

The photographs accompanying this article were taken during the contract negotiations between the Board of Education and the Jefferson County Teachers Association in December, 1976. Photo: The Louisville Courier-Journal.

"In the near future, a systems model of collective bargaining must be designed that will integrate all the elements essential to the operation of a school district. This model can be conceived as a consensus building process concentrically reducing conflicts among the negotiating parties."

A decade ago, ASCD resolved, "Curriculum making is a study process and not a confrontation."¹ Several hundred confrontations later, curriculum specialists are acutely aware of the turbulent social forces demanding swift programmatic changes in the schools. Legislative bodies endorse accountability laws and specific instructional programs, court decisions require more uniform curricula, and the changing nature of family life and

Teachers Unions and the Curriculum Change Process

Keith P. Eiken

sex roles necessitates constant curricular shifts.

Paradoxically, a supervisory staff's flexibility in initiating changes is more limited, as collective bargaining agreements incorporate issues directly affecting curriculum innovation.

This writer sees curriculum development becoming increasingly constrained as the negotiating process, with its priorities on job security and salary benefits, broadens to include more "legitimate" instruction-related issues. The traditional labor-management negotiating model appears inadequate for resolving the complex dilemmas confronting public education and the curriculum change process. The development of a new

¹ Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. "ASCD Resolution." 22nd Annual Conference, Dallas, Texas, March 1967.

model that will be characterized by flexibility and consensus is urged.

Two divergent attitudes have prevailed in the recent past regarding teachers unions and curriculum change. Thomas Williams states, "Union domination will make it virtually impossible for educational managers to make the changes that must be made for the benefit of students and the community."² Jacqueline Vaughn counters, "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."³

The Contract Affects Instruction

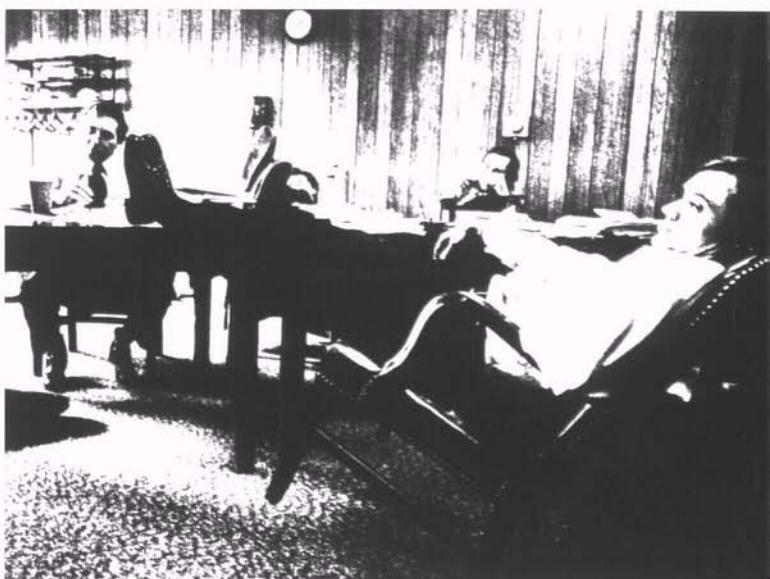
Currently, negotiators, who are confused as everyone else, tend to be ambivalent on curricular topics; yet the terms and conditions established by the contract have a direct effect upon the quality of instructional programs.

For example, the NACOME Report (National Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education) recommends the desirability of including statistics and probability in a revised mathematics curriculum. In a local school district, an advisory committee, including a curriculum specialist, urges the adoption of a unified mathematics program beginning at the middle school level. Initial enthusiasm over the proposed change is dampened when the principal indicates class assignments are given on a seniority basis with the "bright" students being taught by a person nearing retirement, who is unalterably opposed to the abstract content in the unified curriculum. The negotiated agreement, placing rigid rules on teacher transfers and numbers of class preparations, further restricts any viable solution to the problem.

One observer concludes, "Unless the public schools are flexible enough in staffing assignments to get the right teachers assigned to the right tasks, it is likely that high priority educational tasks will increasingly be assigned to private bodies or to public agencies new to education—in either case, to groups free of the rigidity of staffing patterns in school districts."⁴

Frequently in-service time is simply bargained away at the outset of negotiations so teachers can have more direct benefits or, conversely, in-service training becomes the final agenda item allowing both sides a chance to give lip service to the topic.

While professional literature emphasizes the value of teachers becom-



² Thomas E. Williams. "Governance Is the Real Issue: A Management Manifesto." *Phi Delta Kappan* 56(8):561-62; April 1975.

³ Jacqueline B. Vaughn. "The Expanding Role of Teachers in Negotiating Curriculum." *Educational Leadership* 33(1):21-23; October 1975.

⁴ Charles A. Benson. "Collective Negotiations and the Rule of Seniority." *Readings on Collective Negotiations in Public Education*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967. p. 437.

Photo: The Louisville Times.



Photo: The Louisville Courier-Journal.

ing curricular decision-makers, negotiated in-service days may allow few opportunities for the attainment of such a goal. With the emphasis on individual teacher choice, and in-service topics ranging from "assertive training" to "classroom climate," the basis for instituting systematic change becomes nonexistent.

Middle Management Lacks Effective Voice

As the trend toward accountability increases, curriculum development becomes more expensive and demands greater responsibility for program outcomes. School board members may ask searching questions about the effectiveness of an activity-based science program only to be met with blank expressions from the instructional staff. The dilemma is due, in part, to the difficulty of obtaining any meaningful data from classrooms when the contract stipulates supervisory visits are limited to those situations that are teacher initiated.

Negotiated class sizes, a favorite agenda item, create an administrative

mentality of "fill 'em up" in assigning pupils to classes. Specialized or innovative classes, with small enrollments, are rapidly jettisoned to meet the negotiated pupil-teacher ratios. Opportunities for programmatic change are eliminated by the exigencies of the bargaining table.

Middle management, lacking any effective voice in the negotiating process, develops a sense of *ennui* and places responsibility for its inaction on real or imagined contractual barriers. The major sub-system linking curriculum specialists and teachers becomes dysfunctional, and individuals lose their sense of responsibility for initiating change and accountability for instructional outcomes.

The traditional labor-management negotiating model in education has a number of weaknesses. It links the personal needs of teachers to the instructional needs of pupils. Financial priorities are not tied to a goal-setting process involving the community, as well as the professional staff. The developmental nature of the curriculum change process becomes progressively weaker as griev-

ances are filed to maintain the rigid agreements that were formed in an adversarial setting.

In the near future, a systems model of collective bargaining must be designed that will integrate all the elements essential to the operation of a school district. This model can be conceived as a consensus building



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process concentrically reducing conflicts among the negotiating parties. Realistic guidelines can be jointly established for initiating and evaluating change, rather than the imposition of artificial barriers extraneous to the instruction of youth. Timelines become the result of an interaction between the administrative and teaching staffs leading to a greater acceptance by both parties.

Thus, "negotiations" become a year-round process, in which instruction becomes an essential aspect, without allowing the vital issues that interface with curriculum to be decided by default. Hastily-formed curriculum councils, dealing with self-evident problems—for example, the need for multi-ethnic materials or the elimination of sexist books—become redundant.

Rollo May believes that creative persons find joy in encountering chaos and forming it into order. True creativity will be required in the near future if a systems model is to be developed that will result in professional credibility for the unions and worthwhile curriculum change for children and youth. *EZ*

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