

ing. Training in observation and interpretation can eliminate the need for such a crutch.

5. *The time required for the preobservation conference reduces by one-third the time available for observation and conferences.* Three observations and conferences can be conducted in the same amount of time required for two when the preobservation conference is eliminated. Increasing supervisory time by 50 percent is an important achievement when it can be accomplished by eliminating an unnecessary procedure.

A *planning conference* is not considered to be a preobservation conference. In a planning conference the

observer and teacher collaborate in the design of a lesson, which the teacher subsequently teaches, but responsibility for successful learning outcomes is jointly shared. Planning conferences are excellent opportunities for the teacher to experience the stimulation of team planning. The observer, in turn, accepts part of the teacher's daily responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating countless lessons and experiences the fact that "it ain't all that easy."

Coming to grips with the interaction between teachers, particular students, and specific content is growth-promoting and long overdue in education. Platitudes, vague generalizations, and admonitions have dominated the su-

pervision of teachers in the past. Now, accurate observations enable us to recognize specific cause-effect relationships in teaching and learning. Through commonly shared experiences, coaching for increasingly effective and artistic teaching can become a reality.

Let's discard the preobservation conference, a practice no longer needed, and focus our time and energies on what we now know about accelerating teaching excellence through observation and analysis. □

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In Defense of the Preobservation Conference

Preobservation conferences place teaching episodes in context and enhance the supervisor's supportive role.

JOHN LORDON

Madeline Hunter and others who advocate elimination of the preobservation conference argue that such conferences are too time consuming, that they create both supervisor and teacher bias, and that, contrary to popular beliefs, they do not really build rapport between teacher and supervisor. Such rapport, they claim, can only be built through a successful *postobservation* conference.

Hunter's arguments have some validity if we see supervision as limited to the analysis of isolated classroom episodes. However, there are some equally compelling reasons that support the preobservation conference. For instance:

1. *Orientation.* While the typical orientation is to the lesson to be taught, thoughtful supervisors also examine how lessons fit into long-range plans.

It may be possible to do this as part of a postobservation conference, but it is unlikely since teachers then look primarily for feedback on the immediate teaching episode.

2. *Written planning.* Most school districts require written evidence that teachers have completed daily and long-range plans. Not only is the pre-visit conference the logical time to examine such plans, it can help orient the supervisor and lead to discussion about important curriculum decisions. Skilled observers can tell in a short time how thoroughly a teacher has planned, and there is no need to examine written plans. It is important, nevertheless, to scrutinize more than the immediate teaching episode if curriculum is an important concern.

3. *Pupil evaluation.* The preobservation conference provides an opportunity to discuss how the teacher eval-

uates pupils and uses the results of evaluation. It can also be useful to have the teacher provide copies of quizzes and tests, which may be jointly examined and discussed. The whole area of evaluation, feedback to pupils, diagnosis, and remediation is frequently overlooked in the supervisory process. Including pupil evaluation on the agenda of the preobservation conference can lead to positive results, not the least of which may be an improvement in the quality of written tests.

4. *Pupils.* It is most useful for supervisors to know about the pupils in the classes they observe. It is also helpful for teachers to discuss pupil problems with another knowledgeable person. Classes vary considerably in nature. Each one has a different character and a unique quality. Good supervisors want to know as much as possible

about the students and the teacher's perceptions about the students.

5. *Supervisor's resource role.* If supervisors are to be seen as helpers (as they should in formative evaluation), there must be an opportunity for teachers to request the kind of help they need. Although both preobservation and postobservation conferences provide such opportunities, the preobservation conference is more likely to produce an unbiased suggestion or request from the teacher about how the supervisor might help.

6. *Specific purpose for the observation.* Supervisors are always looking for evidence of the components of effective instruction. It is legitimate, however, in formative evaluation, to narrow the focus to a specific area or problem suggested by the teacher.

Recently, teachers in the district where I work were asked to evaluate our supervisory system and were questioned about the effectiveness and desirability of the preobservation conference. If we had any doubts about it, the teachers' positive attitudes made it clear to us that it continues to be a useful part of the supervisory process. Here are just a few of their comments.

"This meeting affords the person being supervised some chance to understand the perspective of the supervisor."

"The evaluation process is more cooperatively planned with the addition of the preobservation conference."

"It puts both teacher and supervisor in a more positive frame of mind concerning the visitation."

"The preobservation conference allows for an exchange between the two individuals. A positive relationship can be created in a nonthreatening atmosphere."

"The previsititation conference is essential. It gives the teacher some input into the evaluation process. It makes it necessary for the teacher to do some self-evaluation."

"It is important for the supervisor to understand what the teacher is attempting to accomplish and what the teacher wants emphasized during the observation." □

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