

The Curriculum Council: New Hope, New Promise

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THE growth of technology, the recent advances made in the areas of computer assisted instruction, the Gary, Indiana, Behavioral Research Laboratory "type" of contracted education program, the 300-plus industries with education departments, experiments with differentiated staffing patterns, and accountability are all elements challenging the status quo of curriculum decision making.

Increasingly, federally funded education programs are requiring evidences of community involvement in program planning and decision making as a condition for funding. Research shows that in the past 50 years public education has remained virtually the same in substance and form.¹ Teachers and students are becoming increasingly more militant in asserting their right to share in the decision-making process.

The reasons given here indicate that we must realistically assume the stance taken in the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's position paper:

Persons affected by curriculum decisions should have a representative voice in making those decisions. The voice of groups participating should be related to how curriculum decisions affect them.²

Curriculum decision making in this

¹ Max G. Abbott and Terry L. Eidell. "Administrative Implications of Curriculum Reform." *Educational Technology* 10 (5): 62-63; May 1970.

² Shirley A. Jackson. "Shared Curriculum Decision Making and Professional Negotiations." 1971 Position Paper for the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971.

article is defined as a process by which the content and activities included in the instructional program or the techniques utilized in presenting that content are determined. This article addresses itself to how maximum feasible, constructive participation may be accomplished through the organization of a curriculum council.

Guidelines for the Council

1. The council should be formulated along the lines recommended by the ASCD in its 1963 publication, *Organizing for Improved Instruction*, pages 15-17, which says,

Each school system needs some continuing body with special responsibility to formulate recommendations and to make decisions within the framework of overall policy. Here we are calling this body the Curriculum Council. The Council initiates and is a clearing house for studies, experiments, and innovations; . . . and in general it is advisory to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.³

2. Persons who are affected by the decisions of the council should be represented. These persons may be appointed or elected, depending upon the local situation. The committee should have an equal number of

³ American Association of School Administrators and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Organizing for Improved Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: the Associations, 1963. p. 15.

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teachers, students, administrators, curriculum resource specialists, business persons, operation personnel, union representatives, and parents or community members (see Figure 1).

The council must have such ad hoc representation as the matter under study requires from such groups as curriculum commissions, continuing groups of specialists from within the system, task forces or study groups established for the specific purpose, and including self-selected parent/citizen groups. The involvement of parents and citizens in the curriculum council complements the ASCD stand taken in its 1967 publication, *Collective Negotiation in Curriculum and Instruction*.⁴

3. The curriculum council must be completely separate from the professional negotiations committee. If a separate inclusive organizational structure is set up to work on curriculum matters, then curriculum concerns should be handled through a co-operative process rather than at the heated bargaining and negotiations table. This will enhance the possibility of devising curriculum that will conserve students' time, utilizing that time efficiently and effectively.⁵

Doing this economically and efficiently depends upon a group with a balanced representation of knowledge from the areas of education, psychology, anthropology, community aspirations, professional negotiations, and many other influential areas. Any procedure worked out must recognize the existing power structure within the community. However, the committee should deal only with curricular problems and not serve as a negotiating team. The members of the council should not be serving as negotiators.

4. The curriculum director should be chairman of the group, with the business manager serving ex officio on the committee.

5. The committee should establish

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

⁵ Richard Wynn. "Collective Bargaining." *Phi Delta Kappan* 2 (8): 415-19; April 1970.

Committee Members	Contributions
Students	React to the relevancy of content, effectiveness of presentation; provide background information on learning problems encountered, their own purposes and desires related to the subject at hand, and their concept of the continuity of the program presented to them
Teachers	React to pilot programs (graduates can provide information about the program some three or four years after they have graduated—valuable source for revisions)
Superintendent and Board of Education	Provide sequence and placement of subject matter, and students within the subject area Diagnose students' backgrounds Provide the philosophy or purpose of their subject matter, the knowledge of alternatives in their subject fields Emphasize the value in a continuing focus on the learner's needs as well as the teacher's needs in relation to implementing the program
Curriculum Specialists	Contribute overall guiding philosophy of purpose and the various alternatives available Provide information on the current state of the budget
Representatives of Colleges	Assist superintendent and board of education in development of overall guiding philosophy Provide information on alternatives available, subject matter content and organization (scope, sequence, continuity) Be a resource person to the council and an in-service education organizer Bring in resource persons
Industry and Business	Assist with the development of philosophy Report on any recent action research their institutions may have conducted Provide objective evaluation/research on pilot projects
Parents and Community Groups	Articulate their expectations of their future employees Provide information pertinent to the topic at hand Assist in fund raising for worthwhile projects
	Contribute to the formulation of the goals and purpose of the school Provide valuable feedback on their aspirations for their children Assist in raising funds for worthwhile projects Point out relevant community resources

Figure 1. Contributions Each Group Can Make

guidelines during its first meeting which will be used as an objective means of reviewing the various items presented. These guidelines must have as their central theme "the welfare of students."

6. The committee should meet at set times with an agenda prepared and submitted to everyone at least two days in advance of the meeting. At the beginning

Continued on page 693

Continued from page 691

of each meeting, based on the agenda, priorities should be set and followed.

7. The framework for involvement in curriculum decision making must permit and enable any group of teachers, students, administrators, and community members to submit a proposal to the council. The mechanism for shared decision making must encourage and permit two-way communications to take place.

8. All proposals to the committee should be in writing and include a rationale for the program proposed. A form outlining inclusions and selection criteria would be helpful.

9. Council members asking for a share in decision making must assume a share of the added responsibilities involved in the process. This means that a teacher must be prepared to devote the time needed at his own expense or at best upon a shared time plan, in which the district provides some released time and the teacher uses his own time to provide the additional hours necessary for completion of assigned tasks. Most teacher negotiation committees in the past have been willing to assume this responsibility for the purpose of negotiations.

If a committee is empowered to share in the decision making it must be ready to propose projects, consider the projects of others, including those of the administration, draw up and administer guidelines for the consideration of each project, keep abreast of the needs of the community and of the youngsters involved. Such a committee cannot function well if it serves only as a conformer or a vetoer of the ideas presented. It can serve with fewer man hours if it is willing to serve in an advisory capacity only; nevertheless, even this capacity demands much time.

10. The committee should recognize that its recommendations can be implemented only if time, money, staff, and facilities permit. The involvement of parents, students, and the business sector should aid and assist in the securing of funds for worthy

projects. The superintendent, board of education, and curriculum council must have a common understanding about the power, role, and function of the advisory council. In some cases it may have a total veto or acceptance power; in others, it may only have the power of recommendation.

How the Council Would Function

The curriculum council would function in the following manner:

Step 1. A proposal for curriculum change or inclusion would be submitted (on a form provided which indicates selection criteria) to the council committee, directed to the attention of a designated person.

Step 2. The curriculum council would then look at this and other proposals that have been submitted and would establish priorities for the various proposals submitted to them, in terms of cost, needs, funds available, and so forth.

Step 3. The curriculum council would discuss each proposal in terms of: philosophy as it relates to the school system's philosophy, the status of current research on this subject, concepts to be developed, their organization and validity, sequencing of skills to be developed, feasibility of implementing and evaluating such a program, available alternatives or modifications of the proposal.

Step 4. The council, considering these points, would vote on whether to accept or reject the proposal. A blanket acceptance or rejection need not be the only available decisions. The council could choose to reject a proposal until specified conditions or modifications are made.

Step 5. If the curriculum council should reject a curriculum proposal, it must provide written rationale which would be returned to the submitting group or individuals, with a copy retained for the files.

This means there must be a writer or a committee representative available to meet with the group whose proposal was rejected, if a representative of that group did not meet with the total curriculum council at the

time of the hearing of their proposal. The writer should have released time, paid for by the district, in which to write the opinion. The group could resubmit the proposal after meeting the objections given by the council. If a proposal were resubmitted, the entire procedure could be repeated, or a special compliance committee could be formed to see if the proposal had, in fact, been modified according to specifications. Checking the alterations in the budget would be a concern of this compliance committee.

Step 6. Proposals accepted, if innovations or new curriculum programs, should be tried in pilot situations in the larger districts; when possible, with the teacher or group originally involved in the development of the proposal.

Step 7. The evaluation procedures should be developed by the persons responsible for the curriculum, indicating at what point a rejection, a modification, or a recall of the program would be decided upon.

Step 8. Dissemination in a small district might well include a single teacher. However, in a larger district, the in-service program decision would be made following the evaluation of the pilot program. From this evaluation a decision to continue, expand, modify, expel, etc., would be made by a designated person or committee.

In-service plans for the dissemination of the project would be made at that time, if necessary; periodically the program would be evaluated by the criteria set up in *Step 7* and a decision on whether to continue, expand, modify, expel, etc., would again be made. This keeps the curriculum up-to-date by removing those things that no longer serve the best interest of the students.

Urban schools, particularly in the ghetto areas, and college students challenge us to become more relevant. Today's militant teachers' expectations are different from those of teachers a decade ago. "Educational changes must take place and we will have a voice in curriculum decision making," is a statement often heard in meetings of class-

room teachers, college and high school students, and community groups. Indeed, changes in curriculum must and will take place. Changes in how these curriculum decisions are made must and will take place. The question is "how?"

The curriculum council offers new hope, new promise in providing a vehicle for wide constituent participation which taps all available resources in developing each child to his fullest potential.

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