The Expanding Role of Teachers in Negotiating Curriculum

Jacqueline B. Vaughn

Teachers implement curriculum goals, but do they help to determine them? In Chicago, teachers are seeking a greater role in curriculum decision making through collective bargaining. The Vice President of the Chicago Teachers Union details this process and lists the curriculum provisions that teachers in that city have negotiated.

Although many elements are involved in curriculum development including local schools; districts; state departments of education; local, federal, and state agencies; and private business, industry, and foundations, only in recent years has serious consideration been given to the involvement of the key component of the educational process, the classroom teacher.

While publishing firms, parent organizations, community groups, and students can make and have made significant contributions toward including meaningful goals in the development of curriculum, those persons responsible for the effective implementation of curriculum goals—the teachers—have often been denied an opportunity to participate in curriculum development.

With the growing trend toward accountability, it is only reasonable for teachers unions to demand a greater role in developing the goals and objectives that teachers are being held responsible for implementing.

With the advent of collective bargaining for teachers, the position once maintained by boards of education—that curriculum matters were outside the scope of collective bargaining—has been modified. This reassessment of teachers' roles is reflected in the agreement between the Chicago Board of Education and the Chicago Teachers Union, which stipulates that classroom teachers shall have equal representation on curriculum writing and evaluating committees in all subject areas, as well as on textbook selection committees. In the current agreement, *Article 29/Curriculum Guide and Textbook Evaluation Committees* states that:

> On each curriculum guide committee and textbook evaluation committee, the union shall have one representative for every ten committee members or major fraction thereof. Elementary teachers selected by the union shall have at least two years experience in the Chicago Public Schools on their certificate and have competence in the subject area of the committee.
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> To serve on a high school committee the teacher shall have at least two years of experience as a regularly certificated teacher, teaching on his certificate, such certificate to be in the subject area of the committee.

The Chicago Teachers Union has also negotiated provisions stipulating that teachers and assistant principals who serve on summer curriculum committees be reimbursed at the same rate of salary received during the regular school year, based on the number of hours worked per day. Examples of reimbursement would be: 100 percent salary for a six-hour day, 80 percent salary for a five-hour day, and 66⅔ percent salary for a four-hour day. Such

curriculum committees usually meet during the summer, depending upon the availability of funds.

In the Chicago Public School system, curriculum committees may be comprised of administrators, teachers, and resource persons selected by the board, and teacher representatives selected by the union, who, in addition to meeting subject area qualifications, must be union members in good standing and knowledgeable about the provisions of the agreement between the board and the union.

In addition to representation on curriculum and evaluation committees, the union and board have negotiated the establishment of joint board-union study committees, with the number and subject matter of such committees to grow out of needs identified through further negotiations.

All joint board-union committees established through the provisions of the agreement shall submit reports to the general superintendent of schools, who will communicate to each committee before it is discharged, his or her recommendations pertaining to the committee's report.

The current agreement also stipulates that:

- Curriculum guides be provided for and used by each teacher in the respective subject area or areas;



The 1976 summer committee (composed of members from the school board and teachers union) reviews the mastery record card system used in Chicago schools.

- Board and union encourage the extensive use of curriculum texts and supplementary materials that represent contributions made to civilization by all elements of our population.

One of the best examples of an effective program resulting from teacher involvement in curriculum development and program planning is the provision negotiated between the board and union in 1969. The provision called for:

- Joint participation of union and board representatives in the formulation of a program for quality education in three inner city elementary schools;

- Experimental summer programs in each of the three READ schools to provide significant learning experiences for children (see box);

Members of a joint school board and teachers union team discuss curriculum and other issues in Chicago.



About the READ Program

As early as 1969, the Chicago Teachers Union negotiated curriculum issues. One effective outcome of that year's negotiations, says author Jacqueline B. Vaughn, was the establishment of the READ program (Reading, Environment, and Development).

READ is aimed at providing quality education to students in three inner-city elementary schools and at improving reading skills. In each of the schools selected, students:

- *Lack the type of language development required for success with most existing textbooks and with "standard" English usage;*
- *Have multiethnic/multicultural backgrounds.*

Today, the READ program reflects the involvement of many parties. Parent committees and school advisory councils actively participate, and each month, members of a board/union committee meet to share experiences and seek resolution of problems.



Children in one of Chicago's READ schools use programmed learning materials.

- Involvement of principal, staff, pupils, and school community in the discussion of meaningful curriculum objectives;
- Principal-staff planning periods for the development of multipurpose units of instruction and in-service training in the utilization of instructional materials and equipment available in the schools.

The most recent provision negotiated provides for the establishment of a committee to develop a curriculum guide for deaf education.

As an officer and member of the union negotiating team, it has been my good fortune to serve on many of the previously mentioned committees and participate in the exchange of ideas between teachers and administrators. I have also had the opportunity to witness the effective implementation of the goals jointly developed by those persons most responsible for providing quality education for all children.

In my capacity as a language arts consultant, I have been able to work directly with the classroom teacher and to learn, firsthand, the need for adding to, deleting from, or revising the existing curricular materials. Suggestions from classroom teachers based on the changing needs of students have often led to revisions that have made curriculum objectives more meaningful.

It is my opinion that the most effective curriculum programs will be developed through the joint efforts of administrators, teachers, students, and local and state boards of education, together with local, state, and federal government agencies.

All individuals—using the invaluable contributions and input from publishing firms, communities, businesses, government agencies, foundations, and industries—have a role in developing, and sharing accountability for, the effective implementation of the educational goals developed.

Through the collective voice of one teacher organization, designated by its members as the sole collective bargaining agent, relevant goals can be developed and changes in curriculum and programs negotiated. The result, in my opinion, will enhance the educational process and lead to the ultimate goal of quality education for all children.

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