

# Curriculum Workers in a Bind

**Paul R. Klohr**

**F**OR THE ASCD 1965 Yearbook, I was asked to project a view of the changing roles of the supervisor and curriculum worker in the decade ahead.<sup>1</sup> Teachers as well as status leaders were seen as curriculum workers. In that context, I identified what seemed to me to be three large areas of need: (a) the need to develop a clearer picture of the specialized functions of curriculum leadership; (b) the need for more adequate conceptual tools; and (c) the need to cultivate openness to new experience.

These needs were predicated on demonstrable problems growing out of curriculum workers' being "caught in a bind." For example, curriculum directors were being bypassed in the making of basic curriculum decisions. Teachers who had gained special competence in curriculum development were not in a position to be heard. Role conflicts regarding instructional leadership within school systems were widespread. Direct pressures from many sources—often conflicting—were impinging on program planning with few, if any, provisions for evaluating proposed changes. Are these not also some of the pressing problems we face today?

In effect, in the years since that publication, this bind has become tighter and tighter. The problems of 1965 are, indeed, a part of the 1969 picture. Yet today there is a significant difference. In a very real sense, all of us in education are now caught up in a kind of revolution only signs of which were then on the horizon. And in many ways we are suffering, and will continue to suffer, the consequences of a revolution.

### **A New Dimension**

The dimension of the revolution that I did not see until more recently involves a persistent drive for participation and self-determination on the part of community, teachers, and students. I am convinced that this

<sup>1</sup> *Role of Supervisor and Curriculum Director in a Climate of Change*. 1965 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1965. pp. 144-63.

drive is justified and long overdue. This is, of course, but one aspect of the larger social scene with which this issue of *Educational Leadership* deals.

In the near chaos which characterizes this revolution in large numbers of schools, and which will affect more in the months ahead, many curriculum workers are asking, "Why is this happening to me?" Their query is not unlike that of countless middle-class citizens confronting directly—many for the first time—rapid changes in the larger social setting.

In a perceptive "Letter to a Teacher,"<sup>2</sup> Peter Schrag makes a point that seems appropriate for us to keep in mind as we find ourselves caught up in these events and as we try to learn how to live with them and to shape new professional roles for ourselves. He tells teachers that there will be no security for them in the immediate future because revolutions are dangerous even for the well-intentioned professionals. It seems to me that this advice applies especially to curriculum workers and supervisors.

Schrag then poses a series of questions that should be asked of instructional leaders as well as teachers. Most crucial among these, from my point of view, is the following: "To what extent have you really recognized that systems are made for people, and that, when people are failing or are destroyed, it is the fault of the system, not theirs?"<sup>3</sup>

### The Human Focus

This query is, as are the others, essentially a question of how to humanize our schools. How can we create authentic, human roles for individuals as we continue to "professionalize" their involvement in curriculum development? Too often, those of us working within the establishment have seen these as antithetical. Or, commonly, we have come to believe that increased concern for human values will follow *after* we have more effectively systematized our professional operations. Both assumptions are false, and we dare not use them as a base for planning programs to foster human values in social institutions.

I propose that our position ought to be what I earlier called a posture of openness to new experiences. From this perspective, we can listen to what our youth have to say to us and we can learn to really "hear" them. Also, we shall be able to sense the real concerns and problems of individuals living in our cities.

In effect, we shall then be in a position to address ourselves to a more effective use of new conceptual tools. Clearly, such new tools must be developed through new research and theory-building which we have not yet undertaken in the field of curriculum. In meeting these needs, we shall be able to meet a third—namely, the redefinition of our specialized professional roles as curriculum workers.

A big step in the direction of helping ourselves, as curriculum workers caught in a bind, is taken when we begin to see the larger social implications of what have traditionally been thought of as "school" problems. The articles in this issue of *Educational Leadership* suggest some aspects of the social scene relevant to this understanding. I am convinced that

<sup>2</sup> Peter Schrag. "Letter to a Teacher." *Saturday Review* 51 (33): 54; August 17, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

this larger understanding, one that recognizes the basic revolution in which we are involved, can be built on projections of the threefold analysis of needs identified in the ASCD 1965 Yearbook. Much work remains to be done along this line.

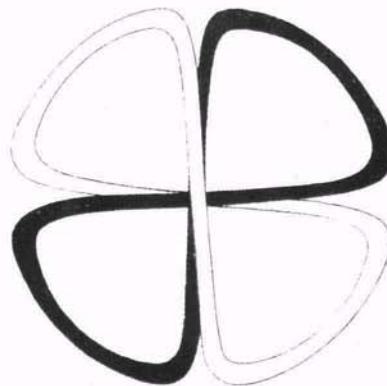
Maurice Eash has made an insightful analysis of certain aspects of the supervisor's plight. He proposes a number of steps that might be taken to redefine professional roles that could conceivably become extinct. Especially helpful for curriculum workers is his identification of macro-curriculum design problems.<sup>4</sup> As he makes clear, relatively little effort to think about curriculum matters and the problems of instructional leadership at the macro level has yet been made.

In the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the work of two newly-established groups—the Commission on Humanism and the Commission on Social Hang-Ups—should also help to generate new ways of thinking about our professional roles in the changing social scene. The program of the forthcoming ASCD 1969 national conference reflects a deliberate effort to examine the problems of instructional leadership in such a setting.

The course ahead, as I see it, will be rough, but there are some promising places to take hold.

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice J. Eash. "Supervisors: A Vanishing Breed?" *Educational Leadership* 26 (1): 73-79, October 1968.



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