

ROLE OF THE COOPERATING TEACHER

During the final phase of the Teacher Preparation Program, **Teacher Candidates** work with a **Cooperating Teacher** and a **University Supervisor** in order to demonstrate skills acquired in previous field experience placements and to begin to extend these abilities as they grow into the teaching profession. The cooperating teacher influences the quality of the student teaching experience more than any other single person. It is primarily the cooperating teacher who guides the student's professional growth during the professional semester.

A **Cooperating Teacher** must have a valid teaching certificate for each grade and subject taught, and have at least three (3) years of experience as a certified educator. In addition, all cooperating teachers must receive training approved by the Education Professional Standards Board provided at no cost to the teacher. The training must include the following: Basic responsibilities of a cooperating teacher; Best practice in supporting the student teacher; and Effective assessment of the student teacher.

The selection of cooperating teachers is a collaborative process in which both the district/school and CEHD have an important role. This collaboration ensures that only teachers who can effectively support a student teacher's development are asked to serve.

Cooperating teachers must demonstrate the following:

- Effective classroom management techniques that promote an environment conducive to learning;
- Best practice in the delivery of instruction;
- Mastery of the content knowledge or subject matter being taught;
- Aptitude and ability to contribute to the mentoring and development of a pre-service educator;
- Usage of multiple forms of assessment to inform instruction; and
- Creation of learning communities that value and build upon students' diverse backgrounds.

The OEDCP is involved in regular and frequent communication concerning student placements with JPCS, OVEC, Archdiocese, and community leaders throughout the service region to secure the appropriate type of placement and to ensure a variety of placements in urban, suburban and/or rural settings with student populations diverse in cultural, economic, linguistic and

special needs. In addition, teachers with Teacher Leader Endorsement and National Board Certification may be given priority.

Pre-arrival Preparations

Cooperating teachers have found it important that their classes and the school be prepared for the arrival of the student teacher. The following are suggestions, which will be helpful:

- ✓ Explain to the students in your class that there will be two teachers in the classroom for a few weeks
- ✓ Point out that both teachers will have many different experiences to share with the class.
- ✓ Give examples of how the teaching team will work together (co-teaching)
- ✓ Explain that the students should look to both teachers for instruction and assistance, when appropriate.

Students need time to become adjusted to the idea of working with two teachers in the classroom. They will manifest the cooperating teacher's attitude toward the student teacher so be aware of your actions toward the teacher candidate. To help develop the status of the student teacher candidate as another teacher in the classroom, it is important to refer to the student teacher as "Mr. Robinson," "Miss Hardy," and the like, or as the "other teacher" rather than the "student teacher candidate."

Helping the Teacher Candidate Get Started

One of the cooperating teacher's first concerns is to help the teacher candidate feel secure in the new situation. Teacher candidates and cooperating teachers have listed the following suggestions as helpful:

- ✓ Establish a time to co-plan with the student teacher candidate.
- ✓ Accept the teacher candidate as a person. Establish rapport as soon as possible.
- ✓ Consider the teacher candidate as a member of the faculty. The teacher candidate should be included on faculty lists, taken to meetings, and encouraged to participate in committee work.
- ✓ Introduce the teacher candidate to school staff members.
- ✓ Design seating charts enabling the teacher candidate to identify students quickly.
- ✓ Provide a desk or a place for the teacher candidate's books and papers.

- ✓ Explain "formal" and "informal" classroom and school policies.
- ✓ Avoid correcting the teacher candidate in front of the students.
- ✓ Share daily chores.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for the teacher candidate to have uninterrupted conferences with you.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for the teacher candidate to teach units as you observe and assist.

Planning with the Teacher Candidate

The need for planning is fourfold:

1. to assist in clarifying the teacher candidate's purposes and procedures;
2. to learn the expectations of the cooperating teacher;
3. to communicate the teacher candidate's intentions to the cooperating teacher for constructive comments; and
4. to develop skills in lesson planning.

During the beginning days of student teaching, it is necessary to meet in order to begin the process of co-planning. Texts, curriculum guides, sample lesson plans, daily schedules, sample report cards, and school handbooks should be made available to the teacher candidate.

The cooperating teacher should give constructive criticism and provide adequate time for the teacher candidate to make suggested revisions to lesson plans. In addition to such informal conferences, about one hour per week should be set aside for an uninterrupted conference to evaluate progress toward goals, to reassess the plan for the unit and the next week, and to handle problems which have not already been discussed and solved.

The cooperating teacher should:

- ✓ Be specific. An anecdotal record of the teacher candidate's actual behavior, expressions used, timing, etc., will help the teacher candidate evaluate teaching effectiveness.
- ✓ Encourage self-evaluation. Ask such questions as "How well did you meet your lesson plan objectives?" "What is your evidence?"
- ✓ Give definite suggestions. Include in the suggestions, techniques for motivating students, presentation of materials, etc.

- ✓ Indicate successes as well as suggest improvements for the teacher candidate. Conferences with the teacher candidate may be planned to discuss things such as adjustment to the school, classroom routines, evaluation, observations, lesson planning, professional activities, teaching materials, or basic subject matter and the teacher candidate's personal problems.

A teacher candidate must be continually informed of the rate of progress being made so that the teaching ability can be compared with teaching potential. It is expected that the teacher candidate would then capitalize on strengths and work toward overcoming weaknesses.

Helping the Teacher Candidate Teach

The cooperating teacher may wish to consider the following suggestions to help the teacher candidate become more effective:

- ✓ The teacher candidate should have the opportunity to take the lead with instruction as often as possible.
- ✓ The teacher candidate should not feel that there is only one correct pattern of teaching, but should begin to acquire a repertoire of strategies.
- ✓ The teacher candidate will need help to see the students as individuals. The teacher candidate should develop keener perceptions of the students' needs, interests, and aptitudes. The cooperating teacher should provide the teacher candidate with seating charts, arrange work with individuals and small groups, hold frequent informal conferences, and encourage the teacher candidate to take advantage of opportunities to meet parents.
- ✓ The teacher candidate should realize that good teaching is creative. To achieve this creativity, the teacher candidate must feel that actions are not narrowly outlined by a teaching manual, textbook, cooperating teacher, or University Supervisor.
- ✓ The teacher candidate should be encouraged to use a wide variety of teaching techniques. Student and teacher demonstrations, laboratory work, group discussions, lectures, question- and-answer periods, directed study, audiovisual presentations and other meaningful experiences should be employed.

Above all, one must remember that the teacher candidate is learning to teach. A teacher candidate is expected to make some mistakes. If this were not true, there would be little need for student teaching. Often the teacher candidate will recognize his or her teaching weaknesses and modify the approach to a given situation. It is the function of the cooperating teacher and the University Supervisor to work together to provide needed assistance in this regard.