

FOR THE COOPERATING TEACHER

Student teaching is the capstone experience for the student to connect educational theory and subject matter content to the practice of teaching. The student has had a wide range of field experiences before entering the classroom for student teaching. The student teaching semester provides an opportunity for the teacher-in-training to plan, implement and evaluate professional decisions in the school setting. It is at this time that the individual makes the transition from student to professional educator. The cooperating teacher plays a critical role in helping make that transition.

The cooperating teacher has been selected because she/he is a qualified professional educator who brings a wealth of educational experience to the classroom each day. It is through the preparation, guidance and knowledge of the cooperating teacher that each student teacher will experience an important instructional role in the classroom. The cooperating teacher sets the tone for the student teacher by providing encouragement, advice and example. Open communication is critical when presenting teacher expectations, guiding instructional decisions and evaluating teaching performance. By accepting and mentoring a student teacher, the cooperating teacher is making a vital contribution to the future of the teaching profession.

Effective Cooperating Teachers

Research notes that effective cooperating teachers:

- are “more proactive than reactive
- are clearer and more specific in their communication, including feedback to the student teacher
- model the behaviors, teaching techniques and attitudes they recommend to the student teachers
- exhibit greater consistency between their behaviors and their verbal expressions
- are more adaptable and flexible
- provide rationales for their actions and suggestions
- practice self-reflection as an active learner, and
- employ positive, problem-solving approaches in most situations.” (Henry & Beasley, 5)

Research further shows that the most successful cooperating teachers:

- “help the student teacher adjust by providing basic information, such as school rules, policies, physical arrangements and classroom management tips
- provide the student teacher with appropriate resource materials (teachers’ guide, teacher’s manual, textbooks, teaching aids, etc.)
- involve the student teacher in planning and evaluating learning experiences
- conference with the student teacher at regularly scheduled times
- evaluate the student teacher’s progress and development through regular observation and feedback.” (Henry & Beasley, 5)

From Student to Teacher

Student teachers frequently go through several stages during the student teaching experience. The beginning days may find them anxious, overwhelmed, tired and prone to self-doubt. As they become more familiar with the setting, they begin to see themselves as a member of “the team.” With increasing responsibility for preparation and teaching, the realities begin to sink in. Morale can be fragile at this point, although most student teachers feel quite good. As the student teacher assumes full responsibility for the class, he/she settles down to the job of teaching and begins to *feel* that he/she *is* the teacher.

Careful planning and preparation on the part of the cooperating teacher can help to alleviate anxiety and ensure that the placement gets off to a smooth start. The cooperating teacher can set the climate for the experience by creating orientation plans that allow the student teacher to be comfortable and informed right from the start of the placement. The transition from “college student” to “beginning teacher” takes time; the efforts of the cooperating teacher at the *onset* of the placement will help to make this transition easier and more successful.

Responsibilities of the Cooperating Teacher

The responsibilities of the cooperating teacher can be divided into five areas: orientation and introduction, planning, supervision, evaluation, and outside classroom activities.

Orientation and Introduction

1. Get acquainted with the student teacher by reading the student teacher’s resume.
2. Attend the Student Teaching dinner to meet the student teacher, college supervisor, and Education Department faculty and staff. During this occasion pertinent information regarding the student teaching experience will be provided.
2. Prepare the class for the student teacher. Do activities such as a guessing game about the student teacher’s “favorites” or a nametag activity to prepare the class for the arrival of the student teacher.
3. Clearly outline expectations for the student teacher.
4. Provide information about the school, district and community to the student teacher.
5. Provide a workspace and study area in the classroom for the student teacher.

6. Encourage the student teacher to use self-evaluation on a regular basis.
7. Provide a set of teacher manuals/textbooks for the student teacher along with helpful materials such as a planning book, class rules, schedules and curriculum guidelines.
8. Acquaint the student teacher with the school's philosophy and other policies and regulations that are important.
9. Outline school policies, such as when the student teacher is expected to be at school, dress code, pupil starting and dismissal times, attendance at faculty meetings, codes of behavior, fire and tornado drill procedures, etc.
10. Familiarize the student teacher with the school building, introducing him/her to the principal and other school personnel.
11. Provide ample time for the student teacher to observe during the first few days in the classroom. Help the student teacher to transition by allowing him/her to assist in activities such as: leading the day's opening routines, distributing and collecting papers, checking attendance, supervising study periods, supervising recess, assisting with lab work, administering tests/quizzes, working with individuals or small groups, assisting the teacher with demonstrations, explaining a specific procedure or technique, planning and creating a bulletin board, and/or carrying out brief teaching activities.

Planning

1. Jointly develop a long-range plan for instruction during the student teaching experience. Allow the student teacher to take on graduated responsibility, beginning with one class or subject matter or a small block of time and then increasing the teaching time until a full teaching load is reached. As the student teacher develops in confidence and skill in working with pupils, responsibilities should be increased.
2. Encourage the student teacher to plan activities thoroughly, drawing from past experiences, resources and ideas.
3. Require the student teacher to submit daily, detailed lesson plans. General weekly plans should be submitted by Friday of the week prior to teaching.
4. Critique and carefully review the student teacher's plans for teaching. Each lesson should have:
 - a. a strong sense of organization

- b. well-defined objectives
 - c. a clear, explicit plan for *teaching* the content of the lesson
 - d. teaching activities that meet the stated objectives
 - e. behavior management procedures
 - f. provisions for differentiated instruction
 - g. materials identified for use with the lesson
 - h. evaluation procedures specifically designed to assess students' learning.
5. Encourage the student teacher to plan activities and assessments built around the use of technology.

Supervision

1. Schedule conferencing time on a regular basis. In addition, impromptu conferences may occur daily depending on the student teacher's needs and the cooperating teacher's time. Develop an atmosphere of free and cooperative sharing of information and feedback.
2. Provide written tips, hints, and suggestions on lesson plans and teaching.
3. Encourage the student teacher to try his/her own ideas. Provide room for risk-taking and possible failure. Try not to jump in and fix the problem, unless absolutely necessary.
4. Provide time for the student teacher to instruct alone in the classroom, if feasible. This can be a helpful way to increase the student teacher's confidence.
5. Inform the college supervisor immediately when a serious problem occurs.

Evaluation

1. Review the document, "Student Teaching – The Final Grade" early and often during the term. (See Appendix S.)
2. Provide feedback on a regular basis. This should be part of both daily and weekly conferencing. Use the "Weekly Check-In" form to frame these conversations. (See Appendix R.) Be tactful, yet honest. Limit major suggestions for improvement to 2-3 issues at any one time. Do not leave the student teacher in doubt as to how she/he is developing as a professional. The student teacher should know that she/he may have challenges and there will be questions and some confusion at times. (Also see Appendix Q, "Coaching Throughout the Student Teaching Experience.")

3. Discuss the student teacher's performance in positive terms, interspersing suggestions into the conversation. Acknowledge the student teacher's strengths and excellent teaching ideas. The student teacher needs to also know what is being done well.
4. Develop a "Plan of Action" (Appendix P) with specific goals for the student teacher that is experiencing difficulties.
5. Provide clear and open explanations when guiding the student teacher.
6. Encourage the student teacher to use self-evaluation on a regular basis.
7. Conference on a regular basis with the college supervisor concerning the progress of the student teacher. (See Appendix K.)
8. Complete and return the mid-term and final evaluations to the Hope College Education Department. The cooperating teacher and student teacher are to review these evaluations and sign them before sending them to the Education Department. (See Appendices L and M.)
9. Provide suggestions for grading the student teaching experience. While the college supervisor will assign the final grade, the cooperating teacher's input is critical and carefully considered in determining the grade for the student teaching experience.
10. Call the college supervisor *immediately* if serious problems arise.

Within two weeks, the student teacher should "be independent in moving about the school, know the names of students, have some professional knowledge about the students, be able to make plans independently of the cooperating teacher's direct supervision, have taken some responsibility for some teaching, have met a number of other teachers and feel comfortable with them, and have enough confidence not to be dependent on the cooperating teacher for minor teaching decisions." (Henry & Beasley, 28)

Outside Classroom Activities

1. Require the student teacher to attend in-service and PTO meetings, IEPT meetings, school open houses, school improvement meetings, and parent/teacher conferences when appropriate.
2. Encourage the student teacher to attend extracurricular activities, such as school plays, musicals, sporting events, open houses, etc.