

# Dealing with Limitations on Freedom



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**H**OW MANY times have we attended a convention at which speakers have poked fun at the standard elementary readers, making clever remarks about their lack of relevancy in today's world? In many instances, these same speakers will direct some devastating verbal shots at the conventional social studies program. They usually describe this program as tiptoeing around the actual history of slavery and as limiting its coverage of Africa to a few pages of dull geographical information and statistical data.

The curriculum worker may then return to a community where textbook publishers are required by state and local textbook committees to alter the books so that the content either omits or tones down the really live issues of our times.

If one examines the new adoptions for a senior high school course, he will find such a course offering as, "Problems of Democracy." He may discover that there is not a single picture of a Negro anywhere in the book. In fact, the authors of some texts are most ingenious in avoiding the inclusion of any problems that might provoke a little thought or that have some personal meaning for the students who are expected to study them. One may recognize that publishers are in the book selling business and would soon

be in financial difficulty if they ignored the proven credo that "the customer is always right."

Newly organized community groups with young and intelligent leadership invite school people to their meetings and raise sharp questions about the coverage of the black people, as a race, in the textbooks and in curriculum development. The inevitable then takes place: for every action there is a reaction. At the initial meeting of a senior high school social studies curriculum revision committee, someone may say, "But if we recommend the addition of a new course in Negro history, why shouldn't we add similar courses on the history of the Norwegians or the Peruvians?" A number of heads in the group nod agreement and look expectantly to the curriculum worker for an answer.

"Hold on," breaks in one member of the group. "Everyone knows that compensatory action is absolutely essential if we are to overcome the many years of invidious neglect of Negro history that have been so much a part of our educational process."

At this point the guidance-oriented member contributes: "Has anyone ever looked at this from the viewpoint of the student's total

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program? If the subject is made an elective, the students who should take it will never bother to schedule it. If the subject is required, we then will be in the position of squeezing another subject into an already overstuffed curriculum and increasing the present logjam of graduation requirements. If we attempt to integrate it with other subjects, we run the risk of diluting the content. On top of all of this we undoubtedly will arouse objections from many overburdened teachers who feel that they already have more to teach than they can possibly handle."

By now it is crystal clear that this problem is becoming increasingly complex, and that the curriculum worker is caught in the middle. What is the curriculum worker's relationship to all of these developments? Where does he stand? Does he take a strong position on one side or the other—and run the risk of alienating a large group of his associates? This stance might include also a head-on confrontation with some of his administrators or with some influential and vocal segment of his community.

The preceding exchange has probably taken place in one variation or another in most of the school systems across the country. The debate is so widespread that the content of this specific example can be changed readily to some other area and the basic design still would remain the same.

How does today's supervisor deal with controversial and complex situations which generate pressures on the freedom of the professional curriculum worker? Specific answers, like specific problems, are not only complex but necessarily cover a great deal of territory.

## Guidelines for Action

In view of the realities of the situation, it seems reasonable to take a guideline approach to developing a rationale for action. Guidelines have the advantage of providing a means whereby application can incorporate sound judgment and flexibility that is appropriate to each unique situation.

The following guidelines may provide some helpful direction for curriculum work-

ers and supervisors who are searching for an approach to these modern day pressures.

1. *Accept and relate to the present situation.* Today's curriculum worker or supervisor is the "man in the middle." Former President Truman's famous quotation to the effect that "If you can't stand the heat, you should get out of the kitchen" certainly applies to modern supervision. Being the "man in the middle" is a difficult role. However, the function of supervision is both essential and important.

2. *Don't overreact.* Unfortunately some curriculum problems launch themselves with an explosion that can be seen and heard for many miles. It is extremely difficult to keep one's "cool" when the situation of the moment is one of panic and confusion. In times like these it is important that the curriculum worker remember certain things. For example, instant commitment or decision making may seem to be an easy way to relieve the emotionally charged circumstances. Yet this procedure may later place the curriculum worker in one of three very dubious positions.

The first position is one in which all of the facts are not known at the time of the explosion. The supervisor or curriculum worker who reacts hastily may find out later that things simply are not the way that they were represented in the heat of the action.

Another position in which the curriculum worker can inadvertently be trapped is one in which he discovers that the hastily agreed-upon commitments are "patent-medicine" approaches. The agreements have some short-range effect on the symptoms, but very little, if any, effect on the basic causes.

Retreat is most difficult from the third possible position. A large group of professional educators and community leaders who may remain silent during the initial stages later may decide to develop some powerful counterpressures. Such tactics doom to certain failure the original course of action.

3. *Communicate.* The most effective way to initiate the communication process in many of these situations is to be a good listener. Any statements made at the time should encourage and support full and un-

contaminated expression on the part of the people who are presenting their case. Let them get it off their chests. After this is accomplished, the job is then to ask questions that will clarify the what, where, when, how, and why of the situation as they see it. Any premature judgment on the part of the curriculum worker or the supervisor at this time may seal the channels of communication. Such premature judgment may cause him to lose his value as a person who can make a positive contribution to the resolution of the problem.

4. *Make a commitment.* In some situations the commitment might well be one of direct action, if the problem is valid and the action commitment is one that falls within the curriculum worker's job responsibility. In another situation, the problem may be ill-defined and loaded with vague generalizations without specific or supporting facts, yet it is still vital that a commitment be made. Under these circumstances it might be well to assure those affected that a thorough investigation will be made of the subjects of their concern.

5. *Follow-up.* It is essential, at the earliest possible moment, to promote a follow-up with a feedback which contains the answer or a statement of the course of action that was taken or is to be taken. If it develops that a direct course of action is not practical, then those people who are concerned with the problem should be informed as soon as possible about the extenuating circumstances. In addition, these persons should be given a probable date when they will receive information as to the progress that is being made on this problem. One of the most unfortunate, and frequent, mistakes is the failure to let concerned people know what is happening. The excuse, "We are working on it," is just not adequate. Excuses can only result in poor public relations and hard feelings.

6. *Utilize organizational flexibility.* Organizational structure should be evaluated continuously and, whenever appropriate, realigned so that function dictates form rather than the reverse. In recent case studies of school systems that have experienced major problems and conflict, one of the findings that appears with increasing frequency is that their organizational structures are largely irrelevant to the functions that must be performed.

Internal organization must be focused continuously on its central responsibility—the learning process. Managerial and supervisory functions must be kept in supporting roles. Innovative approaches to genuine participation by key members representing the various levels of community leadership are absolutely essential to the effectiveness of the organizational structure of today's school system.

We must keep in mind that some institutional inertia is not necessarily a bad thing, since it slows down the "bandwagon" approach so that those people who have the final responsibility for developing recommendations and making decisions have some opportunity to see "what is on board." However, when the organization constantly runs the bandwagon into a wall or does not have a systematic operating procedure for fielding good ideas and implementing desirable changes, the organization then has built in the seeds of its own erosion and possible self-destruction.

Responsible curriculum workers can contribute much to help education fulfill its essential role, the development of people. This can be accomplished only by professional personnel who enjoy the creation of new ways and means for living securely with conflict in human ideas without loss of personal integrity or of devotion to the ultimate of excellence and quality in education. □



# Curriculum Negotiations: Present Status—Future Trends

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**E**DUCATION and educational personnel have commanded more news media time and space in recent years than during any period in the history of education in this country. The development within the profession mainly responsible for the recent wave of notoriety is negotiations. Whether the process is labeled professional negotiations or collective bargaining is immaterial. It is the nature of the process and the impact of the process that we must analyze and respond to in a constructive manner.

The practice of labor groups organizing for collective action—a practice that is now accepted as a basic factor in our economic system—has a very long history, nationally and internationally. The trade guilds in Europe during the Medieval Period were probably the forerunners of labor unions as we know them today. However, collective action by teachers in education is a recent development which has marked the beginning of a new era within the profession.

## The New Force

State laws authorizing negotiations for teacher organizations are becoming quite common across the nation. In many states the laws on negotiations pertain exclusively to public school personnel, while in other

states the laws apply to all public employees. This development was prompted by, and is now accompanied by, militant behavior on the part of teachers.

Teacher associations and teacher unions, at the local and national levels, have been organizing for the purpose of pursuing their interests vigorously at the bargaining table. In many instances, when bargaining has failed, strikes and walkouts have resulted. Regardless of the terminology used, the collective bargaining process and collective bargaining behavior reflect what is happening in most school districts where negotiations are taking place.

## Realities of Negotiations

The power struggle within the profession is between teachers on the one hand and boards of education and administration on the other. Operationally, the laws and organizational behavior have tended to follow the labor-management adversary relationship patterns found in business and industry. The collective bargaining model has been tried

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and tested in business and industry. The utilization of this model by school personnel has resulted in a pattern of employee demands, management counterproposals, heated bargaining sessions, the use of labor attorneys, the use of management attorneys, the use of outside professional organizers and negotiators, the struggles for control between teacher organizations, alienation of relationships, and general adoption of "we-they" attitudes. In some instances, curriculum workers and supervisors have been put in the position of "taking sides."

### **Impact on People**

The new force in education represented by teacher power through negotiations is long overdue. Our problems are not the new force and the rightful involvement of teachers in matters that affect them. The problems are the procedures and tactics being employed in the process by teachers and administrators; and also the nature of the items that are being placed on the bargaining table. There is evidence indicating that teacher organizations regard curriculum as part of wages, hours, and conditions of employment. The wording of legislation, some judicial interpretations, and practice support the fact that curriculum and curriculum-related items are negotiable.

Negotiation in education is in its infancy stage and many of the attendant problems have resulted from naïveté, inexperience, and the fact that alternative models are not available. The most perplexing problem of our profession is that we have not learned how to negotiate on a co-professional basis. Many issues rightfully belonging to professional settlement have been settled in the context of adversary relationships accompanied by antagonistic confrontations. Curriculum matters are being caught up in this process. The resultant alienation of individuals and groups poses a challenge to all of us.

The effects of collective bargaining behavior in general, and curriculum negotiations in particular, have been observable. Within the profession there has been a new type of hostility between teachers and admin-

istrators; there has been a new type of hostility between and among teachers, an increase in work stoppages, decreased feeling of responsibility in each group for the welfare of the other group; communication between administrators and teachers has been adversely affected; and professional staff members have spent tremendous amounts of time, energy, and talent in bargaining sessions and planning for negotiations at the expense of other primary professional functions.

Outcomes within the community of the labor-management game in education are also observable. People, community organizations, and newspapers choose sides. Emotions run high. In some communities, it will take years to rebuild the image and restore the level of respect that teachers and administrators deserve. Gaining increased financial support will become even more difficult.

Impact on children and youth of the adoption of collective bargaining behavior on the part of teachers and administrators is probably less predictable at this time but perhaps more serious. It might be said that we are exhibiting behavior that is a direct contradiction of the stated goals of our instructional program related to proper attitudes and values basic to our democratic way of life. In some school districts the actions taken in violation of the laws of a state pose an even more serious problem. It is difficult to understand how we can expect young people to abide by school rules, develop as good citizens, and support law and order when we flout these traditional values and the law. Young people also lose valuable instruction time in some instances. Curriculum negotiations also affect the instructional program.

### **Impact on the Instructional Program**

Down through the years educators have advocated the development of curriculum through teamwork and a co-professional approach. This position is now in jeopardy. The climate of labor-management bargaining not only has had a negative impact on work-

ing relationships among professional staff members but has also had a negative impact on the instructional program and curriculum development activities.

Many master contracts contain provisions that are curricular in nature. They also include some provisions that are closely related to curriculum. Examples of such items are: textbook selection procedures; teaching assignments; restrictions on classroom visitations; teaching hours; transfer policies; released time; clock length of class periods; length of school day; curriculum committee selection procedures; class size averages; length of the school year; number of weekly teaching periods; preparation periods for elementary teachers during art, music, and physical education instructional time; procedures for selection of instructional equipment and materials; pupil-teacher ratios; and class size maximums. All of these items are curricular in nature or have serious curricular implications. They are related to quantity of instruction, quality of instruction, quality of instructional materials, staffing, and school organizational patterns.

At this point in time it is difficult to appraise results of curriculum negotiations from a positive standpoint. The collective bargaining approach in the curriculum area appears to be a self-defeating process for teachers and administrators (including supervisors and curriculum workers). The education profession faces a major challenge in the next few years, since negotiations are here to stay.

Our present dilemma in the curriculum area perhaps can be attributed to inexperience of school people with a new force, to negative attitudes, and to the striving for some goals that are divisive. In spite of current problems, the long-range effects of the negotiation development will be positive. The new power base has the potential of improving education for the young people of our society and of significantly advancing our profession. The immediate challenge is to learn to live more effectively with this new force.

We can ill afford to have the human resources within our profession divided into

two camps. A unified profession is essential. As a first step toward the evolvment of more mature behavior and a more appropriate model for negotiating, we should start with new approaches to curriculum negotiations.

## Critical Year Ahead

Negotiation approaches that seem appropriate, at this time, for welfare matters are not appropriate for curriculum matters. Optimum conditions for productive curriculum development work require a high degree of mutual faith, trust, and respect among professional staff members. Collective bargaining behavior has not promoted these conditions.

It would be helpful if agreement were reached on the point that it is unwise to negotiate specific curriculum development activities and curriculum content. Activities and content should evolve as teachers and administrators work together on a co-professional basis in an effort to improve the instructional program.

Hopefully, continuing experience with curriculum negotiation will also result in limiting the process to consideration of organizational patterns for curriculum work, teacher representation in curriculum development activities, and structure for curriculum decision making. Curriculum development work is a growth and study process that evolves as a result of interaction between teachers and administrators. The end products of curriculum study must continually change as the study process progresses.

These changes are possible if members of the profession agree that the present negotiation approaches in regard to curriculum matters are inappropriate. These changes would make it possible, within the law, for professionals to live and work cooperatively in this new power relationship. New approaches can provide the vehicle for making significant breakthroughs in education by providing opportunities for a co-professional approach toward the achievement of common goals in a rational and responsible manner. □

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