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## Hopes, Fears, and Norm Setting: Using a student teaching introductory protocol

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### Why an Introductory Protocol?

After working as a university-based student teaching field supervisor for several semesters, I was impressed with how unsatisfying and even frustrating such an experience can be for all parties involved. Such frustration stems from many reasons, but chief among them is the "arranged marriage" of student teacher and cooperating teacher by the student teacher's university and cooperating teacher's school administration. An introductory interview provides the student teacher and cooperating teacher an opportunity to have some say about the arrangement during the relatively non-threatening period before rounds of classroom supervisory observations, students, and teaching in real time enter the mix.

The introductory protocol deliberately probes participants' expectations about student teaching before the student teacher begins in an attempt to avoid potential hot spots from contaminating the actual student teaching. The introductory protocol can reveal participants' professional and personal hopes, fears, and norms and inform student teaching supervision with respect to the expectations of the school district, cooperating teacher, and student teacher in each particular field placement. Without a deliberate introduction that includes the participation and voices of all relevant players in the student teaching placement, K-12 schools and teacher education program staff members are missing an important opportunity to share common ground with each other and the beginning teachers we hope to nurture into the profession.

The Student Teaching Introductory Protocol (STIP) includes four steps: convening the introductory interview, defining roles, using questions to facilitate the introductory protocol, and synthesizing and clarifying expectations. Beyond its immediate value in facilitating a purposeful introduction, the protocol content establishes norms for the student teaching and guides the supervisory process throughout the field placement.

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### Convening Participants for the Student Teacher Introductory Protocol

Just getting a student teacher, university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and cooperating teacher's supervisor in the same place at the same time can be a monumental scheduling feat. However, convening the four-way STIP among student teacher, cooperating teacher, cooperating teacher's supervisor, and field supervisor pays off during the ensuing field placement. Paying close attention to the stakeholders at the start of the student teaching experience is an important introduction to the profession for the student teacher and hugely beneficial in helping to guide the student teacher through the field placement experience.

Starting with beginning teachers' first formalized steps into the profession, compelling reasons suggest the need to pay closer attention to new teacher induction. Researchers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) estimate that approximately 30 percent of new teachers exit the profession within their first three years, and 40 to 50 percent leave within five years. These numbers indicate an alarming and expensive trend that drains financial and human resources. Ingersoll (2003) analyzed a range of issues regarding teacher supply, demand, and quality, maintaining that a sufficient supply of prospective teachers is produced in the U.S. each year. The bigger threat is the inability of schools to keep or retain qualified new teachers, something that Ingersoll attributes to the very organizational systems of schools themselves (pp. 5-6). New teachers become quickly disenchanting with school systems that pay them comparatively low starting salaries, assign them to the most difficult teaching situations, and provide few opportunities for meaningful professional development. Many beginning teachers seem to leave because they feel undervalued and overlooked by school systems.

Facilitating a protocol might seem a somewhat contrived way to introduce the student teacher to the field setting, but the STIP cuts through the organizational density of schools by assembling relevant players in the student teaching placement. Not incidentally, the protocol gathers very busy educational professionals together—a gesture that in itself expresses a degree of interest and respect for the personal and professional significance of the upcoming student teaching. After the STIP, it is unlikely that the four players will meet again. The supervisor's participation is crucial in this protocol for a number of reasons. As a school administrator, the supervisor conveys an institutional welcome and appreciation for the student teacher—a small but significant acknowledgement for newcomers to the profession. In response to protocol questions, the supervisor represents district norms and philosophical dispositions that help the student teacher and supervisor understand the context of the placement better.

Adapting the "Fears and Hopes" protocol described by McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, and McDonald (2003) to the start of the student teaching, I developed the STIP to explore participants' fears and hopes regarding student teaching in an open manner. The purpose of this protocol is to help participants learn about each other, but it also has a deeper purpose to establish norms of ownership by the group of every individual's expectations and concerns about the student teaching assignment and address them together. McDonald et al. explain that the effectiveness of this protocol "depends on the fact that people rarely undertake a new learning experience without harboring some (usually unexpressed) fears and hopes about what will happen" (2003, pp.24-25).

### Defining Roles

At our university, student teaching arrangements are brokered with schools and school districts by the Director of Field Placement. The director also assigns field supervisors to individual student teachers. In my case, I supervise middle/secondary English language arts student teachers. My efforts are girded by state and professional content standards as well as state and professional teaching standards, guidelines that I bring to the STIP and student teaching supervision.

As the convener and facilitator of the STIP, I am hardly a neutral participant; I am very hopeful about and invested in the success of the student teaching placement. However, as an outsider to the field placement and representative of our university, I do enjoy the most neutrality in the field setting, which allows me to facilitate the STIP somewhat dispassionately. Because I have become experienced at facilitating the protocol, I can do so attentively and quickly in about 30 minutes.

After introductions, I explain the function of the STIP and the role I will assume as its facilitator. Before facilitating the protocol among participants, I thank the cooperating teacher and supervisor for sharing their students and setting for the culminating experience for our teacher education program. As a representative of the university, I express the view that we regard the student teacher as a guest in the host district and cooperating teacher's classroom; our primary concern is for students in the district and then to our student teacher. I describe the logistical aspects of the student teaching assignment from the university's perspective—timelines, observation schedules, and my student teaching supervisory role in the school and back at the university. Referring to handouts and the university *Student Teacher Handbook*, I preview Office of Field Placement reporting requirements and expectations for student teachers in the English language arts. After discussing these details,

I shift into the STIP by saying, "Now we need to hear from each of you about your expectations regarding this student teaching placement. I will note as accurately as possible what each of you says during the following interview and then provide opportunity for further elaboration and clarification."

McDonald et al. (2003) explain that facilitating protocols promotes participation, ensures equity, and builds trust; however, they warn that it is important to consider: "...what a trustful situation really is and what it is for. It is situational. When a facilitator promotes a group's trust, it is not to help everyone trust every other individual as an individual, but rather to help each trust the situation that has been collectively created. The purpose is not trust in general, but trust sufficient to do the work at hand" (p. 18).

#### Using Questions to Facilitate the Introductory Protocol

Given the student teaching work at hand, I developed several questions to pose to the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and cooperating teacher's supervisor. The questions require reflection on the work of teaching and on developing professional teaching know-how. In responding as practitioners to the protocol's questions about teaching, the cooperating teacher and supervisor reveal what Schön (1983) calls "reflection-in-action." Listening to the cooperating teacher and supervisor during the STIP, the student teacher experiences first-hand the vitality of experienced educators reflecting deliberately on their work and intentions. The STIP also presents student teachers with the opportunity to "go public" among experienced educators to explain their ideas about emerging and potential work. Such opportunities to explore a teaching persona or public self are rare yet important for the beginning teachers' development and sense of professionalism (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005).

As participants answer each question in turn, I take notes to capture responses, often jotting down direct quotations that I will read back to participants during the synthesis and clarification phase of the STIP. I start the rounds of questions with the cooperating teacher.

*Round 1 Questions: If this is the worst student teaching placement, what will you tell me at the end of the semester? What will have happened or not happened?*

Starting off the protocol with a question about deep dread or fear can be a bit of a surprise as well as a wonderful ice breaker. This question elicits some laughter within the group as it conjures images of student teaching disasters and worst-case scenarios—even before student teaching begins. By asking before the student teaching assignment begins, the responses expose real fears and concerns—but in the abstract. Concerns expressed at this phase of student teaching are personal and professional in nature but are not yet derived from the specific behavior of anyone gathered at the STIP. The student teaching nightmare scenarios provide some warnings as well as insights from the unique perspectives of the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and cooperating teacher supervisor.

*Round 2 Question: If this is the best student teaching placement, what will be the outcome?*

This second question also addresses professional and personal dimensions of student teaching, but it asks participants to consider their aspirations for the very real student teaching situation at hand. This question is useful because it asks everyone to consider the many layers for learning within the student teaching placement. This question reinforces the notion that each STIP participant is responsible for various teaching and learning and offers everyone the opportunity to claim and name that responsibility to students, student teacher, and classroom teacher.

*Round 3 Questions: What are the non-negotiables in your classroom? Is there an aspect of your teaching practice/classroom that you expect absolutely from the student teacher? Is there an aspect of your teaching/classroom that is off limits to the student teacher?*

This third and final set of questions about teaching and classroom norms is posed to the cooperating teacher only, whose responses to these questions acknowledge the pragmatic aspects of sharing one's classroom with a student teacher and help the student teacher and me—especially me as the student teaching supervisor—understand the boundaries within the cooperating teacher's teaching practice and classroom. During this stage of the protocol, a cooperating teacher might acknowledge administrative imperatives, testing schedules or considerations, co-teaching, and/or extracurricular duties.

#### Synthesizing and Clarifying Student Teaching Expectations

During this final phase, I verbally synthesize what I feel are key points in the discussion, and participants clarify and/or elaborate on what they have said. What is most important about the synthesizing and

clarifying stage is that I quote participants directly and use their own words to depict expectations for the upcoming student teaching. After each point, I check for consensus and affirmation from all participants. I encourage participants to elaborate or clarify my interpretations and observations. In hearing their words back, participants clarify and elaborate on their responses. Reading direct quotes from my notes, I sometimes probe for more specificity or examples. For example if a cooperating teacher says that she expects a student teacher to "show initiative," I might ask: "What would 'showing initiative' look like in your classroom?" The responses offer the student teacher as well as the cooperating teacher important details about expectations and boundaries in the literal and figurative professional spaces of student teaching.

Most administrators see themselves as teachers who tend to the growth of their faculty, and all of the administrators who have participated in a STIP have expressed the hope that their cooperating teachers will learn and grow through the student teaching relationship. Cooperating teachers themselves often affirm their intention to learn with and from their student teachers. Such perspectives are important insights for student teachers about the potential for lifelong learning through the profession. Although the protocol asks participants to discuss their fears and hopes about student teaching, the dominant emphasis is always hopefulness about learning. The STIP helps student teachers realize that they are about to make solo flights in teaching, but they are not alone.

#### Using the STIP to Set Norms and Inform Student Teaching Supervision

The STIP informs my supervision throughout the field placement by reminding me where I can push or need to rein in my student teacher's practice. For the Field Placement Office record and for my student teacher's reference, I highlight dominant points from the STIP in my first formal observation report to ground the student teacher's work in the concrete, collective expectations.

The following sample shows how I incorporate direct quotes from the STIP into a formal field report and encourage my student teacher toward subsequent steps in the field setting. To ensure participants' anonymity, I have attributed the direct quotes in parentheses from our STIP but eliminated names.

Today's visit was introductory and included the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and cooperating teacher's supervisor....A 31-year veteran teacher, the cooperating teacher has spent all 31 years in this high school. Both supervisor and cooperating teacher expressed optimism about the student teacher's

potential contributions to the cooperating teacher specifically and to professional development in the building generally. The student teacher is expected to participate actively in all three of the cooperating teacher's classes on block scheduling, to develop unit/lesson planning with the cooperating teacher, and to submit plans each Thursday to the supervisor. In addition to the need for the student teacher's punctuality (which is NOT a problem), our four-way meeting defined some additional expectations for the student teacher and student teaching. The student teacher should:

- "...be open to advice and taking criticism" (cooperating teacher);
- "maintain classroom management...get to know students" (cooperating teacher's supervisor) and "connect well with students" (student teacher);
- "cover curriculum...help students connect well [to the content]" (cooperating teacher);
- "help students make meaning from content" (cooperating teacher's supervisor);
- initiate original planning, teaching, learning, and follow-up and "see how theory translates into action in the classroom with students" (student teacher);
- "through trial and error, understand what works with students" and "enjoy the opportunity to incorporate some techniques like Socratic Seminar into teaching" (student teacher); and
- "make specific accommodations for classified student in class" (student teacher).

Throughout my student teaching supervision, I will reference the STIP both formally and informally. I might remind a student teacher in conversation about the cooperating teacher's or district priorities expressed during the STIP or formally note in an observation report how the student teacher addressed an STIP goal with students in the field placement.

The STIP briefly opens a window on the upcoming student teaching field placement to help me guide my student teacher appropriately throughout the assignment. Knowing some of the personal, philosophical, and practical concerns within a district and cooperating teacher's classroom helps me immeasurably in respecting students within a field placement and helps my student teacher to do so as well.

Most importantly, the STIP includes the voice and participation of the student teacher among a group of experienced educators. The STIP brings university supervisors, school administrators, cooperating teachers, and student teachers together to approach student teaching in a way that feels more like entering the profession than running a gauntlet.

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