

Collective Bargaining and Supervision: A Matter of Climate

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The adversarial positions fostered by the "win-lose" atmosphere of negotiations can carry into other aspects of the work environment and hamper the problem solving that teachers and supervisors must do together.

Collective bargaining in public schools is a dominant and time consuming activity affecting not only wages, hours, and conditions of employment, but also the work environment in the schools. Whether this environment is positive or negative is crucial in determining the quality of the interaction between supervisors and teachers in the process of instructional supervision.

Limited research exists concerning the influence of negotiations on teacher and supervisor interaction. A recent study investigating master contract clauses and their impact on supervisors concluded that supervisors are not prohibited by contract language from fulfilling their supervisory responsibilities. In fact, the research concluded that contract clauses pose little direct threat to supervisors.¹

While contract language does not pose a direct threat, the process of negotiations can be a potent influence on supervision through the organizational climate it can create. The struggle between teachers and school boards in "hammering out a contract" can interfere with and be a negative influence on the relationship between teacher and supervisor.

Supervision and Organization Climate

A program of instructional supervision should foster the professional and personal growth of teachers. The role of supervisors is to assist teachers in analyzing instruction so productive teaching

¹ Robert K. Krey, Lanore A. Netzer, and Glen G. Eye. "Master Contracts and the Supervision of Instruction." *Educational Leadership* 34: 464-70; March 1977.

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behavior can be sustained and ineffective behavior can be modified.

Basic to this process of supervision is the interaction of the supervisor and teacher. Interaction must be honest, open, candid, supportive, and productive. The supervisor and teacher together must be able to analyze instruction and find solutions to problems on a professional level. Problem solving is an analytical activity different from negotiations. In negotiations, both parties stake out positions and attempt to win compromises from the other party in an effort to reach a "settlement." On the other hand, problem solving in supervision involves the teacher and supervisor mutually defining and examining all potential solutions and alternatives, and selecting the best approach based upon the needs of the students or clients. Concerning effective supervision, Blumberg² states:

. . . the interpersonal relationships between a teacher and a supervisor must enable the two to give and receive in a mutually satisfactory way.

In order for open and honest problem solving to take place, the organizational climate must be trusting and positive. A positive school organizational climate can be developed only if there is trust, respect, and caring among and between teachers and administrators. This positive climate should exist

also between the professional staff and the students in the school. Trust, respect, and caring often become victims in the arena of collective bargaining. Both teachers' unions and school boards contribute to those elements, which result in a polluted and paranoid environment characterized by mistrust, retaliation, and closed relationships, in which interaction becomes defined in terms of winning, defeating, and saving face.

While contract language may be benign, the organizational climate outcomes of negotiations can be cancerous to productive and progressive programs of supervision. The power tactics used in negotiations can cause a negative school climate to develop.

Negotiations—Tactics and Approaches

The struggle for power between teachers' unions and school boards has resulted in both sides being locked into an adversary relationship. Often, adversary relationships from one negotiation period are carried over through the next bargaining year. In the meantime, the supervisor and teacher will find it difficult to develop a helping relationship for the improvement of instruction in the classroom.

The possibilities for developing helping relationships between

supervisor and teacher become proportionately diminished as militant teachers' unions try to discredit the school administration and as school boards become more involved in the daily operation of schools. Supervisors and teachers become more concerned with their own security than with issues of instruction in such an environment. In addition, teachers and supervisors lose their motivation as professional prerogatives become compromised through inflexible contract clauses negotiated by school board and union negotiators.

Overly restrictive and inflexible master contract clauses can be changed only through continued bargaining and negotiations. For example, teacher unions have been instrumental in increasing teacher input into the process of curriculum development. A feeling of ownership by teachers should result from involvement in curriculum work, increasing staff motivation. Greater ownership of the curriculum and increased motivation can be productive. However, the "catch-22" of negotiated participation in curriculum development is restrictive contract language. A specific example concerns the Chicago Teachers' Union and their negotiated curriculum development clause which states:

To serve on a high school committee the teacher shall have at least two years of experience as a regularly certified teacher, teaching on his certificate. . . .³

Adversary relationships producing a school climate void of trust and respect inevitably will lead to minimal standards of behavior encouraging a laborer-

² Arthur Blumberg. *Supervisors and Teachers*. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1974.

³ Jacqueline Vaughn. "The Expanding Role of Teachers in Negotiating Curriculum." *Educational Leadership* 34 21; October 1976.

oriented rather than a professional environment.

This clause limits a school district from using highly competent and qualified people who may have only one year of experience. When master contracts include restrictive clauses, supervisors and administrators are not free to make use of valuable teacher resources, regardless of seniority.

The Win-Lose Syndrome

The most corrosive element in the struggle between teacher unions and school boards is the development of a "win-lose" syndrome. Both the board and the teachers' union can succumb to destructive negotiation tactics to win the battle, only to destroy the climate in the schools necessary to effective teacher-supervisor relationships.

In 1977, teachers in a school district in southeast Wisconsin went on strike for the longest period in the history of NEA-supported strikes. During the opening of negotiations for a new contract recently, the local newspaper ran separate pictures of the school board spokesman and the education association negotiator in a face-off position on either side of the main article. The bargaining issues were not as newsworthy as the upcoming contest between two embittered individuals who had fought it out during the infamous strike.

Supervisors and teachers will have a difficult time working together in such an adversary, win-lose atmosphere. Teachers will not respond positively to a supervisor whose role becomes keeping teachers "in line" because of bargaining disputes. Negotiations emphasizing the adversary nature of union-management relationships will accentuate controlling, directing, and reprimanding of staff. The professional roles of planning, coordinating, stimulating, and initiating

become victims of a rigid climate emphasizing standard operating procedures and controls, rather than contributing to a creative problem solving environment. Learning and the needs of students are not considerations unless they can be used to justify a negotiator's position. The clients of the school district become secondary considerations, and problem solving between teachers and supervisors falls victim to bargaining rhetoric and emotion.

Master contracts also define the parameters of minimum performance on the part of the teacher. Some teachers, who have gone through long bargaining battles, begin to interpret the master contract as maximum expectations for their performance. Brenner's scriptural phrasing describing the struggle between teachers and school boards is a good illustration of what happens:

And the Season of Opening arrived and was fulfilled, yet with no Morale. No man would labor beyond The Limit of the Words, and there was no Giving and Sharing in the Land. The Tolling of the Bell heralded the Beginning and the Ending of Effort, and Involvement was shunned. Yea, Minimum Acceptable Behavior permeated The Atmosphere and The Seed of Indifference took root.⁴

terminated by the organizational climate.

- While contract language may not be restrictive to supervisors, negotiation tactics can handicap supervisors and teachers in productive supervisory behavior.

- Both unions and management share responsibility for the organizational climate outcomes of the negotiations process.

- "Win-lose" situations will create a "we-they" organizational climate and mentality.

- Contract requirements can be interpreted as maximum work expectations by teachers and administrators.

- Contract language and the process of negotiations can lead to rigid organizational behavior and limited professional problem solving.

Negotiators for union and management must become more aware of their impact. The process of negotiation can be more important than the product, as far as instructional supervision is concerned.

⁴Jane M. Brenner. "A Book of Revelations." *The Bulletin* 59 (392); September 1975.



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Negotiations are a fact of life in public schools. Supervisors and teachers must examine not only contract language, but also the impact the collective bargaining process has on the school environment. Some things to consider are:

- The relationship between teacher and supervisor will be de-

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