

Teacher evaluation: It creates anxiety among teachers; is disliked and often avoided by administrators; yet is demanded in this age of accountability.

Maybe it is time for

A TEACHER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

BY NORMAN D. POWELL

More than two decades ago, Arthur Blumberg first referred to the relationship between teachers and supervisors as a “private cold war.”¹ Blumberg coined the phrase to suggest that both teachers and supervisors dislike instructional oversight. Since that time, unfortunately, little has changed. Recent research recommends greater reliance on self-assessment, use of performance tests or simulations, and multiple source assessment.² However, the top-down supervisory model still dominates in American elementary and secondary schools.³

This model puts the supervisor in the traditional position of control. Yet, according to the Carnegie Report,⁴ a critical key to educational reform lies in the empowerment of teachers. Blase and Kirby⁵ further suggest that attention in the literature has traditionally focused on supervisors, rather than on teachers and their perceptions.

Given the top-down nature of current supervisory practices and the need for classroom teachers to be more aware and proactive, this article focuses on helping teachers understand what kinds of supervisory practices to expect.

So, teachers, this article is for you. It provides some fundamental information about the supervision and evaluation process and explains what teachers should expect from the

process—a “Bill of Rights” for teachers, if you please.

Basic Principles

Certain underlying principles and practices should be part of any system of teacher evaluation or supervision:

1. *The right to be respected as a professional.*

Effective supervisors will see you as a unique individual and a professional. They will treat you as they would wish to be treated if the roles were reversed. While you may use different teaching methods than your supervisor would in the same situation, your ways may be just as effective. Your school or conference will have certain performance expectations, but as long as you meet them, you should be allowed the freedom to use the methods that suit you best.

It is, of course, important to know and understand what is required of you. This leads to our second “right.”

2. *The right to know what performance standards are expected.*

When you announce a test to your students, they expect to be told what material the test will cover and what to study. An effective supervisor will use the same kind of professionalism when evaluating a teacher. You should have received a written list of performance standards so you know what is expected. These standards should define the basic teaching performance expectations. They should be based on generally ac-

cepted theories of good teaching practice, while being broad enough to allow reasonable individual differences among teachers. If your conference *does* have such a list, make sure that you receive a copy. If it *does not*, do what you can to encourage your superintendent to adopt and circulate such a list.

The Planning Conference

Any system of teacher supervision should begin with a collaborative planning conference. Our next “right” deals with the nature and conduct of such a conference.

3. *The right to participate in professional growth decisions.*

Because you probably know more about your own needs than your supervisor does, you should help make decisions that affect your professional growth. You and your supervisor should hold a collaborative planning conference early in the school year, before any classroom observations take place. Expect, during the conference, to adopt one or more professional growth goals for yourself. You

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should be the one primarily responsible for choosing and achieving these goals.

Classroom Observation

Teacher supervision and evaluation always include classroom visitation and

observation. Because the classroom is your responsibility, the next “right” deals with your expectations during this observation.

4. *The right to have one's classroom respected.*

Your classroom is your domain and responsibility. This does not mean, of course, that no one else has the right to enter. Parents may wish to visit. The supervisor may make informal visits, frequently or occasionally. But a formal visit to observe instruction is different. An effective supervisor will provide advance notice of such a visit, so you can know what he or she will be looking for. (See “right” No. 2.)

During the visit, the supervisor should not talk to students while you are teaching, or in other ways interfere with your class. He or she should be as unobtrusive as possible.

The Post-Observation Conference

Following the classroom observation, the supervisor should conduct a feedback conference with you. Without such a con-

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ference, the supervisory visit has no real meaning. Therefore, the next three items in the “Bill of Rights” relate to this conference.

5. *The right to receive meaningful feedback.*

The feedback conference should be held the same day, or at latest, the next day after the observation. The supervisor should have spent enough time in your class to observe a complete lesson. He or she should have taken careful, thorough, and objective notes.

The supervisor should use great care in preparing his or her comments. They should include what was commendable about the lesson. If the supervisor is somewhat unclear on certain aspects of the lesson, he or she should ask questions about these items. This conversation should be collaborative and should demonstrate that the supervisor respects your competence, your feelings, and your dignity.

6. *The right to receive ethical treatment.*

When someone observes your teaching, he or she is probably judging your professional competence. The supervisor may file a written report on the visit. Ethical practice demands, therefore, that your supervisor be extremely careful about the confidentiality of information relating to the observation.

During the feedback conference, you may have asked for help from your supervisor. This required courage, because you were, in a sense, exposing possible weaknesses in your abilities. The supervisor should hold such conversations in the strictest confidence.

The supervisor may make suggestions during the feedback conference. These should be substantive recommendations for improving teaching and learning. Because both giving and receiving criticism is difficult, the next item in the “Bill of Rights” refers to this issue.

7. *The right to have reasonable expectations.*

When the supervisor requests that you change something about your teaching, he or she should focus on one or two reasonable and “doable” areas for improvement. The request should fit into the published performance standards of your conference. (See “right” No. 2.) “Doable”

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means that you should be given a reasonable amount of time to achieve the suggested changes. It also suggests that if your supervisor asks you to make changes in your teaching, he or she will assume the responsibility to provide support and resources. Those resources may include release time to visit other classrooms or meet with other teachers.

Evaluation Files

Eventually, as part of the supervision and evaluation process, the supervisor will prepare a document to place in your file. Evaluation strikes at the heart of your professional existence. Therefore, the next three items in the “Bill of Rights” are very important.

8. *The right to be treated fairly.*

This includes the following four elements: First, evaluation should be based on a broad spectrum of information, not just one classroom observation. All of the information about your evaluation should be objective and accurate.

Second, you have a right to be aware

of whatever information is used in your evaluation. If you have any question about the basis for an evaluation, ask the supervisor to let you see your file. All documents that are kept about you should be there, and you have a right to see everything in the file. You do not have a right to change or remove items, but you do have a right to add to the file if you think certain information is inaccurate or misleading.

Third, you have the right to be spared surprises. No criticisms of your professional performance should appear in your file or evaluation report that have not been discussed with you.

Fourth, you have a right to due process. You should not receive any form of professional discipline such as undesired transfer, reduction in status, or dismissal, without due process. This includes being informed of dissatisfaction with your performance and being given support and adequate time to correct perceived weaknesses.

9. *The right to an advocate.*

As a teacher, you may receive unfair or hostile criticisms from board members, parents, or others. Your supervisor should provide you with someone to serve as your advocate—a person who will provide support and protect your rights throughout the difficult process of being buffeted by criticism.

10. *The right to reasonable job security.*

When someone criticizes you professionally, this may damage your self-esteem. Extreme or unfair criticism may even diminish your ability to teach effectively. However, to have your very job or position threatened is one of the most stressful situations possible. Small groups of church members, pastors, or even misguided school boards should not have the power to arbitrarily or unfairly dismiss or

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not do, you should maintain a record of your own professional growth.

11. *The right to maintain a personal professional portfolio.*

As authentic assessment of students becomes more common, you are undoubtedly helping your students prepare personal portfolios. You should do the same for yourself.

A well-designed and well-organized portfolio will help you understand your own needs and affirm your growth. As with student portfolios, you need to determine the nature of the portfolio. It may contain a variety of different kinds of documents and artifacts, such as examples of student work, videotapes of your teaching or other professional activities, examples of special instructional units you have designed, or documents illustrating leadership activities. The portfolio will help you take control of your own professional growth.⁶

In summary, teachers must assume a proactive role in assuring that the process

of supervision is a positive and productive experience. The 11 “rights” or criteria for a productive supervisory process can be useful as a guide to examine the process and seek ways to improve it. If you find your experience with supervision stressful or unproductive, take steps to change it. Ask for a conference with your supervisor and, using these criteria as guides, ask what you could do to help improve the process. Both teachers and supervisors should keep in mind three significant principles: (1) fostering mutual respect between supervisor and teacher, (2) focusing on improved instruction for mutual benefit and benefit of students, and (3) applying the Golden Rule. When these three principles are in place, supervision will become a positive experience rather than a “cold war.” ☞

Norman D. Powell, Ed.D., is Chair of the Department of Educational Administration and Leadership at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

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REFERENCES

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2. Jason Millman and Linda Darling-Hammond, *The New Handbook of Teacher Evaluation* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990).
3. Carl D. Glickman, Stephen P. Gordon, and Jonta M. Ross-Gordon, *Supervision of Instruction, A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), p. 6.
4. Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1986), pp. 25, 26.
5. Joseph Blase and Peggy C. Kirby, *Bringing Out the Best in Teachers* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), p. xi.
6. Much is available in the literature regarding teacher portfolios. One example is *The New Handbook of Teacher Evaluation* by Jason Millman and Linda Darling-Hammond.

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transfer a teacher. The effective supervisor will protect your rights.

Effective leaders must never forget that our school system is founded on Christian principles. When the system fails to protect you, does not provide appropriate respect for you, or denies you basic human and professional rights, then our heritage has been abrogated.

Personal Responsibility

The Carnegie Forum points out the importance of finding ways to empower teachers. This is the reason for the final, 11th item in our “Bill of Rights.” Regardless of what your supervisor does or does