

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:
 - Will the challenging situation make a significant difference in student learning?
 - Is it a skill that will be used frequently? Immediately?
 - 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
<p>“If you like what you teach, so will the students.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be animated and use gestures. • Move throughout the room. • Vary vocal delivery by changing tone, pitch, volume and pace.
<p>“Stay on top of the students – anticipate problems.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and reinforce appropriate behavior.

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- 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
<i>demonstrates...</i>	<i>Student teacher might...</i>	<i>Mentor could...</i>
Passivity-lack of initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -be afraid to "step on toes" -be accustomed to taking directions rather than initiating action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -have low self-esteem -be arrogant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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

