

TIPS FOR ACADEMIC COACHING

Coaching is a process that a cooperating teacher can use to help a student teacher learn a complex teaching technique or one that is causing the student teacher particular problems. It is a five-step approach for learning, practicing, and mastering a teaching technique. The process consists of: (1) identifying a need your student teacher has, (2) modeling the desired behavior, (3) having the student teacher practice the skill without students, (4) if practical, having the student teacher practice the technique with an individual student or small group of students, (5) having the student teacher use the technique with large group instruction. After each of the preceding five steps the cooperating teacher helps the student teacher evaluate progress by asking questions that help the student teacher reflect upon his/her own progress and by helping the student teacher plan the next step.

The first step in coaching is to identify a teaching technique that you believe the student teacher needs to improve. The most common way to identify such a need is often done through the daily discussions you have with your student teacher or through observations of his teaching.

After you and the student teacher have identified a technique to work on, the next step is to have the student teacher observe that technique in many situations. You should help guide the observations by identifying certain elements for which the student teacher can look. For example, if you and the student teacher have determined the need to improve the monitoring of student behavior, you would tell the student teacher to observe your body language, tone of voice, proximity to students, and other related behaviors as you monitor students. You should also have the student teacher observe other teachers as they monitor student behavior. When learning fairly simple teaching techniques, the student teacher should observe a minimum of 15 events which model the desired behavior, and for more complex techniques perhaps twice that number should be observed.

After the student teacher has completed the observations, you should guide the student teacher through a series of questions that will help him/her evaluate what was seen. Then you should help the student teacher plan what will be done to integrate the technique into teaching. Now the student teacher should practice the technique in private, perhaps in his/her own home or in an empty classroom. After further reflection and planning, the student teacher is ready for step 4. If practical, the student teacher can practice using the technique with a single individual or a small group of students.

This might be done several times until the student teacher feels comfortable with the technique. Once again reflection and planning follow this step. Finally, the student teacher will use the technique with a large group and perhaps have to use it several times before it is mastered. As in previous situations, each episode will be followed by reflection and planning.

Coaching can be a very rewarding experience for a cooperating teacher. It is often where you can see great growth in your student teacher. It is a complex process and very time consuming, and typically it is only used to help a student teacher with techniques that are particularly difficult to learn or are particularly complex. It can be a beneficial experience for you and your student teacher.