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Linking School Practices With No Child Left Behind

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Punctuating Student Teaching Supervision with INTASC Standards: Highlighting the Convergence of Personal Experience and Professional Standards

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As politicians, professional educators, and the public work and worry about leaving no child behind, official and unofficial reactions to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation across the country have created chaos and uncertainty. And while state departments and university schools of education grapple with reform and implementation, student teachers—caught in the here and now—take to their field placements. In ideal conditions, student teaching is an intensely complex experience. In an educational environment preoccupied with NCLB details, student teachers are bombarded with warnings, information, and misinformation all in the name of standards and student achievement. Amid such a swirl, how can supervisors help student teachers distinguish the significant standards-driven details from the distracting ones in order to hone individual professional development?

Interestingly, I found that using one set of standards actually helped me cut through the hectic complexities of student teaching in succinct, professional, and still very personal ways. The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards and their underlying principles cover a wide range of professional educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions, yet these INTASC Standards are limited to a concise list of ten. This list or set of standards can be adapted to a variety of beginning teaching experiences. When connected to relevant episodes from student teachers' work, the INTASC Standards can serve as illustra-

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tive professional guideposts rather than abstract impositions.

The capstone experience to a teacher education program, student teaching presents sustained, intense occasions for educational theory to meet professional practice. For student teachers, the field experience is often a gallant yet awkward juggling act of knowledge, skills, disposition, learning, frustration, joy, and anxiety. As a university student teaching supervisor, I am situated outside field settings where I can cut through the dense, daily intensity of student teaching and focus on the beginning teachers' professional development and to their students' learning in field settings. As a supervisor, I can articulate a few succinct recommendations to help student teachers feel they are doing more than simply surviving beginning teaching. This is where I have found the standards from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards essential (see below). By hinging my supervisory reporting on the standards, I customize my assessment and advice to student teachers in ways that are personal, professional, and immediately useful in practice.

Combining observations, reflections, and reporting with INTASC Standards allows me as a supervisor to pin actual student teaching experiences to professional standards that should serve well beginning teachers beyond their novice development. Most importantly, though, connecting standards to actual beginning practice helps penetrate generalizations about teaching and learning to make teaching practice as personal as it is professional.

*Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium
(INTASC) Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing,
Assessment and Development*

Principle #1: The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students (Standard 1: Understands content knowledge)

Principle #2: The teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development. (Standard 2: Under-

stands development)

Principle #3: The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners. (Standard 3: Understands differences)

Principle #4: The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills. (Standard 4: Designs instructional strategies)

Principle #5: The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. (Standard 5: Manages and motivates)

Principle #6: The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom (Standard 6: Communicates)

Principle #7: The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals. (Standard 7: Plans and integrates instruction)

Principle #8: The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner. (Standard 8: Evaluates)

Principle #9: The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally. (Standard 9: Reflects on practice)

Principle #10: The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being. (Standard 10: Participates in the

professional community)

Compressed Complexity: INTASC Standards

Created in 1987, INTASC is a reform-oriented consortium of state and national education agencies and organizations. While INTASC sees state education agencies as its primary constituency and responsible for teacher licensing, program approval, and professional development, INTASC maintains that its "work is guided by one basic premise: An effective teacher must be able to integrate content knowledge with the specific strengths and needs of students to assure that all students learn and perform at high levels" (Council of Chief State School Officers).

Compressing the complexity of teaching and learning into a 10-point list, INTASC's model core standards hardly give teaching and learning short shrift. Their 1992 draft publication elaborates INTASC's ten standards listed here with explanations about knowledge, dispositions, and performances related to each of the ten standards. Additionally, the consortium acknowledges that by suggesting "common core" standards they were not suggesting that the standards be construed as generic or context-free teaching behaviors (INTASC, p.7). I know from experience within our school of education that preservice teachers are well-versed in the INTASC Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing, Assessment and Development. The standards are doomed to mere abstraction if not connected to actual practice and context in field placements and beginning teaching.

INTASC emphasizes what entry-level teachers should

know about their subjects as well as about their students. The principles intend to guide teacher licensure efforts in light of what entry-level teachers should understand about what students need to learn effectively as well as what they themselves need to know at entry about responsibly dealing with diverse students. By specifically addressing the ten INTASC standards throughout a semester-long internship, I relate professional evolution to personal practice during supervisory conversations and on supervisory reports. These professional benchmarks help student teachers and me as their supervisor concretely articulate and assess the evidence of their teaching and their students' learning.

The INTASC standards are congruent by design with other

major standards initiatives and with our school of education's conceptual framework and work with preservice educators. With concentration on the diverse needs of all learners, the INTASC Standards certainly complement the spirit of NCLB—a significant message for preservice educators who will witness and tremble at some of the NCLB implementation fallout in the field.

Expanding a Traditional Model of Supervision

Within our school of education, we currently employ a traditional model of supervisory visits to student teachers' classrooms followed up with formal reports to the Office of Field Placement. My formal reports provide the field placement office with necessary documentation, but composing those reports is much more than reporting an observed slice of classroom teaching. My formal Student Teaching Classroom Observation Reports appear tidy, but they are deceptively so because each report is backgrounded by informal co-constructed reports between student teacher and supervisor. Offering formative assessment of beginning teaching practice, formal supervisory reports cut through the complexity of daily student teaching with professional insight and concrete clarity. The following sequence represents the elements within a round of reporting that culminates in one of my formal supervisory observation reports.

Co-constructing Reports: The student teacher initiates co-constructed reports with an e-mail to the supervisor about scheduling a field visit to the classroom. The student teacher indicates at this time the intended focus for supervisory feedback.

Co-constructing a Response: The supervisor responds to the student teacher's e-mail and probes for more specificity about the teaching focus, particulars in the field setting, and planning.

Co-constructing Conversation between Field Visits: The co-constructed reports are ongoing; they necessarily address the superficial and the essential elements of student teaching. The progressive e-mail conversation can be rambling, reflective, and/or instructive. The co-constructed reports serve many purposes, but the most important is allowing student teachers to exercise voice and exert some control over their emerging teaching practice.

Visiting the Classroom: The supervisor visits the student teacher in the field, collects lesson plans and/or other documenta-

tion, observes the student teacher and students at work, and returns to the university to record comments and impressions from the visit. Co-constructing Assessment: The student teacher writes to the supervisor and assesses the particular class session observed. This is an important correspondence because it reveals how cognizant the beginning teacher is about specific aspects of evolving teaching practice.

Composing the Formal Report: Within the formal report, I first comment and describe briefly the sequence of observations from the classroom visit. In the second part of the formal report, the supervisor responds to the student teacher's own assessment of the visit in the formal report's recommendations. These recommendations refer to specific aspects of the student teacher's work and connect directly to several INTASC standards. A formal report concludes a round of conversation and observation, but it also launches consideration and conversation for the subsequent round.

Submitting the Formal Report: With related co-constructed reports attached, the formal report of the classroom visit is submitted to the field placement director and student teacher.

Throughout the 12-week internship, I formally report a total of six times to the field placement director and student teacher. For the formal report, I include a brief narrative outline of what I see during the classroom visit followed by several INTASC standards and a specific recommendation to the student teacher about how to incorporate the professional standard into his or her teaching practice.

Using INTASC standards on formal reporting has not revolutionized my supervision, but connecting the standards to actual student teaching episodes has. This connection also seems to help students because it sears professional understanding in ways that only personal experience can. Examples of student teaching practice connected to an INTASC standard or two magnifies student teachers' work relative to the larger professional context. I also believe that when student teachers see their work connected to the standards, they are lifted out of student teaching's immediate chaos for a more reflective view of their work along a professional continuum. I cannot change the particulars of field placements for my student teachers with my supervision and field reporting. But I can divert their attention from the distractions and steep learning curve of the moment to the long-range, professional implications of

their field experiences.

Honing in on two or three INTASC standards per formal report is a matter of my interpretation. Given the work that envelops each classroom visit—the conversations I am part of, the co-constructed reports to which I am privy through e-mail, the specific needs and development of each student teacher and students in the field placement—I select several standards that seem most apt. For my formal reporting, the two or three selected INTASC standards cinch the round and range of detail surrounding each field placement visit. Citing the standards is not just a functional strategy; it helps build themes and formative assessment for student teachers across their internships. No set of INTASC-related recommendations looks the same from student teacher to student teacher because the examples and suggestions attached to each recommendation unfold specifically within individual field setting experiences and supervision.

Supervision as a Co-Constructed, Reflective Opportunity

At the start of the student teaching semester, I begin my supervisory rounds with a visit to each field placement setting to make introductions and share expectations with the student teacher and cooperating teacher. I then ask student teachers to invite me for classroom visits through e-mail notes that indicate the particular time, date, and focus for the visit and reporting round. These e-mail messages begin our co-constructed reporting around classroom visits; the student teachers initiate the process of setting up supervisory visits and focusing for me their intended teaching and learning.

As designed and described by two of my colleagues, co-constructed reports between student teachers and supervisors foster the habit of reflective thinking, learning, and teaching practice. Co-constructed reporting is an effort to make the student teaching experience more learner-centered, much as we encourage our interns to make their own new teaching practice learner-centered (Paris & Gespass, 2001, p. 398). Co-constructed reporting also encourages student teachers to articulate specific needs and understanding, and it encourages beginning teachers to use their own voices where traditional supervisory arrangements deny such. The co-constructed format reframes the traditional and inherently unequal relationship between student teacher and supervisor by sharing purpose, power,

and responsibility.

The co-constructed reports provide the opportunities for student teachers and supervisors to reflect not just on "what happened" in the field setting during one visit but how specific, individual practice relates to theory, professional standards, context, and content. The co-constructed reports invite close, personal examination and discussion of specific slices of teaching, learning, and evolving practice espoused by teacher educators (Paris & Gespass, p. 400; Loughran, p. 42).

Using e-mail for the co-constructed reporting puts the onus on the student teachers to reflect on and assess their own work, to communicate with their supervisors, and to use the language of professional development. The student teachers' reflections are anecdotal, colloquial, self-conscious, occasionally self-righteous, fearful, inquiring, and astute. In a range of tone, moods, and maturation over the internship, student teachers use their written reflections to interpret the internships' cultural, pedagogical, and content-related phenomena. As a supervisor, I am afforded insights through our co-constructed reports about student teachers' understanding and experience that I could never uncover as a mere classroom observer. The informal, reflective nature of these co-constructed reports permits me to pose comments, questions, and observations in ways that seem much more like coaching than scolding because they grow out of our written conversation. Stressing that I am not visiting the classroom to "see a show," I encourage student teachers to regard my classroom visits as part of our ongoing dialogue about their teaching and learning.

The time lapse between my supervisory visit and reflection on the visit gives student teachers the opportunity to process and assess a given lesson or aspect of teaching practice. Given the relative privacy of electronic mail, our co-constructed reports seem safer than hurried face-to-face follow-up conferences after observations.

By couching the classroom visit within an entire round of conversations culminating in a formal report, I can emphasize that learning to teach is like learning of any other kind—a process of fits and starts and strides, not a series of "one-shot" performances. If student teachers would rather I not include an e-mail note or portion of a co-constructed reflection with the final report, I do not. Otherwise, our field placement director and student teachers receive hard

copies of our unedited, co-constructed reports attached to my formal reports and recommendations related to each visit. Essentially, the formal report is processed between the student teachers and me through our co-constructed reports. I compose the formal report and apply INTASC Standards and recommendations as a kind of final punctuation to each visit, but those recommendations in turn launch the subsequent round of co-constructed reports, teaching, and classroom supervisory visit.

Supervision as a Timely, Professional Opportunity

Within the whirl of cultures, content-knowledge, expectations, and learning that occur simultaneously in field placements student teachers develop their repertoires of skills, cognition, and understanding. At times, though, student teachers are burdened unduly about matters over which they have no control and that do not serve their professional development. By focusing student teachers on professional goals, I can quiet hurtful or irrelevant aspects of a field placement and/or dwarf the impact of confused or distracting messages from a cooperating teacher in the field.

For instance, when one cooperating teacher was less than cooperative about sharing classes with a student teacher, I composed the following formal report—which was supported by several e-mail reflections around the visit. Hard-copies of our co-constructed reports were attached eventually to the formal student teaching classroom observation report. These co-constructed reports conveyed the student teacher's increasing level of concern about not being permitted to start teaching, that she would not accumulate sufficient teaching experience, that the cooperating teacher did not want a student teacher, and that there did not seem to be an overarching plan for students' and teacher's work.

The formal report does not reveal the student teacher's bewildered disappointment over sitting on the sidelines for a full month into her placement; it does not reveal the cooperating teacher's lack of advanced planning or apparent apathy over hosting a student teacher. The following excerpt from a formal report summarizes briefly the student teaching intern's field placement situation and my first visit to the school; it also aims to provide specific recommendations to the student teacher:

Comments: The purpose of today's visit was introduc

tory....

Our 3-way discussion was dominated by the logistics and impact of the school's block scheduling, first on the cooperating teacher, then on the intern's student teaching opportunities. The intern started at the school during the last and final examination week of the semester. With a weekend to close-out one set of students and welcome another set to a "new" school year, the cooperating teacher was understandably hard-pressed to plan for a student teacher. She clearly indicated her intention to begin classes with her new students and allow the intern to assume teaching at the beginning of March.

The cooperating teacher urged the intern to ask for what she needs and not wait for cues. I interpreted this as encouragement from an experienced teacher to a novice. Our co-constructed report is attached.

INTASC Standard #1 & Recommendation/Understands

Content: At this point, continue to refine your content knowledge as you prepare to teach and unit/lesson plan for students in March.

INTASC Principles #9 and #10 & Recommendation/

Reflects on Practice and Participates in the Professional

Community: Principles #9 and #10 seem especially

relevant to this stage of your involvement at the school. Continue to cultivate relationships with students and other adults in the school community; learn about this community, your students, other teaching styles and techniques.

Then deliberately reflect on how these observations and conversations can inform your understanding/teaching. Be yourself as you move about this community; do not be afraid of seeming intrusive or overly assertive. Pierce,

Kathleen ("Student Teaching Classroom Observation Report," February 5, 2002).

To conclude the formal reporting related to the visit, I invoke 3 INTASC standards and made recommendations to steer the student teacher in a direction of what she could positively and professionally do in a compromised setting without my indicating my fears about a compromised setting to unnerv the intern or insult the cooperating teacher. Frankly, given the early stage of this

internship, it would have been reckless of me to impose any judgment. My job as supervisor is to help interns make the most, personally and professionally, of the field placement. So, rather than allow this student teacher to feel that she was just hanging out in the field setting until she took over teaching classes, I urged her to look at the range of INTASC standards and realize that time would not be wasted professionally if she worked on my recommendations. Getting to know students and other professionals in the field setting is significant professional work. While beginning teachers naively sense that student teaching means teaching a class, the INTASC standards provide a full complement of professional considerations and activity required of educators that I pointed out in recommendation.

As a student teaching supervisor, I advocate for student learning—the student teaching interns' learning and the learning of students in their care. As evidenced in the previous example, INTASC standards sometimes help me cut through bureaucratic and/or interpersonal muck to focus the student teacher on how and what to learn in the field when conditions are less than optimal—indeed, how to be professional when others may not be so.

Combining Informal and Formal Reports to Assess Student Teaching

Using my observation notes and reflective co-constructed reports as the basis for a formal report of each visit, I comment briefly on details from the supervisory visit and cite two or three INTASC standards needing attention and/or meriting compliment. Along with the INTASC standard(s) cited, I make specific recommendation for teaching practice—a move that helps me help student teachers transcend the idiosyncrasies of their particular placements to consider individual practice in the larger professional context.

In one instance, a student teacher was frustrated by how the cooperating teacher insisted she present class material yet gave the student teacher free reign to design and assess student learning. Because the student teacher and I were engaged in conversations about assessment and learning, we sidestepped a traditional classroom observation visit in favor of a review of student work and how the student teacher prompted and evaluated student writing and projects. My visit to the school library to study with the student

teacher a body of her students' work was a most useful, productive visit. This session related to most of the INTASC standards, but I found that the visit especially revealed the student teacher's developing insights into her students' learning. By closely examining and discussing her students' work and products, I observed strong growth—the student teacher's and her students'. In my formal reporting of the visit, I commented on the evidence within two sets of student work we examined and discussed during my visit and made the following INTASC notes and recommendations:

INTASC Standards #2 and #8 & Recommendations/
Understanding Development and Evaluates: In particular, your teacher-designed planning, prompts, and assessments reflect your increasing understanding about a variety of students' development and learning styles.
INTASC Standard #9 & Recommendation/Reflects on Practice: You continue to do commendable reflection—reflection that you use to refine, re-create, and adapt learning opportunities for your students. Such reflection and relative action are further evidence of your own development and understanding. Pierce, Kathleen ("Student Teaching Classroom Observation Report," April 18, 2002).

The standards provide a device for cutting through the complicated web of classroom observation and co-constructed reports in a way that I find direct, constructive, and professional. As mentioned previously, the standards frame our school's preservice teacher programs and courses, so my supervision uses internally consistent concepts and vocabulary to assess and discuss the work of teaching and learning with my student teachers. Rather than externally imposed or treated as "add-ons" to the final student teaching portfolio, INTASC standards are part of our teacher education vocabulary.

Throughout my supervision, I specifically link examples of student teaching practice to INTASC standards for several important reasons: to move professional standards beyond abstraction and into real practice for student teaching interns, to assess student teaching evolution for interns and make specific recommendations for continued growth, to articulate coherence within and across our

university's teacher preparation programs, and to publicly note the professional development of our student teachers related to widely-agreed-upon professional standards.

An example of using specific field work to illustrate concrete connection to INTASC standards involves a student teacher for whom I saw planning and teacher-centeredness as related difficulties. To help him re-see or reframe his work, I combined two INTASC standards with specific recommendations in my formal report as shown in the following excerpt:

Comments: The purpose of today's visit was to observe an 11th grade Composition class and focus on the student teaching intern's [expressed interest in] "prompting students with questions to get them motivated to participate." The cooperating teacher joined the intern and me in a post-observation discussion....

The student teacher presented an interesting lesson on observing (listening and viewing) events in order to compose an organized story with emphasis on significant sequence. Students heard and saw various video clips of an actual crime, then composed their stories with details they gathered. Our co-constructed report is attached.
INTASC Principle #4 & Recommendation:/ Designs Instructional Strategies: Reinforcing verbal directions with visual cues is good for all learners, and it will also help your own sense of organization. Plan directions in advance to help simplify what you're asking students to do—not make the work simple, but make the plan for work clear. You are working at a basic level in this area, but I have confidence that your continued effort will finesse this aspect of your teaching.

INTASC Principle #7 & Recommendation/Plans and Integrates Instruction: Your students were "with you" in the class I observed, but you seemed very preoccupied with your plan. I would encourage you to plan well before class, then become preoccupied with your students during class. What do students say? What are their questions? How do they respond to each other? Argue with each other? Work to facilitate this student interaction around your questions—not around you. And if a topic comes up that you

did not anticipate, encourage thoughtful discussion. Don't perceive that as a challenge. Let's revisit your lesson/unit objectives in light of these recommendations. Pierce, Kathleen ("Student Teaching Classroom Observation Report," February 21, 2002).

In my final supervisory visit to the student teaching intern who had what I perceived as problems with planning and a teacher-centered preoccupation, I observed and recorded evidence of real professional development as indicated in my formal report.

Comments: During today's visit, the student teacher asked the Composition class to debate the hot topic of the high school football team. Based on a newspaper article about the community's public debate on this topic, students prepared their group's arguments to present to the class. The student teacher's lesson planning is clear, and this aspect of his work has emerged as a real strength. Directions for the assignment were posted on the board...I saw many students referring to directions while they prepared their cases for oral presentation to the rest of the class.

While students within groups strategized, the student teacher reminded them about including all the required elements. He conversed and visited with each group and encouraged their work.

Throughout the preparation of their arguments, students were engaged. As each group presented its case to the class, the group's point and strategies were clear. In addition, each group I heard speak made connections to debating factions within Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar. As indicated in the attached co-constructed report, the intern sees the work as culminating on one hand (Julius Caesar) and anticipatory on the other (preparing for individual presentations).

INTASC Standards #4 and #5 & Recommendation/ Designs Instructional Strategies and Manages & Motivates: ... by far these two specific areas represent the most commendable development in your work. You combine content, instructional strategies, and management/motiva-

tional methods to help your students learn, apply learning, and enjoy themselves. (You seem to be having a very good time too!)

INTASC Principle #9 & Recommendation/Reflects on Practice: This remains a commendable area of your emerging professional development as your lesson planning and teaching demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of teaching and learning and a willingness to revise and refine your work. Pierce, Kathleen ("Student Teaching Classroom Observation Report," April 24, 2002).

As I work more within the standards and their underlying principles, I find them flexible enough to adapt to a variety of individual student teachers yet descriptive enough to articulate specific entry-level expectations and professionalism. Using INTASC standards as single-phrase mantras throughout the field experience cues student teachers to retrieve concepts, models, ways of acting, and even ways of reframing work during their novice stages. As student teachers develop through basic levels of accomplishment, the standards then help us name specific areas of accomplished development.

Sometimes growing can feel like flailing, and breakthroughs feel like failures. Despite careful preservice preparation, student teachers can find their internships sounding cacophonous and feeling awkward. Traditional supervisory models seem to strand student teachers in environments that pound them with newness and estrange them from any sense of personal mission or control. Even without the highly-charged current and realities of NCLB legislation, the student teaching field experience can be overwhelming and indecipherable to preservice educators. Supervisors can help their student teachers decipher professional relevance by using INTASC standards in the spoken, written, formal, and informal vocabulary of the field experience.

INTASC standards help me as a supervisor to interpret and discuss field work with student teachers. This combination of professional and personal observation and feedback helps beginning teachers focus their attention and refine their emerging practice as well as continuing conversations about it. Rather than being overwhelmed or threatened by standardization, student teachers and their supervisors might look to the unique potential of INTASC

Standards to highlight the convergence of personal student teaching experiences with evolving professional practice.

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