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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a model developed at one urban university to guide student teachers through a semester-long process of reflecting upon their teaching skills using state and national standards. The model required analysis of professional abilities using a self-assessment of teaching skills tool. Under this model, preservice student teachers worked through a self-assessment of teaching competencies in the domains of curriculum, classroom management, instruction, assessment, and professionalism. Two assignments helped student teachers through the process. The first was to take information from the needs assessment document and create visual snapshots of themselves as teachers. The second was to list, in order of priority to self, teaching strengths and areas for improvement. This process of self-evaluation went on throughout the semester. Participants rated themselves at three points during the semester. Reflection with a peer on these ratings was ongoing. Each reflection was substantiated with specific examples and evidence (lesson plans, work samples, a classroom management plan, student cooperative learning projects, and observations of student teachers' performance). The process culminated in the creation of a professional portfolio and a professional development plan. Participants considered the process critical to accurately identifying their teaching skills. (SM)

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From Student Teaching into a Profession: One Model for Guiding Professional Development

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From Student Teaching into a Profession: One Model for Guiding Professional Development

Most, if not all, teacher education institutions use a seminar course during student teaching to help preservice level teachers transition from student teaching experiences to professional development activities. Some of these courses seem to be little more than successful job-hunting tips. However, one model was developed at an urban, northwestern university to guide student teachers through a semester long process of reflecting upon their teaching skills using state and national standards. The model we developed required analysis of professional abilities using a self-assessment tool of teaching skills.

The foundation of the model was a strong component of professional development that was based on self-reflection and evaluation. Under this model, preservice level student teachers worked through a self-assessment of teaching competencies in the five domains of curriculum, classroom management, instruction, assessment, and professionalism. With this level of self-evaluation and reflection, the student teachers were able to construct an in-depth understanding of their own teaching strengths and areas for improvement practice (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Henderson, 1996; Schon, 1987).

The process required reflection upon individual teaching performance in terms of specific teaching behaviors (Rogers, 1996). Two assignments, in particular, helped each participant through this process. The first was to take the information from the needs assessment document and create a visual “snapshot” of themselves as a teacher. This snapshot was a picture of how each person viewed him or her self as a teacher at this

point in their career. It could have been a collage, a spatial map, a bar chart, or any other visual organizer. This required each person to organize summarize all of the information about their teaching skills that came from the needs assessment document. This snapshot had to be presented to a peer who, through reflection and dialogue, helped support and articulate the accuracy of the snapshot.

The second assignment, also based on self-reflection, was that each participant had to list, in order of priority to self, his or her teaching strengths and areas in which they wanted to improve. This list contains the top ten most important teaching skills and the ten most important areas for improvement. Each item on the list needed to be stated as specifically as possible. Again, this assignment required summarization and organization. The peer editor's role was to help their partner articulate why those teaching skills were categorized as they were and to help articulate the reasoning behind their choices.

As the semester went on, this process of self-evaluation continued. The participants individually rated themselves on this needs assessment tool at three evenly spaced times at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the semester long course. Reflection with a peer on these ratings continued throughout the semester. Each rating was substantiated with specific examples and evidence to defend the rating. Evidence consisted of lesson plans or work samples, a classroom management plan, student cooperative learning projects, and observations of the student teacher's performance. This process took several weeks as the student teachers analyzed the components of each domain and then identified the specific documents that supported their teaching. The process culminated in the creation of two products (Bullock & Hawk, 2001) that

accurately represented the individual's teaching skills; a professional portfolio and a professional development plan. Both products were meant to guide the professional development activities for the next two to three years of their career.

From this project several important conclusions emerged. Participants found the semester-long process of reflection using self-evaluation and dialogue to be critical to accurately identifying their teaching skills. Through the process of self-evaluation, finding a professional balance among their teaching skills was a major factor in not only for preparing for job interviews, but critical for transitioning into a professional in the field of education. Each participant found this reflective process to be unique and to be a foundational piece in his or her professional development.

Requiring the self-evaluation three times during the semester was of the greatest value to these participants. The first set of ratings was merely a mechanical exercise in learning how to evaluate one's self. The second and third ratings, however, were the most meaningful to their professional growth. The participants found their portfolio and professional plans to be unique and individual to their own particular skills. These findings suggest that this model may assist other teacher education institutions to adapt their own seminar courses. There is much still to investigate, including the long-term effects of training teachers in such a model. We hope that this model will continue to evolve and be closely investigated. We believe that real, authentic assessment of teachers can only result in more efficient and effective educators.

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