughtful professional judgment.

Based on the foregoing assumptions, a major task of the curriculum administrator should be to head off the trend toward involving the curriculum in negotiations by helping to structure a framework in which teachers play the central role in curriculum development. Williams suggests that the best universities be used as an appropriate model.⁵ Here one finds a strong tradition of faculty control over the curriculum. Faculty committees initiate proposals for curriculum change and the faculty determines appropriate learning materials. The role of the administrator is that of a coordinator and implementer of faculty decisions. He may also be a reality tester in light of budget limitations but it is the faculty that determines the priorities.

The Academic Model

Probably the best means of preventing formal negotiation of the curriculum is to move toward the university model in the public schools. The curriculum administrator can do much to bring this about. He has considerable influence over the organizational structure and process of decision making in the curriculum area. If teachers assume the major role in curriculum development within the organizational structure, there will be little or no reason to press for more influence in this area at the bargaining table. They can work on instructional matters in an atmosphere of scholarly study and inquiry, which is as it should be, rather than in the emotionally charged climate of a negotiations session.

Does such an arrangement rob the curriculum administrator of his leadership function? Not necessarily. It means, however,

⁵ Richard C. Williams. "An Academic Alternative to Collective Negotiations." *Phi Delta Kappan* 49 (10): 571; June 1968.

that he must depend more on his own intellectual resources than on institutional authority. In addition to doing everything he can to create the conditions under which effective curriculum development can be carried out by teachers, the administrator may also function as a stimulator of thought about curriculum issues. He is in a position to make a significant leadership contribution in the role of a perceptive generalist by asking questions of teachers about what they are doing and why. He has access to many sources of information about new ideas which he can pass along to teachers for their consideration. Without posing as an expert, he can suggest possible areas of experimentation and support efforts on the part of teachers to try something different. In short, he is in an excellent position to exercise the most challenging kind of leadership—that of ideas.

In order to play this role, the curriculum administrator must be a thoughtful and reflective student of education, not in a technical sense, but as a kind of educational philosopher who is conversant with the major movements and thrusts in education and who probes into their meaning, significance, and implications. He should be able to raise stimulating questions which prompt teachers to examine their teaching behavior and explore new possibilities for enhancing the learning process. Part of his function is to encourage teachers to come together in professional dialogue and cooperative endeavors that foster intellectual growth and more effective use of teacher skills. He must be willing to share the risk and uncertainty of innovation. Brickell's study of the New York schools re-

vealed that most innovations were undergirded by the strong support of an administrator.⁶

In emphasizing the leadership role of the curriculum administrator, care should be taken not to underestimate the significance of his administrative functions. Once curriculum decisions have been made, it is vitally important to see that the implementation phase is carried out efficiently and quickly enough to meet the desired timetable. Many carefully developed plans for instructional improvement have been ruined by failure at the implementation stage. Whether it be ordering new materials, scheduling writing teams, organizing in-service programs, or procuring sufficient budget support, the curriculum administrator plays an indispensable role in coordinating and facilitating the process by which curriculum development moves from the drawing boards to the classrooms. Failure at this stage can be as frustrating to teachers as lack of opportunity to shape the curriculum.

The time may come when we will be negotiating the curriculum as we now negotiate salaries and fringe benefits. Vigorous efforts on the part of curriculum administrators to place primary responsibility for curriculum development in the hands of teachers and to implement curriculum decisions in an efficient, responsive manner may succeed in shifting the trend away from negotiations toward the university model of faculty determination of the curriculum. The possibility is well worth the effort. □

⁶ Henry M. Brickell. *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1961.

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