

# I Have/Am a Student Teacher; Now What?

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## Why This Topic?

### **I love giving back.**

This is my 5th year of supervising and mentoring music education student teachers. I had a great experience while student teaching, and I want to ensure that my students have as best of an opportunity as possible.

### **Cooperating teachers need help too.**

For first time cooperating teachers, or if it has been a while since their last student teacher, the concept of mentoring a future music educator can be intimidating. While most universities offer a guide for those CTs working with their students, there are many questions that CTs can still have.

### **Student teaching is scary.**

As student teachers head out to teach for the first time, there can be many concerns that new teachers have to face. Teaching can even be scary for veteran teachers these days, let alone for student teachers.

### **The AHA! moment can come during student teaching.**

For Supervisors, CTs, and STs, the AHA! moment that we all want as teachers CAN come during student teaching. I still love watching student teachers have that first realization that they are where they are meant to be.

# EXPECTATIONS: Cooperating Teacher Perspective

**Be a good model:** Everything you do is now being watched and heard! Many CTs that I've worked with have commented that having a student teacher has been very helpful because they had the chance to consider how they ran their program.

**Schedules:** The goal is that when the CT is at school, the ST is at school. Student teachers should be at school as soon as any staff are required to be in the building. Most universities require the ST and CT to create a document that describes how and when the ST will be ramping up to be the head teacher. As a CT, if you know that you are NOT going to allow a student teacher to conduct your ensembles on a concert, on tour, at contests, for festivals, etc., please DO NOT TAKE A STUDENT TEACHER! These opportunities are how the student teachers will learn.

**Caring:** You are the mentor! You'll see the student teacher every day. We expect you to help monitor their professional progress, to be sure, but we also expect you to mentor them about how they balance their personal lives with professional. You don't have to become buddies, and you don't have to pry if the ST doesn't want to share with you but take time to SHOW that you care about them.

**Patience:** The ST is coming from 3-4 years of professional, collegiate-level ensembles and classes. Now, they have to remember what it is like to teach beginning students and how. This is one of the biggest challenges that I have observed and it may take time to adjust to grade-appropriate content. When a student teacher struggles during a class and is looking for immediate feedback, don't be afraid to say, "I'm sorry, I'm not able to answer this question right now since we're getting ready for music theory class, but let's talk during our planning period later today."

**Extra-Curricular:** Student teachers are not technically required to attend rehearsals after the school day. While this may be true, I strongly encourage student teachers to attend extracurricular rehearsals and events for their programs. I would wager that 60% of my rehearsals and obligations for my high school positions, especially a 4A program in Iowa, was spent outside of the school day between rehearsals for musicals, jazz choirs, madrigal ensembles, All-State, Solo/Ensemble contest, and honor choirs.

# Expectations: Student Teacher Perspective

**Be a sponge:** One of the best things student teachers can do is take in everything that they experience and all advice that their CT provides. Just like there are great things to soak up, sometimes student teachers have to wring out some of the bad water. There will be many things that may not work in their own programs for many reasons.

**Schedules:** Much like with the CT's information, the student teacher should be on the same page with the CT and supervisor about when they will be required to be the head teacher, how long, and how they will return to observation status at the end of their experience.

**Balance:** Student teachers will be asked to do A LOT during this experience. The student teachers will need to find a way to balance their personal lives and professional experiences. We'll talk more about this later in the "Self-care" section.

**Patience:** Success will not happen immediately. There will probably be more frustration and failures than successes as they get going. Remember that you are NEW to this and it will take a while to find your rhythms.

**Extra-Curricular:** This could easily go under "Balance," but it is important to decide how often you will attend extracurricular rehearsals and events. You may still have to work or have family obligations that take precedence over your student teaching duties. Be sure to know what is expected of you by your CT and supervisor. If you can't make every rehearsal, can you create a schedule that works to attend a portion of each type of rehearsal so you get various experiences. Remember to be a sponge!

# Communication: Cooperating Teacher Perspective

**Think Out Loud:** When you are planning every aspect of your classroom curriculum, concerts, tours, uniforms, etc. having a student teacher is a great opportunity to think out loud. Consider why you are doing things the way you do. What didn't you know when YOU were starting out.

**Anticipate:** If you experience situations where the ST is having difficulty such as in rehearsal pacing, planning rehearsals, or communicating clearly with the students, please reach out to them early and often.

**Know When:** Know when to contact the supervisor about issues you may be experiencing with your student teacher. We are more than happy to help when we can, but please don't wait until halfway through the semester to communicate with the ST Supervisor that they don't know how to create a lesson plan.

**No question too small:** This is important to know when you contact the ST Supervisor. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have to make sure everyone is enjoying this experience.

**Non-Classroom:** This goes back to "Think Out Loud." Any time you find yourself in your office and writing emails to plan an event, please ask yourself, "Is this something my student teacher should know how to do?"

# Communication: Student Teacher Perspective

**WHY?:** Just like I hope the CT will consider if student teachers should know something, I hope the ST will ask, "WHY?" about any and ALL topics! That's how we learn.

**Know how to ask:** Be polite when you ask, "WHY?". Be sure not to come across like you are second guessing or criticizing your CT. Remember, there may be several things the CT does that you do not agree with or understand but it is still their program.

**Know when to ask:** You will have to figure out when the best time is to ask these questions. You may not have an opportunity to ask about why or how your CT handled a specific situation in the moment but make a note for yourself to ask later when the right time arises. ‘

**No question too small:** It's okay to ask questions. You should respect your CT, but you should not FEAR them. They need to always understand that you will have questions. You can always reach out to your supervisors as well.

# Professionalism: CT & ST Perspectives

**Dress:** While this seems obvious, you are modeling behavior for your student teacher. If you show up every day in sweatpants and a basketball jersey (and yes, I have seen this) that is what the student teacher will assume is acceptable. Even if it is for YOU, it isn't for THEM! The adage of "Dress for the job you want" still applies! Student teachers do not yet have the job and are also constantly networking and making connections.

**Patience:** Remember to be patient and allow your ST to ask questions about whatever they want. If you don't have time to answer their questions right then, tell them. "I'm sorry, I'm not able to answer this question right now since we're getting ready for music theory class, but let's talk during our planning period later today."

Your ST WILL mess up. Be ready for this and consider how you will address them, or the situation, when mistakes happen. BREATHE!!

**Social Media:** Model appropriate use of social media for your program. Share your successes and struggles with social media for promotion or organization. What are your policies regarding being friends with students or parents on social media. Even what seems like common sense can use some reinforcement.

**Shadows:** During the school day, the idea is that wherever you go, your student teacher will follow. If they overstep your personal boundaries because they are ALWAYS IN YOUR BUBBLE, politely tell them and schedule time for a chance to catch up.

# Evaluations: CT & ST Perspectives

**Journals:** I have found that most universities do not require their student teachers to keep daily journals. I recommend this to all student teachers. This doesn't have to be a minute-by-minute report of their day, but it can be a summary of what went well, what was a struggle, and what they are thinking or feeling at the moment or after a particular lesson. I take time to read the journals of all my student teachers and I can pick up on some language that may indicate that an intervention is necessary.

**Videos:** I know it may not be a great experience to watch yourself on film when you are made to reflect and evaluate how a lesson went, but I recommend student teachers do this every time they are in front of the class. If you don't need the film as a point of communication or reflection with your CT/Supervisor, you can always delete it. These videos will help you see what you say and how you say it to your students. They will also serve as protection for you if something occurred in your classroom that you were not able to handle. There are many reasons for filming every class. Use an iPad, phone, GoPro, laptop, etc.

**Debriefing:** In addition to daily debriefing sessions with your student teachers, please allow your student teacher to have time to meet with their supervisor immediately after their evaluation. There were several times that the CT of my ST wasn't available immediately after my observations. I had to try and connect with them later or via email regarding my thoughts on their performance and it was never very meaningful.

**Timing:** This simply means that you can help your student teacher understand that their teaching segment that we observe doesn't have to be the full class time. There were several times when a student teacher thought they had to teach the entire time so they tried to conduct a piece they weren't ready for or teach a topic they didn't prepare just so they can fill more time. I just want to see them interact with students. It can be a 5-minute warm up at the beginning!

# Relationships: CT Perspective

**Anticipate:** I had mentioned this before, but you will eventually learn to anticipate many issues that could arise with your student teacher based on the communication or LACK of communication they have with you. Please keep communication open between the student teachers, their supervisors, and yourself.

**Point Person:** The student teacher no longer has their regular music education professor that they will see every day; you are now that person. It's okay to ask your student teacher questions about how they are coming with planning future lessons, what they thought about how a lesson went that they taught, or keeping them informed about student issues that they should know. I have seen many student teachers kept in the dark regarding IEPs and other pertinent student information. Remember that you are their mentor. You may form an amazing relationship with your student teacher. I hope you do! It's okay if you do!

**Supervisor:** I love it when CTs take the time to have conversations with me. I have created some great friendships myself with the CTs of my student teachers because we have shared experiences or because I was able to come back and clinic one of their groups.

**Model:** I can't stress enough the importance of being a good model of professionalism for your student teachers. They ARE listening, I promise. When you bad mouth your colleague, when you complain about the hours or low pay, when you talk negatively about your students, your student teacher WILL hear you. I know because most of that gets back to ME!

**Debriefing:** Again, it is worth repeating that taking time to meet with your student teachers after they teach a class or even at the end of the day is so important. This may seem obvious; however, I have had many student teachers tell me that their CT only meets with them once a week to talk about how things went. By then, issues have passed, details faded, and questions have been forgotten.

# Relationships: ST Perspective

**Look, Listen, and Learn:** Use your CT! You will pick up on many things from your CT. Not everything they say and do will be a gem of wisdom. Remember that they are people also with joys, concerns, struggles, and successes. It's okay that you are not a cookie cutter of them when you are finished. If you trust your CT to open up to them, you may find that you start a wonderful professional or personal relationship. You can reach out to your former CTs when you start at your own program. You may also learn some great things from other staff at your field experience school such as other music teachers/ fine arts teachers/ collaborative pianists, and administrators. Be the sponge!

**Know the supervisor:** It is very possible, especially at bigger schools or if you have a special student teaching site, that you will NOT know your supervisor. They may be a retired Arts teacher/professor that your university hires as an adjunct professor. Take time to learn about your Supervisor. It may be even more important to create an open relationship with your CT if your supervisor is not from your immediate area. I supervised several instrumental music education students even though I am choral/vocal based. My comment to my students and their CTs was always, "I don't necessarily speak the language of (band/orchestra), but I do speak music education." I always used my ST's CT as the point person on questions I had that were specific to their content. Be open and honest!

**Boundaries:** With students, it can be challenging to establish appropriate boundaries. You may not be that much older than your students. You may have many similarities with them. Being friendly and courteous with your students is acceptable, but you are NOT THEIR FRIEND. Student teachers have to work extra hard at this, especially when you are alone with students outside of the classroom setting like before or after school, lunches, or evening rehearsals. Make sure you talk with your CT to discuss what is acceptable and what is not. Ask questions often!

**Celebrate:** Don't forget to celebrate your successes! If this means celebrating that you didn't cry that day, GREAT!! If this means that a student who never participates ask a questions, AMAZING! Celebrate the small things during this experience.

# Self-Care: ST Perspective

Sorry teachers, you're on your own here! Just kidding, you may find that what works for your student teachers is something that you need to be reminded of. Cooperating teachers may have more experience finding ways to practice self-care during the school year. Keep this up! We all need to practice self-care.

**Find your thing:** It doesn't matter what your thing is but find a thing! It could be bingeing on Stranger Things, exercising, meeting friends for coffee, cuddling with your cats...all that is fine. It is important to have a way to disconnect with school once you go home.

**Balance:** Student teachers- you may still have evening jobs, weekend obligations for family or religion. You may have to report to your campuses for evening education classes. At Iowa, we had a weekly 2-1/2 hour student teaching course that everyone had to attend online. We had students attend via Zoom at contests, from backstage of musical rehearsals, and from car rides to and from work and home. Find a healthy balance and respect your time.

**Sleep:** This may seem obvious, but student teachers, you will be tired in ways that you may not have experienced. Establish healthy sleep habits early on in the student teaching process.

**Remove Negativity:** This may be a hard thing to do. You may have friends from other classes/ areas/ jobs, etc. They may not always bring positivity into your lives. Sometimes, family can be the ones bringing negativity in your life. When at all possible, try to find a way to cut this negativity from your life. Know when to walk away, when NOT to engage in discussion, when NOT to comment or retaliate through social media. All these things can bring in negativity and, frankly, you don't have time for it and don't deserve it. Seek out positivity!

**Celebrate:** Like I just said, find reasons to celebrate the small things. This can be for your other student teaching colleagues, not just for you. Enjoy this experience!

Thank you for your interest. If you have any further questions, please contact me!

