

Tips for Successful Student Teaching

by Dr. Paige M Medlock

Student teaching is a crucial time during preservice teacher training. Following required coursework, observations, and practicum experiences, students make the transition from student status to professional teacher under the guidance of mentor teachers and supervisors. On track to become licensed to teach Pre-K-12 art, student teachers often fulfill two placements for a range of experiences. As a university professor in art education, supervising student teachers is one of the highlights of my job!

My student teachers have already prepared portfolios, lesson plans, curriculum, assessments, and instructional resources; they have attended classes, conferences, professional developments, and are ready for this important phase in their career preparation. However, at this stage their stress often increases, their uncertainties and questions arise, and new people and places they experience can feel unsettling. These things are normal. Therefore, I provide them with tips and strategies to equip them for success.

When I meet with my student teachers prior to their first day of placement, I review several important topics. First, I cover the initial **logistics** they need to accomplish, which include communicating with the mentor teacher/s, meeting the principals and staff, learning names, policies, dress code, where to make copies, and where to have lunch. I ask them to introduce themselves to the principals and support staff, learn names, ask questions, and thank them appropriately. Then I address the topic of **presence**, including how to be professional in person and online. Presence involves staying holistically healthy. We discuss attendance, punctuality, demeanor, rapport, and holistic well-being. I ask them to evaluate their health in all areas: physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, social, spiritual, financial, occupational, and relational. Together we brainstorm ways they can best take care of themselves, fuel their

passions, be creative, get enough rest, and maintain their personal hygiene, overall wellbeing, and professional demeanor. I reinforce that if their semester (week, year, day) feels difficult, it is a season they can get through. They are not alone. I, nor their mentor teacher, expect them to be perfect or an expert. I remind them of the many free and affordable university services available to support their wellbeing and reinforce how their support network includes their supervisor, mentor teacher, principals, colleagues, faculty and staff, friends, and family. We discuss how each of them has been well-equipped to get to this point in their teacher candidacy. To summarize presence, I ask them to plan personal strategies to maintain effective time management and set boundaries to be successful. These combined practices help them reinforce their positive beliefs in themselves.

Next, we address effective **communication**. I explain the benefits of communicating clearly and professionally. We discuss how to communicate with an appropriate tone, timeliness, and the values of speaking with confidence and joy. Together we clarify the importance of introducing themselves and addressing other professionals and Pre-K-12 students appropriately. We focus on why they need to be able to listen attentively and be considerate of other points of view. Their effective communication is essential for building healthy teacher-student rapport and relationships in and outside of the classroom, so students know they authentically care. Building on what we have discussed, they consider how they can best clarify and support class routines, policies, and management systems. I particularly focus on why they need to know how and when to reach out for support for communicating with students and articulating classroom and curricular goals. Regularly meeting with their mentor teachers, supervisor, and fellow student teachers provides readily available supports and guidance in these areas. To conclude our segment on communication, I reinforce the importance of them writing with a professional tone and clarifying their intended meanings to avoid potential confusion and/or misunderstandings. Academic grammar and spelling are essential.

Lastly, I overview the **expectations** for teaching, including pacing, responsibilities, observations and visits, evaluations and conferencing. If edTPA, Praxis, or other licensure requirements need to be met, we review deadlines and supports. We

discuss the values of planning relevant, applicable lessons and curriculum that make enduring connections. They should employ the standards, academic justification, breadth of scope and logical sequence, diversity throughout art history and visual culture, integration of disciplines, and variety in methods and materials. I also ask the student teachers to state how they plan to visually and verbally create quality instructional materials and assessment tools that help Pre-K-12 students engage in the learning process and plan how they will clarify and support the routines, policies, and classroom management systems. As arts advocates, I ask them to plan how they will take initiatives to become involved in and out of the classroom. This includes greeting students at the door; communicating with parents, teachers, and administrators; mindfully observing the learning environment; actively seeking ways to benefit the learning environment; and attending all meetings and duties. Student teachers benefit from being curious and teachable. When their teaching is evaluated by their supervisor and mentor teachers, they should consider these evaluations as an investment in their effectiveness in planning, instruction, assessment, and nurturing a positive learning environment.

Throughout the student teaching experience, I provide lots of quality feedback for my student teachers as an investment in their futures, as I know they will multiply the positive influences they have received. I reinforce strategies for career success. I explain the values of documenting their work and taking quality photographs as they can contribute to their professional portfolio and become resources to develop future instructional materials. I explain the values of maintaining their professional support network, which includes their supervisor, professors, mentor teachers, principals, and colleagues. These relationships are often helpful in establishing further professional connections and opportunities. I invite them to research topics that interest them, join professional associations, attend and present at conferences and workshops, continue to acquire professional development, consider graduate work, advocate for their content area, and to be eternal learners.