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Title	Practicum supervision styles and assessment in the Singapore Institute of Education practicum curriculum programmes
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Source	<i>Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Sydney, Australia, 27 November to 1 December 1990</i>

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PRACTICUM SUPERVISION STYLES AND ASSESSMENT  
IN THE SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
PRACTICUM CURRICULUM PROGRAMMES

The IE Dip.Ed. Practicum Curriculum Programmes at the Institute of Education, Singapore

A Practicum Curriculum programme was established at the Institute of Education in Singapore for pre-service secondary teachers in 1986. Since then, four cohorts have passed through the programme. This paper describes key features of the Practicum component of the programme, focussing on the role of the supervisor as formally conceived and actually practised. Of particular interest is the Institute's policy that supervisors should disclose formative grades to their supervisees during teaching practice conferences. The significance of this policy and its implications are explored. Whilst most IE supervisors are found to comply with this policy, there is a sizeable minority who do not. It is argued that differing views about the nature of supervision may account for this. There are supervisors who broadly adhere to a "clinical" model of supervision on the one hand, and to a "technical-rational" model on the other. (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983 ) Supervisors adhering to the clinical, developmental model are generally deeply committed to the view that the disclosure of formative grades to students during teaching practice is undesirable, whilst those adhering to a technical-rational position believe that objective feedback is a necessary prerequisite to student progress. Using student questionnaire data, the paper attempts to throw some light onto the adequacy of these opposing views, especially in relation to Singapore student teachers. The results suggest that there is a need for caution when applying arguments and research findings generated in one culture to another. ( Broadfoot et.al. 1988 ) They are used to explore the potential of the programme as well as to highlight a number of problems that have developed over the years in the supervisory role.

Rooted in the Practicum Curriculum model pioneered by Cliff Turney ( Turney, C. et.al. 1985 ), the IE model was designed initially as a one year Dip.Ed. programme for the initial training of secondary school and Junior College teachers, and later extended for the two year Certificate in Education programme. ( The programmes have been reorganised for the current cohort and renamed the Post Graduate Diploma in Education, and Diploma in Education respectively ). The IE practicum curriculum programmes retain certain key features of the parent model, notably (i) the idea of practice being at the centre of teacher training programmes (ii) focussed supervision, learning and development being at the heart of teaching practice and (iii) a predetermined model of good teaching, specified in terms of classroom teaching processes made up of competencies and personality characteristics.

In other respects, however, notably the design, supervision and

assessment of teaching practice, IE programmes have been developed to meet local needs. Of these, timescale was an important consideration, especially with the one year Dip.Ed. course. This resulted in a programme structure that sought to bring the Practicum and IE taught courses into a closer relationship, with each focussing on seven classroom roles. A second consideration concerned the developing logic of teacher education in Singapore, particularly the policy of designing courses to meet specific needs : of the beginning teacher, the trainee Head of Department and the potential Principal. Each of these courses was to draw on differing skills and differing knowledge bases, with the pre-service programmes focussing directly on classroom teaching processes.

Seven classroom teaching processes formed the focus of the Dip.Ed. programme, and are retained in the new PGDE programme. These are : Planning, Inducting, Communicating, Managing, Evaluating, Learning and Socializing. These roles form the centre of the teaching programme which provides students with a knowledge base for understanding how the classroom teaching processes may be performed, and why they should be performed in particular ways. Linkages between the practicum and taught programme are intended to encourage staff and students to make links between theory and practice.

#### Components of Teaching Practice

Organisationally, school-based experience takes the form of two weeks of preparatory School Experience, followed by a ten week block of teaching practice. There are three key components of teaching practice supervision. The first of these is the " supervision cycle ", which involves supervisors in pre- and post-lesson conferences as well as lesson observations. The second is the " supervision triad ", where IE supervisors and school-appointed cooperating teachers meet periodically with the student to share observations and agree courses of action. The third is the " Assessment of Performance in Teaching " instrument ( APT ) which is an observational and feedback instrument used by both cooperating teachers and IE supervisors. Acting together, these components of supervision are intended to enable the student teacher to form a clear understanding of relative strengths and weaknesses in classroom teaching, to relate IE coursework to analyses of the classroom and personal teaching, to formulate hypotheses about teaching and to implement improvement strategies.

#### A Synthetic Approach to Supervision

As described, the intention is to marry aspects of 'artistic' and technical-rational approaches to supervision. ( Sergiovaani & Starratt, 1983 ) On the one hand, there is a recognition of the need for face to face, personalised supervision, informed analyses of classroom teaching, and focussed improvement strategies. On the other hand, a need for a predetermined model of effective teaching, and structured feedback with a normative reference point. Thus, teaching practice is intended to be much more than mechanical practice and evaluation of predetermined teaching skills. Rather, it is a learning context where student and supervisor draw on coursework and personal

experience to help decipher the context of teaching performance. In theory, the only limits to discourse and reflection are set by course content and experience, in the sense that students and supervisors draw on these to understand the classroom situation. In practice, of course, the limits are set by the ability and willingness of supervisors and students to engage in informed discourse. These dual and potentially conflicting aspects of the practicum are brought together in the form of the assessment instrument - the APT.

#### Clinical Supervision, Grade-giving and the APT Form

The APT form comprises five of the 7 teaching processes mentioned earlier : planning, inducting, communicating, managing and evaluating. Devised originally by Sim Wong Khooi, IE Director, the form breaks down each process into two component parts to provide a basic conceptualization of classroom teaching. The two parts are "competencies" and "characteristics", the former conceptualized as basic skills and their associated knowledge base that can be taught to students ; the latter, personality attributes that the students by and large bring with them to the classroom. It is the interplay of competencies and personality that produces what is commonly termed teaching "style". Each of the terms is defined in a handbook made available to each of the parties using the form and ideally provides a common framework for observation and discussion.

The primary purpose of the APT form is to provide students with a profile of their relative teaching strengths and weaknesses at a particular point in time, to focus in on specific aspects of teaching that might be improved, to initiate discussion that draws extensively on coursework, and to devise improvement strategies. Used in conjunction with the supervision cycle, in its conceptualization the form is consistent with aspects of the clinical model of supervision (Goldhammer, 1969, Lewis & Miel, 1972, Cogan, 1973 ). The form thus eschews a simple checklist or quasi-objective approach in favour of providing a context for the kind of intellectual discussions between teacher colleagues proposed by Goldhammer for use in in-service contexts.

#### Linking Formative and Summative Assessment

Formative grades are recorded on the APT form by the supervisor and a copy given to the student during the post-lesson conference. Students receive one formative form for each lesson observed, whether this is by the IE supervisor or CT. Five grades are recorded, one for each of the teaching processes, but not an overall grade. Over the course of a ten week teaching practice, supervisors make a minimum of five observations. At the end of the teaching practice, the supervisor awards a summative grade for each of the processes, together with an overall summative grade. This is done separately for the first and second teaching subjects. Final summative grades are not averages, nor are they based on the last lesson alone. Rather, they represent performance trends over the course of the teaching practice. These grades are not disclosed to students. Thus, though they have a normative reference point, formative grades do not carry a

predetermined summative weightage.

The purpose of making formative grades available is to provide students with a profile of strengths and weaknesses, as well as a normative reference point, and to couple these with agreed strategies for improvement. In this way, students are encouraged to focus on improving specific aspects of their teaching whilst at the same time being able to monitor their development in terms of general norms of performance. There is a recognition, therefore, that " in the strictest sense formative and summative evaluation cannot be separated " ( Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983, p.292 ) and, further, that all parties are aware of this. The provision of formative feedback with a summative reference point thus makes manifest what would otherwise remain latent ( and unexamined ) value judgements about the student's teaching.

#### Competing Supervisor Beliefs

Broadly, there have been two main, opposing points of view amongst IE supervisors on the issue of formative grade disclosure. Those adopting an artistic approach to supervision have argued that grade disclosure is unhelpful and damaging ; those adopting a "scientific", technical-rational approach have emphasized that precise feedback on the attainment of predetermined competencies and attitudes is a sine qua non of progress. Still others have been ambivalent on the matter.

Arguments of this kind tend to become circular and counter-productive, the reason being that they impinge not simply on the issues at hand but on deeper and well established educational ideologies, regarding not only the nature of education and of 'good' teaching, but also conceptions of individuality and social structure. At their extremes they are articles of faith, quite immune to rational discourse. For example as Anderson ( Anderson 1986 ) has noted, any discussion that involves clinical supervision is likely to release heated feelings and manifest entrenched views. When combined with traditions of "autonomous pluralism " found particularly in Higher Education these entrenched views can become a real barrier to change. ( D. Hopkins, 1985 ) It is for this reason perhaps that neither argument was allowed to prevail at IE during the first three years of the programme. Instead, individual departments were given the authority to decide their own policy. With the 1989 intake, however, and in response to student requests, the Institute decided to adopt formative grade disclosure as formal policy.

The result of this policy change was to reduce the number of supervisors who had previously not been disclosing formative grades to their supervisees. Interestingly, however, not all supervisors complied, continuing to deny formative grade feedback to their supervisees. It is these supervisors who are the main focus of the discussion.

### Methodology

Data for the present study was routinely collected from two sources: summary evaluation sheets completed by IE supervisors for submission to the IE Board of Examinations and a post-teaching practice student-teacher questionnaire.

### Supervisor Grade Summary Sheets

These were compiled by supervisors immediately after Teaching Practice for submission to the Board of Examinations.

The questionnaire The post teaching practice questionnaire was completed by students immediately on return to IE from teaching practice in April, 1990. The same questionnaire, with minor variations, had been completed by students in the previous three cohorts, thus allowing comparisons to be made over the four year period. The questionnaire asked the students to provide a range of factual and attitudinal information. 277 of the 356 students completed the questionnaire, making a response rate of 78%. Of these, 10 did not include their NRIC/Passport number, and consequently were left out of the study. Students were assured of confidentiality, even though their IDs were required : they were told that the database would be "locked" and only accessible to the researchers. Access to the student IDs made it possible to match student responses with other databases, for example those holding information on assessment, previous education and school posting.

The basic procedure here is to examine this data in relation to those students who were provided with their formative grades by their supervisors ( informed students ) and those who were not ( uninformed students ). Reference will also be made to a similar analysis undertaken with the 1988 Intake, prior to the change in policy when larger numbers of supervisors did not disclose formative grades. After presenting the results, the discussion attempts to locate the findings within the broader debate on supervision models.

### Research Questions

Data from the two groups was compared on the following dimensions :

- (i) the relationship between the summative grades that students expected to receive and actually did receive
- (ii) the students' level of confidence in performing the five key teaching roles
- (iii) attitudes towards supervisors

Results1. Grades1.1 Summative Grades Expected by Students vs Actual Overall  
Summative Grades Awarded by IE SupervisorsTable 1

PESS- IMISTIC	SPOT ON	OPT- IMISTIC	NR	TOTAL
54	104	95	14	267

On their return from Teaching Practice students were asked to record the overall grade that they expected to receive for teaching practice. This was then compared with the actual overall grade submitted to the Board of Exams by supervisors. There is a close relationship between expected and actual grades, the correlation coefficient being +0.597 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Most students are accurate to within one half grade, though, as Table 1 shows, there was a greater number of "optimistic" than "pessimistic" students, optimistic students being those who expected to receive higher grades than they were actually awarded, and pessimistic ones lower grades. This almost exactly reverses the previous year's position when more supervisors did not disclose grades, suggesting that grade disclosure might be related to the grades expected by students.

1.2 Disclosure and Non-Disclosure of Formative Grades by  
IE Supervisors vs Summative Grades Expected by StudentsTable 2

	C & Below	C+	B-	B	B+	A/A-	NR	Total
Informed	7	8	24	60	45	19	6	169
Uninformed	9	5	3	30	32	8	3	90
NR	0	0	0	4	2	0	2	8
								<u>267</u>

chi sq. = 8.664 df=5 n.s.

Table 2 sets out the grades expected by students whose supervisors provided them with their formative grades during teaching practice and those who did not receive their grades. Whether grades were given to students or not during observational visits by supervisors did not influence the students' estimated grades.

1.3 Disclosure and Non-Disclosure of Formative Grades by IE Supervisors vs Actual Summative Grades Received by Students

Table 3

	C & Below	C+	B-	B	B+	A/A-	NR	Total
Informed	7	23	35	36	44	21	3	169
Uninformed	7	11	15	24	26	7	0	90
NR	3	2	0	2	1	0	0	8
								<u>267</u>

chi sq. = 2.792 df=5 = n.s.

Table 3 shows that, as with expected grades, there is no statistically significant difference between the informed and uninformed students in terms of their final summative grades. Again, students who were given grades by their supervisors achieved similar grades to those who were not.

1.4 Accuracy of Grade Predictions made by Students who were told, and not told, their formative grades by IE Supervisors

Table 4

	PESS- IMISTIC	SPOT ON	OPT- IMISTIC	NR	TOTAL
Informed	37	62	61	9	169
Uninformed	16	40	31	3	90
					<u>259</u>

Table 4 provides information on the accuracy of student grade predictions. Those whose expected and actual grade were the same are termed "spot on"; those whose expected grade was higher than their actual grade are termed "optimistic"; and those whose expected grade

was lower than their actual grade are termed "pessimistic". Once again, there is no significant difference between the informed and uninformed students, with both tending to be more optimistic than pessimistic.

It seems that students' expected and actual grades are unrelated to grade disclosure. Students who were not given their formative grades were just as accurate as those who were in predicting their final summative grades for teaching practice.

Though grading was not related to disclosure, it is worth noting here that students with some teaching experience prior to joining IE ( as relief teachers ) expected to receive higher grades than those with no prior teaching experience. However, their confidence did not translate into higher actual grades : there was in fact no difference in the actual summative grades awarded to both sets of student teachers.

Table 5

Expected Summative Grades by  
Previous Teaching Experience

Previous Teaching Experience	C+& Below	B-	B	B+	A/A-	Total
Some	17	15	52	61	17	162
None	11	12	42	18	10	93
						<u>255</u>

chi sq. = 9.961 df=4 = n.s.

2. Student Self-Ratings on Competence in Performing the Five Teaching Processes.

A number of items on the post-teaching practice questionnaire sought to establish the degree of confidence that the students had in performing basic teaching roles. Though not ideal, this measure gives some insight into the effectiveness of the programme in preparing students for classroom teaching.

The questionnaire item was worded : " On the 7-point scale, please rate how 'competent' you feel in performing each of the teaching roles in the classroom : " For purposes of calculation, the 7 point scale is collapsed into 5.

Very Competent - - - - - Not Competent at all  
7 1

2.1 Perceived Confidence in the Planning Role

Table 6

	3/2/1	4	5	6	7	Total
Informed	6	15	46	74	28	169
Uninformed	5	12	35	32	6	90
NR	1	0	5	2	0	8
						<u>267</u>

chi sq. = 9.590 df=4 p<0.05

Table 6 shows the student's self-rated levels of confidence in performing the planning role. It can be seen that the level of confidence for all students is high, but that it is higher for the informed than the uninformed students.

2.2 Perceived Confidence in the Inducting Role

Table 7

	1/2	3	4	5	6/7	Total
Informed	1	11	50	54	53	169
Uninformed	5	11	23	31	20	90
NR	0	2	2	4	0	8
						<u>267</u>

chi sq. = 10.69 df=4 p<0.05

As with the planning role, students who were told their formative grades express more confidence in performing the inducting role than those who were not.

2.3 Perceived Confidence in the Communicating RoleTable 8

	2/3	4	5	6	7	Total
Informed	5	16	55	71	22	169
Uninformed	4	19	29	28	10	90
NR	1	1	3	3	0	8
						<u>267</u>

chi sq = 8.265 df=4 = n.s.

Once again, levels of confidence are high, but for the communicating role there is no difference between the informed and uninformed students.

2.4 Perceived Confidence in the Managing RoleTable 9

	3/2 /1	4	5	6	7	Total
Informed	10	36	58	50	15	169
Uninformed	17	31	23	17	2	90
NR	1	2	2	3	0	8
						<u>267</u>

chi sq = 21.4 df=4 p<0.001

The statistic is affected by the low number cell, but the result is still highly significant when this is allowed for. It seems that though confidence is generally high for the managing role it is significantly higher for those students who were told their formative grades.



3.2 Table 12 sets out student responses to the second attitude item and shows, again, that there is no difference between the informed and the uninformed students.

Table 12

Generally, my supervisor was helpful in correcting my weaknesses :

	1	2	3	4	5	NR	Total
Informed	2	6	33	71	57	0	169
Uninformed	2	3	21	39	25	0	90
NR	1	0	5	2	0	8	8
							<hr/> 267

3.3 Table 13 sets out student responses to the third attitude item and shows no difference between the informed and the uninformed students.

Table 13

Generally, my supervisor was helpful in developing my strengths :

	1	2	3	4	5	NR	Total
Informed	4	13	31	69	51	1	169
Uninformed	4	8	23	35	19	1	90
NR	1	0	5	2	0	0	8
							<hr/> 269

Table 14 provides information on the students' perceptions of supervisors' abilities to create a positive climate during lesson conferencing. Again, there is no difference between the informed and uninformed students.

Table 14

Generally, my supervisor created a positive climate  
during lesson conferencing

	1	2	3	4	5	NR	Total
Informed	7	13	32	52	64	1	169
Uninformed	3	4	17	40	24	2	90
NR	1	1	3	3	0	0	8
							267

#### 4. Discussion

The results show that there is no identifiable difference in student grades for teaching practice, or in attitudes towards supervisors between those students who were told their formative grades by supervisors and those who were not. Students who were told their grades received similar summative grades to those who were not, were equally as accurate in their expectations, and held similar attitudes towards their supervisors.

However, significant differences were found in levels of confidence in ability to perform three of the five teaching roles, the largest difference being with the managing role. Though the measures do not cast light on the day to day management of grade disclosure by students, in summary terms they do not reveal any untoward effects of grade disclosure. On the contrary, it appears that grade disclosure may have a positive impact on students' perceptions of their classroom teaching ability.

This finding is interesting because it does raise important questions about the desirability of withholding grades from students, especially on the grounds that to reveal grades would upset student-supervisor relationships. Another important question to consider is whether conventional beliefs and distinctions between clinical and technical-rational models of supervision are really applicable to pre-service supervision in the Singapore context? Should these distinctions, which are partially based on beliefs about the consequences of regular grade feedback, be upheld in the light of these findings?

Dealing with the first question, the results show that for the most part all students rate their supervisors highly and agree with the attitude item relating to the supervisors' ability to create a positive climate during conferencing. This was even the case with students of a group of supervisors termed "raiders", due to their preference for making unannounced supervision visits. Whether grades

are revealed or not does not appear to be related to relationships but to confidence in being able to teach. Perhaps it is for this reason that the vast majority of students have consistently expressed a preference for grade feedback, and of those receiving grades, over 90% found this helpful. ( Sharpe, L., 1986-1990 ) But more than this, the fact that regular, meaningful evaluations can be conducted without adverse consequences augurs well for the future development of the programme. It opens up the possibility of further developing a supervision mode that can combine features of clinical and competency-based approaches to supervision. This leads to the second question. If grading, particularly norm-referenced grading, is a major perceived stumbling block to a synthesis between the different models of supervision, then these results suggest that it should not be. For Singaporean students it appears to be possible to combine an essentially clinical, developmental mode of supervision with the practice of grade giving. The supervisor need not worry about wearing the two hats of helper and assessor at the same time.

It is possible that there are additional cultural reasons for student teachers in Singapore not being adversely affected by grade disclosure. Singapore student teachers are the products of an educational system which places high value on regular grading and achievement orientation. Students are graded from the moment they enter primary school right through to their entry into IE. As such, they are likely to regard grade disclosure by supervisors as a more 'natural' process than non disclosure. If true, this would be another instance of where care needs to be taken when applying overseas research findings to the local context.

Whatever the explanation, the findings on grade disclosure would seem to permit more detailed feedback to students, helping them particularly to construct meaningful improvement strategies. It would aid, not obstruct, them in analysing the relationship between classroom reality and their own professional growth, which itself is a crucial component of any definition of classroom reality. The opportunity to disclose grades should be viewed positively, then, as an opportunity to go beyond accepted dichotomies to provide a form of supervision that is at once clear and clinical.

However, available data suggests that developing such a mode of supervision is a difficult process. The Practicum Curriculum programme is a time-consuming process for supervisors and involves high levels of commitment. Even where commitment to the programme may be high in general terms, supervisors may be strongly committed to a particular supervision model that prevents them from fully adopting the institutional model. Further, there are supervisors who cling to what might be termed a traditional model of supervision where unannounced "raids" are made on the student and where summative evaluation is the predominant concern. ( Sharpe, 1987 ) As many as 62 of the students reported that their supervisors had given them no notice for 2 or more supervision visits. Scheduled visits are a fundamental component of the practicum. Interestingly, however, the phenomenon of raiding does not appear to have any adverse effects on

the questionnaire measures. The lower levels of confidence reported do not appear to be connected with whether visits are announced or not.

The role of the supervisor at IE, as formally conceived, requires the supervisor to act as a "master" supervisor, as discussed elsewhere. ( Sharpe, 1987 ) Is there any evidence to suggest that this is being achieved ? For example, are supervisors implementing the supervision cycle, the triad, and APT instrument as intended ? There is only time here to provide a partial answer. With regard to the supervision cycle, as might be expected, students report more post- than pre-lesson conferences. In fact, only one third of the students report having had one or more pre-lesson conference with their supervisors. Triad meetings are another area where there is still much room for improvement. Here, students reporting that their supervisors held at least one such triad conference dropped from 56% in 1986 to 23% in 1989. It is no surprise, then, that students have consistently noted poor working relationships between CTs and supervisors over the four year period.

It is a truism to say that the Practicum is always in danger of reverting back to Teaching Practice. This is especially the case where supervisors are expected to supervise large numbers of students. In such cases corners need to be cut and are cut, as the data shows. Innovation requires an ideological commitment to flourish and ultimately routinize itself. In this respect, the ideology of clinical, developmental supervision is a positive force, providing as it does a rationale for such practices as the supervision cycle. The task at IE would seem to be to build on this commitment whilst at the same time opening up some of its most cherished assumptions for discussion.

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