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ABSTRACT

A program designed to help student teachers improve their skills through interaction with their peers is described. The Peer Group Support System (P.G.S.S.) is a self-evaluation process. Participants in the P.G.S.S. are elementary student teachers, secondary student teachers, selected students enrolled in general methods courses and the faculty of the Department of Education. From this pool of individuals the student teacher may choose the members of his or her P.G.S.S. team. It is suggested that the team not exceed four members. The student teacher identifies a specific instructional element that he or she wishes the team to observe. This may be any activity, attitude, procedure, or skill, such as question skills, lecturing techniques, student involvement, discipline, motivation techniques, nonverbal cues, etc. Members of the P.G.S.S. team observe the student teacher in the classroom, noting successes as well as failures. Following observation the team members and the student teacher discuss the noted comments. This procedure is intended to identify in a nonthreatening way areas where a student teacher may improve instructional techniques. (JD)

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Peer Group Support System

Summary

by

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## Peer Group Support System

The Peer Group Support System, hereafter referred to as P.G.S.S., is a self-evaluation process used with student teachers at Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio.

Participants in the P.G.S.S. are elementary student teachers, secondary student teachers, selected students enrolled in general methods courses and the faculty of the Department of Education. As the name implies, the P.G.S.S. is an evaluation procedure which attempts to make maximum use of the student teacher's peer group, i.e., other student teachers.

The purpose of the P.G.S.S. is to provide the student teacher with a self-evaluation model which may be adapted to various instructional situations. The P.G.S.S. format allows the student teacher to choose P.G.S.S. team members, specify the instructional elements to be evaluated, and choose the time and place for the evaluation.

The P.G.S.S. evaluation procedure consists of three stages. Stage one involves a pre-instructional conference during which P.G.S.S. team members consult with the student teacher concerning the specific instructional elements to be considered. Stage two consists of the actual observation of the instructional process with team members directing their attention to the pre-assigned instructional elements. Stage three in the P.G.S.S. model provides the setting for a discrepancy analysis of intended instructional outcomes versus observed instructional outcomes.

The P.G.S.S. model is intended to serve as a catalyst. It is a procedure for identifying, in a non-threatening way, areas where a student teacher may improve his or her instructional technique. The information generated

by the P.G.S.S. evaluation procedure provides the student teacher with a basis for self-improvement as well as an anecdotal record of methodological successes and failures.

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PEER GROUP SUPPORT SYSTEM:

A DESCRIPTION

by

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## PEER GROUP SUPPORT SYSTEM

### DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT:

The Peer Group Support System, hereafter referred to as P.G.S.S., is a self-evaluation process used with student teachers at Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio.

The P.G.S.S., as the name implies, is an evaluation procedure which attempts to make maximum use of the student teacher's peer group, i.e., other student teachers.

The P.G.S.S. has as its theoretical base four assumptions.

1. All student teachers desire to do the very best job possible.
2. The very best evaluation is formative in nature, that is, it provides information to be used for the purpose of improvement.
3. Any evaluation procedure should have pre-determined evaluation targets and should not digress from those targets.
4. The information generated from an evaluation procedure should be immediately available.

### THE P.G.S.S. MODEL

#### Identification of P.G.S.S. Members:

Participants in the P.G.S.S. are elementary student teachers, secondary student teachers, selected students enrolled in general methods courses and the faculty of the Department of Education. It is from this pool of individuals that the student teacher may choose the members of his or her P.G.S.S. team. It is suggested to student teachers at Mount Vernon that the number of P.G.S.S. members not exceed four, and that at least one individual be from the same academic area as the student teacher. Other P.G.S.S. members may be from any academic area. The important point is that the student teacher has the freedom to choose a group of individuals whom he respects,

Figure 1

PEER GROUP SUPPORT SYSTEM MODEL

STAGE ONE → STAGE TWO → STAGE THREE

Identification of  
intended instructional  
elements (evaluation  
targets)

Comparison of intended  
instructional elements  
with observed instructional  
elements.

Discrepancy analysis of  
intended elements  
and observed instructional  
elements

whom he trusts and with whom he or she can communicate.

### Role of P.G.S.S. Members:

Upon completion of the selection process the various roles for each P.G.S.S. member are developed. At this time the student teacher provides each team member with a P.G.S.S. observation Form A (See Appendix A). The student teacher then identifies a specific instructional element which may be any activity, attitude, procedure or skill that he or she will be attempting during the instructional period. The instructional element is described in detail under the heading "intentions" on the P.G.S.S. Form A. This descriptive statement is the standard against which all observations will be compared. The student teacher directs each P.G.S.S. member to give their attention to only the one instructional element described on his or her form. There may be several components to the instructional element, however. Questions concerning the instructional element should be clarified at this time. Examples of specific instructional elements which might be considered are:

1. Questioning skills.
2. Lecturing techniques.
3. Student involvement.
4. Preventive discipline.
5. Motivation techniques.
6. Non-verbal cues, etc.

Having identified the specific instructional elements to be considered, it is then the P.G.S.S. members' role to give exclusive attention to that particular aspect of the instructional process.



## Stages of The Evaluation Procedure

### Stage One:

The P.G.S.S. model, as developed at Mount Vernon Nazarene College, consists of three formal stages. Stage one involves a pre-instructional conference where the P.G.S.S. members consult with the student teacher concerning the various instructional elements to be considered. Assuming a P.G.S.S. group of four it would be advisable to attempt an evaluation sequence consisting of no more than four instructional elements. Each element might have several component parts however.

### Stage Two:

Stage two consists of the actual observation of the instructional process. Each P.G.S.S. team member locates himself in an unobtrusive area of the classroom and directs his attention to the pre-assigned instructional element. Through observation, the P.G.S.S. member attempts to determine if the intended instructional element is in fact present in the instructional process. Assuming that the element is observable, notation is made to the degree that the observed element differs from, or corresponds to, the intended element. For example, if the intended instructional element concerns the maximum participation of students in a classroom discussion and the observation reveals that only one third to one half of the students participated, a discrepancy exists and should be noted. After noting the discrepancy, anecdotal notes should be recorded in an attempt to explain or clarify the discrepancy. At this point it is extremely important to maintain objectivity. The only record desired is that of actual observation. Any subjective feelings should be withheld.

In essence the P.G.S.S. team member is attempting to determine, through observation, the match or mismatch, congruency or discrepancy, of intended instructional elements and observed instructional elements. The team member's responsibility is to report, as accurately as possible, what he observes in the classroom with respect to a particular instructional element.

### Stage Three:

At stage three the P.G.S.S. team members and student teacher discuss the various instructional elements. Special attention is paid to those elements where a discrepancy was found to exist. Discrepancies are identified by comparing intended instructional elements with observed instructional elements. After reviewing the congruency-discrepancy information the student teacher may ask for subjective input. He is not required to do so, however,

Stage three is intended to be a catalyst. It is a procedure for identifying, in a non-threatening way, areas where a student teacher may improve his instructional techniques. As stated earlier, it is assumed that all student teachers are dedicated to being the very best teachers they possibly can. The information generated at the stage three conference provides the student teacher with a basis for self-improvement as well as an anecdotal record of methodological successes and failures.

Teacher Education students at Mount Vernon Nazarene College are acquainted with the P.G.S.S. model during the fall semester of their senior year. This is typically the semester prior to student teaching.

During the fall semester students who will be student teaching the following spring are introduced to the Peer Group Support System. This is accomplished through the general methods courses and utilizes a video-taped

case study. The case study describes the P.G.S.S. model and provides on-site examples of P.G.S.S. team members involved in all three stages of the evaluation procedure. Students may also participate as P.G.S.S. team members in a role playing situation as a part of the general methods courses.

During the spring semester approximately fifty student teachers participate in the Peer Group Support System. As a part of the student teaching program, each student teacher is required to initiate at least one P.G.S.S. evaluation. Each student teacher is also required to participate on at least two, but not more than three, P.G.S.S. teams.

#### OBJECTIVES AND GOALS:

The goals and objectives of the Peer Group Support System are few in number and are quite simple. The overall goal of the program is:

to provide a supervisory alternative which will foster self-evaluative behaviors among the elementary and secondary student teachers at Mount Vernon Nazarene College.

It is the belief of the authors that self-evaluation is a worthwhile goal, not only for student teachers, but for practicing teachers as well. It is hoped that by participating in the P.G.S.S. student teachers will not only gain instructional competence but will acquire a new and more positive perspective concerning the nature of evaluation.

Other more specific objectives of the program are as follows:

1. To promote instructional improvement through self-evaluation.
2. To develop the ability to identify specific instructional weaknesses.
3. To promote instructional improvement through observation.
4. To develop a trusting and helping relationship among student teachers.
5. To develop an awareness of the numerous successful styles of teaching.

The achievement of these goals and objectives by the Teacher Education students at Mount Vernon Nazarene College will have several positive effects. Achievement of the objectives will result in Teacher Education graduates who possess a greater awareness of the varieties of teaching style and who are better able to deal with their own instructional problems. It is also anticipated that the concern with self-evaluation instilled, as an undergraduate, will have some degree of carry-over effect when the student teacher accepts employment. Another positive result, which has already begun to materialize, is the degree of interest exhibited by the cooperating public school personnel. It is anticipated that some further investigation of the P.G.S.S. concept will be soon forthcoming.

PERSONNEL INVOLVED:

P.G.S.S. has been implemented with elementary and secondary student teachers and selected students enrolled in general methods courses at Mount Vernon Nazarene College. Although there may be an unlimited number of P.G.S.S. teams, each student teacher has no more than four of his/her peers on a team. The peers are either student teachers, or seniors in their final semester before student teaching. At least one of the members of the team should represent the particular content area and/or grade level of the person being evaluated.

Members of the Teacher Education faculty at Mount Vernon Nazarene College have the responsibility of training the teams, and expediting the program through each of the three stages.

BUDGET:

A very attractive feature of the P.G.S.S. is the minimal budget required. The only expenses incurred have been the purchase of video tapes and mileage reimbursement for program participants. Total cost for the pilot program was \$100. Financial support has come from the Teacher Education Department of Mount Vernon Nazarene College. Since video-taping is only done in the pilot stage, the cost is considerably lower once the program has been established.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION:

Although the field of education has been inundated with innovations in recent years, the area of student teacher supervision has maintained a status quo since the days of the Normal School. The P.G.S.S. is unique in that it is student-centered, student-directed and it places the responsibility for evaluation on the learner rather than on the college personnel.

In its pilot stage, the P.G.S.S. has been very well accepted by the student teachers, the team members and the college coordinators.

Student teachers are less threatened by observations made by their peers than those made by a college supervisor. The follow-up conference in Stage 3 has the atmosphere of an informal conversation where everyone feels comfortable sharing his/her observations and impressions.

In contrast, the typical evaluation conference often proceeds with the supervisor pointing out the student teacher's strengths and weaknesses while the student teacher passively listens. Even though he is usually given the opportunity to participate with comments and questions, the student teacher is generally reluctant to do so under these circumstances. One student teacher stated "With fellow students, you feel freer to discuss. You are not dominated by the supervisor."

Student teachers also appreciate the sequence of the program. It is they who identify the instructional elements to be observed. They are challenged to excel on those items during the lesson presentation knowing that no other characteristics will be observed and criticized during the follow-up conference.

Peers also report being positively affected by participating on the P.G.S.S. team. At first glance, one might predict that the student teacher's peers would find it difficult to be objective and share their observations honestly and openly in Stage 3. In practice, however, the opposite seems to be true. Each member appears to take his responsibilities as an assignment which should be reacted to with as much professional maturity as possible. The follow-up conference has resulted in very candid expressions of both positive and negative reactions as well as suggestions team members have for alternative techniques in particular situations.

A second value reported by team members is that their own teaching styles have been modified and improved as a result of observing and evaluating their peers.

Education faculty members are pleased to have identified a method of supervision which can be more student-centered than has traditionally been possible although the P.G.S.S. does not eliminate the need for college supervision, it is a valuable supplement which substitutes for at least one of their own evaluations during the student teaching assignment.

#### EVALUATION METHODS AND RESULTS:

The scheduled evaluation procedure for the P.G.S.S. program consists of two phases. Phase one is formative in nature and has been taking place since prior to the inception of the program. Phase two of the evaluation procedure is formative in nature and is not scheduled to take place until the spring of 1979.

The formative evaluation procedure consists of four parts. They are:

1. faculty review,
2. public school teacher review,
3. completion of a participant questionnaire, and
4. P.G.S.S. team interviews.

#### Faculty Review:

In its initial stage of development, the P.G.S.S. concept was presented to selected faculty members both within and outside the Department of Education. Their comments were considered and, where appropriate, revisions were made.

#### Public School Teacher Review:

A second review of the P.G.S.S. concept was completed when the procedure was presented to seventeen elementary and secondary teachers enrolled in a graduate level curriculum course. Their comments were considered and again, where appropriate, revisions were made.

#### P.G.S.S. Participant Questionnaire:

In order to gain information during the pilot stage of the P.G.S.S. program, a participant questionnaire was developed. (See Appendix B and C) The questionnaire sought rather general responses to questions considered to be of importance to the initial success of the P.G.S.S. program. Comments from the participant questionnaires suggested that:

1. Participation on a P.G.S.S. team was definitely a learning experience.
2. Having pre-determined evaluation targets resulted in a more accurate evaluation of teaching ability.
3. Working with a group of peers was a more comfortable experience than being evaluated by a single supervisor.
4. There was a freedom to discuss the instructional process which was not always present in a traditional student teacher-supervisor evaluation setting.

5. Serving as a P.G.S.S. team member would facilitate the improvement of their own teaching.

#### Participant Interview:

Participant interviews were a means utilized to classify comments made on the participant questionnaire and as a means to answer questions which might arise as a result of a particular P.G.S.S. evaluation sequence. The interviews were always highly unstructured. They were used primarily to get a reading on the personal feelings and attitudes of the P.G.S.S. team members. Very negative or very positive feelings were always pursued as an attempt was made to identify as many factors as possible that were contributing to the success or failure of a particular P.G.S.S. sequence.

A summative evaluation is scheduled to be conducted in the spring of 1979. The summative evaluation will consist of the completion of a "Likert" type attitude scale concerning supervision and evaluation. The responses from the student teachers involved in the P.G.S.S. program at Mount Vernon Nazarene College will be compared with the responses of student teachers not associated with the P.G.S.S. program. This control group will be selected from two sister Nazarene institutions which currently utilize the traditional approach to student teaching evaluation.

#### Recommendations:

The following suggestions are included for anyone attempting a program similar to the P.G.S.S.

1. Commitment of all the members of the Department of Education is crucial. Without one hundred percent support from the faculty involved any new program would be hard pressed to succeed.
2. When choosing students to participate in the pilot program it was found that volunteers were much more dependable and less frustrated with the changes that take place than students who were otherwise inticed to



participate in the program.

3. The production of a video tape explaining the program, and more importantly providing actual on-site examples of the P.G.S.S. sequences, has proven to be a most worthwhile training technique. Producing or purchasing such a video tape for the purpose of introducing student teachers to the program is highly recommended.

4. The completion of a training program prior to the actual student teaching experience is recommended. At Mount Vernon Nazarene College this is accomplished during the fall semester in the general methods courses.

5. Transportation to and from separate school buildings for P.G.S.S. team members may prove to be a problem. Two options utilized at Mount Vernon are the use of the student teacher's own automobile and the use of College owned vans.

**APPENDIX A**

P.G.S.S. FORM A

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

| INTENTIONS | C | D | OBSERVATIONS |
|------------|---|---|--------------|
|            |   |   | 1.           |
|            |   |   | 2.           |

**APPENDIX B.**

INITIAL FORMATIVE EVALUATION

P.G.S.S. TEAM MEMBER RESPONSES:

1. Did you feel competent to participate in the P.G.S.S. evaluation process?
2. Did you feel that this type of evaluation process was helpful to the student teacher? Yes, why? No, why?
3. What do you especially like about this approach to student teaching evaluation?
4. What do you especially dislike about this approach to student teaching evaluation?
5. What are your feelings about evaluation in general?
6. Was your participation as a P.G.S.S. team member a learning experience?

APPENDIX C

## INITIAL FORMATIVE EVALUATION

### STUDENT TEACHER RESPONSES:

1. Did you perceive the P.G.S.S. evaluation procedure to be helpful?  
Yes, why? No, why?
2. Do you feel that your peers have the expertise to serve in the role of evaluator as defined in the P.G.S.S. model?
3. What do you especially like about the P.G.S.S. approach to the evaluation of student teachers?
4. What do you especially dislike about the P.G.S.S. approach to the evaluation of student teachers?
5. What are your feelings about evaluation in general?
6. Was your participation in the P.G.S.S. evaluation procedure a learning experience?