COACHING THROUGHOUT THE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Providing Feedback to the Student Teacher

At times, it can be challenging to provide meaningful and appropriate feedback to the student teacher. Establishing a positive working relationship takes deliberate and intentional time and effort. Success can be reached when the cooperating teacher creates routines that provide a platform for discussion and foster the development of a working relationship.   These routines include, but are not limited to:

- **Daily Interactions** – The cooperating teacher should aim to spend 20-30 minutes per day to discuss plans, provide feedback on teaching, and make suggestions. Teams at the elementary level usually prefer to meet at the end of the day, while those at the secondary level prefer to meet during daily preparation hours.

- **"Coaching"** – During the daily meetings, the team should commit to focusing primarily on giving and receiving feedback and to planning. The time is not meant to be used for preparation.

- **One-to-one** – It is best if the daily sessions can occur uninterrupted and in private. Student teachers are more likely to open up and be receptive to the ideas presented during these meetings.

- **One goal** – The cooperating teacher should attempt to communicate positive observations in addition to talking about areas of need. Mentors/coaches should be prepared to talk in detail, though, about one challenge, and make suggestions for improvement. Consideration should be given to the following questions when determining each day's challenge:

    o   Will the challenging situation make a significant difference in student learning?
    o   Is it a skill that will be used frequently? Immediately?
    o   Will the student teacher be able to use the skill successfully the next day? (Enz, Hurwitz, & Carlile, 32)

Communication can occur in both **non-verbal** and **verbal** forms. Non-verbal communication includes gestures, posture, muscle tension and facial expressions. When a cooperating teacher smiles, nods, or gives a thumbs up, the student teacher feels assured and affirmed; likewise, frowns or head shaking can be perceived as distressing.

Verbal communications can cover a range, such as:
- General praise – *"Super job!"*
- Positive description – *"That worked well because…"*
- Suggestions – *"Next time, you might want to…"*
- Prompting questions – *"What do you think might happen if…"*
- Criticism – *"The students didn't respond because you…"*

Student teachers have reported that verbal communications that are specific and timely (with the exception of criticism) were usually effective and helped them to improve their teaching. They also noted that the "mentor's pitch, volume, inflection, pacing and choice of words also

strongly influenced how the message was perceived" (Enz, Hurwitz, & Carlile, 33). Certainly verbal communications are enhanced by non-verbals, but it is important to note that if the non-verbals do not match the verbal communication (praised spoken through clenched teeth), the student teacher is more likely to pay attention to the non-verbal message, disregarding the verbal communication.

During the lesson, the cooperating teacher might consider questions such as:
- What is the purpose of the lesson? What will the students know and be able to do?
- How did the student teacher engage the students?
- How was the information communicated to the students?
- Were directions clearly stated?
- What techniques or strategies were implemented?
- How did the student teacher check for understanding throughout the instruction?
- How did the students practice the new skill?
- How were the students assessed?
- Did the assessment/evaluation match the lesson's objective?
- What was the student teacher's level of preparation and readiness?
- What were the strengths of the lesson?
- What could be done to increase the effectiveness of the lesson?

Responses to these questions in turn can provide the basis for the subsequent coaching session.

Further, when the cooperating teacher provides specific directions in addition to the verbal comments, student teachers are far more likely to implement the suggestions and achieve success in reaching daily goals. The chart below, based on a sample from *Coaching the Student Teacher: A Developmental Approach*, details examples of typical verbal comments and more helpful directions or suggestions.

Typical Verbal Comments	Directions/Suggestions
"If you like what you teach, so will the students."	• Be animated and use gestures. • Move throughout the room. • Vary vocal delivery by changing tone, pitch, volume and pace.
"Stay on top of the students – anticipate problems."	• Recognize and reinforce appropriate behavior. • Describe specific, desired actions ("Thank you for raising your hands.") • Move towards students who are going off-task.
"The students were confused. They weren't 'with you.'"	• Repeat directions and write them down. • Ask students to repeat the steps to a partner. *Then* ask if they have questions.
"You ran overtime. Watch the pacing and keep it moving."	• Have materials ready to go. • Outline procedures and make a timeline. • Keep the clock in sight.

(Enz, Hurwitz, & Carlile, 35)

"Coaching" the student teacher requires a commitment to assist the student teacher in deepening their "knowledge of teaching and improv(ing) their pedagogical skills (Enz, Hurwitz, & Carlile, 37)." The skillful cooperating teacher helps the student teacher to "learn how to:

- Recall information about student behavior during the lesson,
- Review teaching actions and thoughts during the lesson,
- Make comparisons between intended and actual outcomes,
- Evaluate their own actions, planning, accuracy of lesson goals, and teaching strategies,
- Plan future lessons based upon principles learned from the analysis of the lesson." (Enz, 37)

Heading Off Problems

It is the rare student teacher who does not encounter challenges during the student teaching experience. The challenge for the cooperating teacher is to identify probable causes and communicate viable solutions to the student teacher in a compassionate and caring manner. The authors of *Coaching the Student Teacher: A Developmental Approach,* B. J. Enz, S. C. Hurwitz, and B. J. Carlile, created a reference tool that analyzes challenges and suggests solutions. The chart below is based on their research and may provide guidance for the cooperating teacher as he/she moves through this delicate and intricate process.

Phase 1-Initial Phase-In of the Student Teaching Experience

	DEVELOPMENTAL CONCERNS	PROBABLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
	Student teacher often demonstrates…	*Student teacher might…*	*Mentor could…*
Energy/Commitment	Passivity-lack of initiative	-be afraid to "step on toes" -be accustomed to taking directions rather than initiating action	-make direct, but gentle observation of behavior -recognize student teacher's efforts to take initiative -create a phase-in schedule of responsibilities with the student teacher -help student teacher identify this as a goal
	Lack of commitment	-be unsure of career choice -be scared to actually admit that he/she does not want to teach -be distracted by too many other demands or commitments	-gently inquire about the student teacher's interest in teaching -suggest that the student teacher reduce outside demands on time/energy -suggest career or personal counseling, if appropriate
	Inappropriate degree of self-confidence	-have low self-esteem -be arrogant -be getting mixed messages from cooperating teacher	-demonstrate positive self-talk -provide direct, but gentle comments & specific examples -tactfully suggest counseling, if appropriate
	Insensitivity to colleagues and/or students	-lack awareness -lack experience interacting with colleagues -be intimidated by cooperating teacher	-make direct, but gentle observations of behavior -discuss collegiality with student teacher -encourage the student teacher to observe the cooperating teacher's interactions with peers
	Inflexibility	-be perfectionistic -have desire for control -be scared of doing something incorrectly -have a limited repertoire of skills or ideas	-identify the tendency -gently suggest counseling, if appropriate -discuss unforeseen consequences with student teacher -suggest times/situations when relaxing standards might be O.K. -identify viable alternatives -help student teacher identify this as a goal
	Student teacher is…	*Student teacher might…*	*Mentor needs to…*
Flexibility	Unable/unwilling to adjust to demands of full-time teaching	-underestimates professional demands -be ill or depressed -have to many outside demands	-develop an improvement plan for student teacher -have a frank discussion of the realities of teaching -gently suggest counseling, if appropriate -contact college supervisor
	Unable/unwilling to implement feedback	-be overwhelmed by feedback -not understand gravity of situation -feel threatened by mentor; feel insecure	-be tactful, but clear and specific -provide written feedback -refer to ST Grading rubric
	Student teacher frequently…	*Student teacher might…*	*Mentor needs to model…*
Planning	Creates plans which are incomplete or unclear, have not been shared with mentor and do not reflect state/district standards	-lack experience with lesson planning -misunderstand level of specificity needed -misunderstand expectations -not be planning far enough ahead -misunderstand difference between "activity" and "objective"	-lesson planning examples -using task analysis -his/her thinking process while planning -advance planning -teaching to the objective -how to align standards with curriculum

Phase 2-Partial-to-Full Responsibility of the Student Teaching Experience

	DEVELOPMENTAL CONCERNS	PROBABLE CAUSES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
Classroom Management	**Student teacher frequently fails to…**	*Student teacher might…*	*Mentor should…*
	Consistently use proactive management strategies	-lack familiarity with rules and consequences -fail to anticipate possible problems -not value importance of proactive practice	-remind student teacher of classroom management plan/discuss it often -brainstorm reinforcement techniques -ask student teacher to check seating arrangements
	Manage disruptive behavior or is oblivious to disruptive behavior	-be trying to use extinction techniques -be concentrating too much on lesson delivery -be uncertain of his/her authority in the classroom -be uncertain of what to do, so does nothing -be unsure of content	-remind student teacher that extinction is only effective with minor infractions -discuss lesson plan fully so that student teacher is confident of teaching and can attend to management techniques -role play typical teacher reactions to inappropriate behavior -focus on management in daily/weekly goals for student teacher
	Establish and maintain appropriate rapport	-be young and/or immature -want to be friends with students -be fearful of losing control, so acts unfriendly or unapproachable -be unclear of "fine line" between "friend" and "friendly professional"	-discuss appropriate responses to students' remarks and questions -explain/model how to be friendly yet professional -dispel myth that students need to like the teacher all the time
Lesson Planning/Differentiation	*Student teacher often fails to…*	*Student teacher might…*	*Mentor should…*
	Involve all students in the lesson	-not understand simultaneous interactions -use inappropriate questioning strategies -lack repertoire of signals/activities to check for understanding	-discuss meaning of active participation -help student teacher create questions that elicit responses from ALL students -brainstorm possible signals and ways to check for understanding -model "wait time"
	Give directions which are sufficient and clear	-fail to break activity down to a step-by-step process -fail to write directions down	-require a step-by-step process -show examples of strong directions -require student teacher to demonstrate giving directions prior to teaching
	Prepare and organize adequately	-underestimate complexity of teaching	-require plans in advance -take time to analyze lesson plans and provide constructive feedback
	Use a variety of instructional approaches	-need a variety of instructional options	-model a variety of instructional approaches -allow student teacher to visit other classrooms -brainstorm possibilities -provide resource books/texts for ideas -suggest appropriate web-based resources
	Assess student learning regularly or effectively	-misunderstand the link between the lesson's objective and related assessment -misunderstand the importance of assessment -not be able to design appropriate assessments -not design age-appropriate assessments	-model how to link objectives to assessments -provide examples of objectives and assessments -share district expectations for assessment