

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
 - Development of content
 - Effective teaching qualities
 - Teaching techniques
- Evaluation of the student teacher's performance
 - Explore what the student teacher is learning
 - Identify specific teaching skills
 - Discuss problems
 - Review the evaluation form
- Information about students
 - Official information
 - Personal observations and insights
 - Unique pupil behavior and possible causes
- Professional ideas and knowledge
 - Philosophy of teaching
 - Beliefs about pupil evaluation
 - Classroom management procedures
 - Discipline strategies
 - Organizational techniques
 - The teaching profession in general

- Planning
 - Pre-teaching analysis
 - Post-teaching appraisal
 - Long-range planning
- Personal concerns
 - Relationships with other faculty members
 - Personal problems
 - Pupil relationships
 - Value conflicts
- Enriching the teaching experience
 - Observations
 - Extra-curricular activities
 - Teacher growth

Effective Communication in Conferencing:

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

Resource: Henry, M.A., & Beasley, W.W. (1996). *Supervising student teachers: The professional way* (5th ed.). Terra Haute, IN: Sycamore Press.

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.

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

Resource: Minnesota State University, Mankato, (2013). Partners in excellence: A handbook for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers. Mankato, MN: College of Education, Office of Field and International Experience.