Conferencing with your Student Teacher

Conferencing between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher should occur both formally and informally throughout the student’s placement.

**Initial Conferences:** Conferences early in the student teacher’s placement will focus on the schedule, roles, and orientation to the students. These conferences are typically teacher-led and very directive. Control by the cooperating teacher is necessary at this point in the placement, but should gradually lessen as time passes.

**Developmental Conferences:** The content of developmental conferences is usually determined by the cooperating teacher, however they will vary according to the student teacher’s performance and development. The needs of a conference are determined through an observation and/or analysis of the student teacher’s teaching. The focus is the daily teaching activities of the student teacher. A collaborative approach to the conference is necessary to enable reflection of practice. An open exchange of ideas and/or solutions is recommended. The cooperating teacher eventually uses an indirect approach by becoming more of a listener and facilitator in the conference, allowing the student teacher to solve problems through discovery rather than through listening.

**Questions that may get you started:** (more questions are below)
- What were essential strengths of the lesson?
- What, if anything, would you change about the lesson?
- Do you think the lesson was successful? Why or why not?
- Which conditions were important to the outcome?
- What, if any, unanticipated learning outcomes resulted from the lesson?
- Can you think of another way you might have taught this lesson?
- Do you think the content covered was important to students? Why or why not?
- Did any ethical concerns occur as a result of the lesson?

**Possible topics for conferencing include:**
- Analysis of teaching skills
  o Development of content
  o Effective teaching qualities
  o Teaching techniques
- Evaluation of the student teacher’s performance
  o Explore what the student teacher is learning
  o Identify specific teaching skills
  o Discuss problems
  o Review the evaluation form
- Information about students
  o Official information
  o Personal observations and insights
  o Unique pupil behavior and possible causes
- Professional ideas and knowledge
  o Philosophy of teaching
  o Beliefs about pupil evaluation
  o Classroom management procedures
  o Discipline strategies
  o Organizational techniques
  o The teaching profession in general
• Planning
  o Pre-teaching analysis
  o Post-teaching appraisal
  o Long-range planning
• Personal concerns
  o Relationships with other faculty members
  o Personal problems
  o Pupil relationships
  o Value conflicts
• Enriching the teaching experience
  o Observations
  o Extra-curricular activities
  o Teacher growth

Effective Communication in Conferencing:
• Establish rapport
  o Be empathetic
  o Choose words carefully
  o Be a good listener
  o Concentrate on supportive non-verbal behavior
  o Respond to the needs expressed by the student teacher
• Encourage reflection
  o Use questions to initiate the conversation
  o Use questions that will elicit more than a “yes” or “no” response
  o Examples are provided below
• Use the right technique
  o Student teachers at different developmental levels will require more or less direction and control
• Study the results
  o Does the student teacher approach me with new ideas?
  o Does the student teacher bring up problems?
  o Do we communicate freely and clearly?
  o When I make a suggestion, is it carried out?
  o Is the student teacher learning to evaluate herself objectively?
  o Is the growth of the student teacher steady and observable?

Suggestions for working with student teachers who have instructional weaknesses:
• Be direct and honest.
• Be persistent.
• Listen with compassion.
• Leave with a mutual understanding.
• Use the person’s name.
• Give the responsibility back to the student teacher.
• Remove the student teacher from teaching and model for them.
• Give the student teacher the opportunity to observe others.
• Make a timeline for progress.

Below are examples of questions that mentors can ask teacher candidates to elicit critical thinking about their own strengths and weaknesses in the teaching process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor’s Questions</th>
<th>Teacher Candidate’s Reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“What did you observe your students doing?”</td>
<td>Recalling student behaviors observed during the teaching episode.</td>
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<td>“What did you do to cause your students to perform that way?”</td>
<td>Stating causal relationships.</td>
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<td>“How did what you observed your students doing compare with what you had planned for them?”</td>
<td>Comparing desired student performance with actual student performance.</td>
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<td>“How does what you did compare with what you had planned to do?”</td>
<td>Comparing teacher behaviors/strategies planned with those that were performed.</td>
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<td>“What were you thinking of when you… (used a particular teaching behavior)?”</td>
<td>Employing metacognition.</td>
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<td>“Do you think the objectives were achieved? What did you observe that causes you to think so?”</td>
<td>Making inferences as to the achievement of the lesson objectives. Supporting inferences with observable supporting data.</td>
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<td>“Why do you think your objectives (were/were not) achieved?”</td>
<td>Analyzing why the desired objective were/ were not achieved.</td>
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<td>“What might you do differently in future lessons of this sort?”</td>
<td>Prescribing alternative strategies that might be employed.</td>
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<td>“Why do you think it is important for your students to learn this?”</td>
<td>Evaluating the appropriateness of the curriculum and instructional strategy.</td>
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<td>“What has this dialogue caused you to think about?”</td>
<td>Reflecting on own thought processes (introspection).</td>
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<td>“What might I do differently in future sessions that would be of help to you?”</td>
<td>Inviting evaluation of the supervisor’s effectiveness (modeling).</td>
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