Student Teaching in Elementary School

Education Program
Brandeis University
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Brandeis student teachers are given the opportunity to teach classes and groups of students, design curriculum through carefully constructed lesson plans, provide instruction that takes into account your diverse students, and assist in the assessment of students. Your cooperating teacher, field instructor, and Education Program advisor work together to make this an outstanding learning opportunity for you and your students.

Four themes define the Education Program courses and philosophy:

**Inquiry:** Effective teachers continually assess and reflect on their own teaching practices and stay aware of current resources and information related to teaching and learning. Teachers need to have a firm grounding in educational research, theory and practice, and understand the ways in which inquiry and reflection on research, including their own classroom research, can inform practice.

**Teaching for Understanding:** Good teachers communicate high standards and expectations for student learning, and draw on an exploration of rich content and a repertoire of approaches, using instructional strategies to make knowledge accessible and interesting to diverse learners. Effective educators build on and extend students’ ideas, monitor their students’ intellectual engagement, and take steps to challenge or re-engage each student in learning.

**Knowing Students as Learners:** Good teachers work actively to know their students as individuals and learners. They use their knowledge of child development and learning, and their knowledge of individual students, to inform their planning and teaching.

**Social Justice:** Issues of social justice and injustice affect schools. Effective teachers strive to narrow the achievement gap between students through their use of standards-based, learning-centered curricula. Teachers need to work toward greater equity and access to knowledge for all students, while creating multicultural, democratic classrooms that celebrate respect and diversity.

**Student Teaching**

Student teaching is one of the most critical times for development of a future teacher. It can be an exciting and exhausting time. Students are best served by seeing their role as that of increasing responsibility for student learning in the classroom in which they are placed.

Student teaching begins with your doing extensive observations in the first week of the academic year. These observations enable the student teacher to learn how her cooperating...
teacher establishes the classroom norms and culture. The student teacher should offer her/his assistance as the teacher meets with new students, passes out books and materials, and begins the school year. This is an incredibly busy time of year, and not a good time to ask many questions of the cooperating teacher. The student teacher should jot down any questions because there will be time to discuss these questions, during the fall 35-hour pre-practicum when students learn about their classroom, school, and community.

During the pre-practicum and practicum, the cooperating teacher, field instructor, and student teacher work closely together to determine the pace and level at which the student teacher assumes more responsibilities. Student teachers will move at different speeds as they learn to teach in the classroom in which they are placed. It is important to seek additional responsibility but it is equally important not to move too quickly, as moving too quickly through a teaching experience makes it more difficult to recover if any problems occur.

The key to the student teaching experience is planning. Student teachers must attend to creating lesson plans far enough in advance that they can share them with their cooperating teacher. Likewise, cooperating teachers and field instructors must plan for progress of the student teacher, ensuring that each individual student teacher has a wide variety of teaching experiences in the classroom. At a minimum, elementary student teachers must successfully plan, teach, and assess students for at least one week as a “solo teacher.”

In general, the student teacher should plan to:

- Know and abide by policies of the school where placed, including arrival and departure times of teachers, as well as other rules and responsibilities of teachers within the school;
- Keep open communication with the cooperating teacher: Inform the teacher of illness if missing a day of school is unavoidable (depending on the student teaching calendar, missed days may need to be made up by extending the student teaching period) and provide lesson plans for any teaching scheduled for that day;
- Participate in all teacher planning meetings, parent-teacher conferences, staff meetings, in-service and committee meetings in which the cooperating teacher participates;
- Assist with extra-class responsibilities, such as lunch supervision or after-school activities, as needed;
- Gradually increase responsibilities in the classroom, moving from observation and one-on-one tutoring to small group teaching and lead teaching;
- Plan lessons consistent with principles learned in Brandeis education courses;
- Plan lessons sufficiently ahead so that cooperating teachers have time to provide feedback and suggest revisions; and
- Understand that although the student teacher is expected to plan lessons and teach as if s/he were the actual teacher, the class is still officially the responsibility of the cooperating teacher. Student teachers must obtain the approval of the cooperating teacher for all activities and lessons. While we hope that student teachers will have freedom and flexibility in planning their lessons, the cooperating teacher has both the right and the responsibility to make decisions he or she believes are in the best interest of the students.

Updated 10/2009
Cooperating Teacher’s Role

Cooperating teachers can take on many roles for a student teacher: mentor, leader, partner, role model, guide, critical friend, trusted colleague. Building a productive relationship depends on planning, thoughtful communication, and regular feedback. We understand that student teachers are at the beginning of a long continuum, and we appreciate the willingness of cooperating teachers to mentor and teach student teachers. A cooperating teacher assumes a significant role in helping a student become a confident and creative teacher.

In general, we ask that cooperating teachers:

- Welcome the student teacher as an observer and helpful assistant during the first week of school;
- Provide an orientation to the school and introduction to school personnel;
- Plan, model, and discuss daily lessons with the student teacher as well as plan long-range class objectives;
- Introduce student teachers to school curriculum materials;
- Model and discuss a variety of student evaluation strategies;
- Actively demonstrate a belief that all students can learn;
- Actively demonstrate self-reflection in teaching and analysis of teaching effectiveness;
- Demonstrate a genuine interest in guiding student teachers to develop their own best strategies of teaching, including the flexibility to allow a student teacher to teach with a style that differs from the cooperating teacher’s or to explore alternative approaches to curriculum;
- Be willing to assist student teachers as they learn and implement classroom management techniques;
- Help the student teachers develop appropriate assessments in a standards-based environment;
- Observe and provide constructive feedback to student teachers; and
- Meet at least three times per semester with the student teacher and field instructor to discuss progress and plan future strategies that support the student teacher’s development.

Cooperating teachers need to prepare a strategy to help student teachers grow throughout the practicum experience. It may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- How will the student teacher learn about the students, their families, and community? How will he or she learn about the school’s culture?
- What specific teaching responsibilities will the student teacher initially have? How will those responsibilities change?
- How will the student teacher help the cooperating teacher plan? How will the cooperating teacher review and give feedback on the student teacher’s plans?
- When will the student teacher co-teach and later assume responsibility for the classroom?
- What other duties, in addition to whole-class teaching, will the student teacher assume?

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• How and when will the cooperating teacher observe the student teacher?
• How will the cooperating teacher and student teacher discuss and share ideas about instructional challenges in the classroom?
• How will the cooperating teacher provide needed positive feedback and constructive criticism?
• How will problems be handled?
• How will successes be celebrated?

Cooperating teachers commit their energy, time, and professional insights into helping student teachers develop effective teaching practices and strategies. In conjunction with the field advisor, they are the primary coach for student teachers as they wade into the waters of elementary school teaching.

**Field Instructor’s Role**

The field instructor is an experienced former teacher who visits student teachers in their classrooms to observe, support, instruct, and evaluate their progress. Field instructors formally observe student teachers a minimum of five times per semester, meeting each time with the student teacher to provide feedback and discuss the field experience. They collaborate with the cooperating teacher to support the growth and development of the student teacher. Field instructors also facilitate three meetings per year—one each at the beginning, middle, and conclusion of the student teaching practicum—in which the field instructor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher reflect on the field experience together. Field instructors also review the portfolios and daily journals student teachers are required to complete for their practicum.

The field instructor can serve, as necessary, as an intermediary and advocate for the student teacher if problems occur between the student teacher and cooperating teacher. The field instructor’s primary role is to support the student teacher in having a positive teaching experience.

**Selection of Schools**

The following criteria are used in selecting sites for observation and student teacher placements:

• Brandeis is working to have a close, collaborative relationship with the school so that all parties provide ongoing support for the student teacher.
• We attempt to place student teachers into schools as a cohort, with two to three students completing their practicum in the same school.
• We seek a variety of placement opportunities, including urban and suburban schools, for each student teacher.
• We attempt to match the grade preference for students, placing student teachers in their first or second choice of grade level.
• We strongly encourage students to student teach in a location that is different from the one in which they completed their pre-practicum observations, and at a grade level that is different from one they observed. Thus, it is good planning for a student who
believes she or he wishes to student teach at a specific grade level to observe at a grade level that is either higher or lower.

The Building Principal as a Resource

Principals are experienced observers of teaching and teachers. Student teachers are urged to make an appointment to talk to the school principal to discuss:

- The principal’s perspectives on teaching;
- The school’s culture, challenges, and improvement plan;
- Additional school resources the student teacher may investigate;
- Teachers in the building whom student teachers might observe; and
- Job search resources or tips.

Reflective Teaching Seminar

Student teachers attend a weekly seminar throughout their student teaching field experience. This seminar is designed to build skills, add to the awareness of community resources, and encourage student teachers to reflect on their teaching experience. The student teaching seminar includes time for sharing concerns and successes as well as formal information on specific topic areas. Student teachers will also receive guidance about creating their teaching portfolios.

Other Courses and Honors Theses

Because student teaching is a full-time responsibility, we strongly recommend that you not take any courses other than ED101b and ED111e in the spring semester. During your spring semester, you will be working full-time in the schools as well as attending a two-hour, weekly after-school seminar at Brandeis.

This creates problems for anyone interested in doing an honors thesis. If you are committed to pursuing an honors thesis, it is our strong recommendation that you complete most of the reading and development of your research question before the fall semester of your senior year so that you can complete most of your thesis writing by the end of the fall semester.

Dress and Decorum

Student teachers are expected to dress professionally. They must also act professionally which means that student teachers will not talk about their students in public places in or outside of school. They should also respect the experience and expertise of faculty colleagues. If there are problems in communication or understanding between the student teacher and adults in the school, it is important (and helpful) to consult with the field instructor and/or seminar leader. Even when outside of school, remember that your students perceive you as their teacher.
Creating a Teaching Portfolio

All student teachers are required to create a professional electronic portfolio that documents their student teaching experience. This portfolio is a collection of artifacts, with commentary, that demonstrates progress and accomplishments in teaching. It is a visible manifestation of work as a teacher, a three-dimensional exhibit of teaching style and interests.

Portfolios should include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:
- Statement of teaching philosophy*
- Resume
- Examples that illustrate values and beliefs concerning practice
- Samples of student work
- Photos or other records of classroom experiences
- Unit lesson plan(s)

* A statement of teaching philosophy is a written expression of core values and ideas about teaching. Generally, student teachers develop a philosophy statement prior to student teaching and then refine it throughout their student teaching experience. It is a challenge to craft this statement so that is it both concise and articulate. Additional guidelines for developing a statement of teaching philosophy are provided within education coursework.

Keeping a Journal

Student teachers are required to keep a journal that includes their reflections on each day’s occurrences. This form of communication can help the Field Instructor or Supervisor more easily recognize the concerns and questions of student teachers and offer student teachers a forum to raise questions on an ongoing basis. Portfolios and journals are reviewed by field instructors and University advisors during and at the conclusion of the student teaching practicum, and are required for successful completion of student teaching.

Planning

Planning for classroom lessons and activities includes a wide number of tasks that can appear daunting to new teachers, including finding resources, estimating how long an activity will take, figuring how difficult a concept will appear to students, and calculating how to engage students’ interest and enthusiasm. Putting all these factors into a written plan may even feel risky, as comparing a written plan with what actually happens during a lesson may feel threatening. Yet planning is critical to good teaching, and student teachers are required to provide their cooperating teachers with written lesson plans in advance of implementing the lesson.

Learning how to plan is difficult, and each teacher may have an individual approach. Some focus on process, some on content, some plan in great detail, some jot notes. Some can’t explain how they plan, some know their own process very well.

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During the student teaching experience, student teachers are encouraged to write detailed lesson plans. This helps both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher analyze the plan in advance and reflect on the success or needed improvements after students work with the lesson. Brandeis student teachers practice planning lessons in preparatory courses. Both cooperating teachers and field instructors also work with student teachers to develop a sound strategy for planning effective lessons. Providing detailed lesson plans in advance is a key aspect of successful student teaching.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Student teaching is an opportunity for a potential teacher to become integrally involved in the daily life of an elementary school. At all times, however, the focus of the student teaching practicum must be on the development of classroom teaching skills.

Student teachers need to learn to apply theories and practices that build productive teaching and learning relationships with students. They must learn to:
- Be a part of a learning community;
- Work actively to know students as individuals, learners, and members of families and communities;
- Use their knowledge of child development and learning, and their knowledge of particular students, to inform their teaching;
- Use information in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to modify instruction and integrate students with disabilities into the classroom;
- Respect diversity in the cultures and backgrounds of students and their families;
- Work with the cooperating teacher to keep families informed about students’ academic and social progress;
- Treat families as partners in students’ learning;
- Understand what it means to be a colleague;
- Seek constructive feedback from a mentor or field instructor;
- Plan for student learning; and
- Actively seek to expand their repertoire of teaching strategies.

(Thanks to the DeLeT Handbook for some of this language.)

Before the first day of student teaching begins, the student teacher can take responsibility for:

- Sharing his/her background, including work experience, school experience, academic preparation (specific education courses completed), and experience working with individual children or groups of children with the cooperating teacher and field instructor;
- Asking about and preparing for responsibilities for the first day of the field experience;
- Observing in the classroom and learning about the students.

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Before the first day of student teaching begins, the cooperating teacher can take responsibility for:

- Creating a work space for the student teacher within the classroom;
- Introducing the student teacher to school personnel, including the principal, other teachers, specialists, librarians, school nurse, and custodians;
- Providing an orientation to the school and a tour of school facilities (including teachers’ room, adult and student lavatories, main office, classroom supply storage, and copy machine instruction);
- Providing an orientation to the classroom set-up and basic record-keeping procedures;
- Discussing his/her philosophy of teaching, discipline, class rules and procedures, individual students, class atmosphere, and goals for the year;
- Sharing any behavioral and instructional modifications specified in your students’ Individual Education Plans;
- Discussing expectations for the student teacher, including initial responsibilities and a plan for increasing the level of responsibility throughout the field experience; and
- Arranging regular meeting times with the student teacher.

Gaining Authority

Student teachers often feel the need to be liked by their students. As legitimate as this feeling may be, it can complicate a student teacher’s role and authority in the classroom. Thus, it is often more productive to delay the idea that students should like the student teacher until after the students have come to know the student teacher. A professional attitude that is both businesslike and pleasant can provide a solid base for rapport and the positive, productive atmosphere that all student teachers hope to build with their students.

The cooperating teacher should introduce the student teacher to the class on the first day, clearly identifying the student teacher as a person who has the status of a teacher. Student teachers benefit from having specific tasks that help communicate to students that the student teacher has authority in the classroom. Some suggested tasks for the first days of student teaching include:

- Distributing books and other materials;
- Escorting students to various parts of the school building;
- Taking attendance and leaning students’ names; and
- In some cases, teaching part of a lesson.

Discipline

Discipline in a classroom is a complex process. Learning precisely where and when to draw the line with individual students and with an entire class frequently requires some trial and error. This can be a difficult learning process.
Cooperating teachers and school personnel can help student teachers establish classroom control. Three starting points are:

- Make sure student teachers are aware of school rules and discipline procedures.
- Make sure student teachers are equally aware of the cooperating teacher’s rules and expectations about student behavior. Help student teachers understand the reasons behind the rules.
- Give student teachers time and space to absorb all the pieces involved in effective classroom discipline, so that they adopt or adapt procedures and become their own kind of responsive and caring teachers.

Student teachers can also take steps to become more confident in front of a classroom. Four starting points are:

- Pay close attention to what occurs throughout the day. Write down things that are unexpected, your response, and your assessment of how your response worked.
- Share these notes with your cooperating teacher and other school personnel to find out how they respond to similar circumstances.
- Understand the modifications and alternative teaching strategies specified in the Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities.
- Identify (with the help of your cooperating teacher) as many alternative strategies as possible so that you can decide what, if anything, you will do differently in a similar situation. Plan to learn from your experience.

Teaching Load

Student teachers are expected to follow the calendar of the school in which they are placed. They are expected to be in the school full time throughout their student teaching experience. Most of this time will be in the cooperating teacher’s classroom, although student teachers have an outstanding opportunity to observe other teachers as well. Student teachers should gradually increase their teaching within the classroom, so that by the end of the student teaching practicum they have had a variety of teaching experiences and have had complete responsibility for the classroom for at least one continuous week. Student teachers are expected to plan and teach at least one full unit of instruction in a content area determined in consultation with the cooperating teacher.

Non-classroom duties

Student teachers should not be assigned supervisory duties (such as lunchroom, bus, or recess supervision) on a regular basis. They should, however, be exposed to these duties, participating in them to gain the experience of having done so.

Physical Education

Elementary student teachers are expected to learn about integrating physical education into the curriculum. Field instructors should work with cooperating teachers to ensure student teachers have the opportunity to observe and interact with physical education instructors.
Substitute Teaching

Brandeis student teachers may serve as substitute teachers (teachers of record) in their host school if: 1) they do not count the substituting day as a student teaching day, and 2) they are officially designated the teacher of record and receive regular district compensation for their work.

We have developed this policy because we want students to have a full student teaching experience. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, a student teacher is under supervision by an officially designated cooperating teacher, a teacher of record. Thus, if a Brandeis student, in the role of student teacher, accepts responsibility as a substitute teacher, we have a person who is sanctioned to work without supervision while, in fact, s/he is supposed to be supervised.

If, however, the Brandeis student agrees to substitute in the school, s/he must make up the student teaching days elsewhere in the Brandeis term or thereafter. S/he should also be compensated as would any other substitute teacher.

Preparing for the Future

Everyone who successfully completes the Education Program at Brandeis, no matter what plans he or she might have, should complete the licensure process. Details will be supplied by the Director well in advance of graduation, and licensure information is available from the Education Program Office and online.

Everyone should also obtain written recommendations from his or her cooperating teacher and field instructor. Broach the subject several weeks before the end of the practicum and provide them with the Brandeis form if you intend to use the services of the Hiatt Career Center.

The Hiatt Career Center will help you make decisions about your future and will collect conveniently in one place materials you will need when applying for a job: resume, transcript, and recommendations. The Center has information on graduate programs in education and sends out notices of teaching opportunities.

The Education Program has catalogues of several graduate programs in education. We organize a yearly panel of local educational administrators who describe the job application process and conduct mock interviews.

The Education Program website lists job opportunities as they are received in the office, including those from the Consortium for Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE), sixteen colleges and universities in the northeast with programs like ours. The Massachusetts Educator Career Center, an on-line resource of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, also posts jobs in Massachusetts and provides a place to post confidentially an abbreviated resume: (www.doe.mass.edu/mecc). Many other job search resources are posted on the Education website employment page.

Updated 10/2009
Brandeis also belongs to several organizations that can be of help in the search for a teaching job. The Massachusetts Education Recruiting Consortium (MERC) brings together recruiters from school systems and graduates of teacher preparation programs for a job fair during the April public school vacation week. Information is made available to Education Program students well before the meeting dates.

**KEEP IN TOUCH**

After you complete the Education Program, please keep in touch. When your email address changes, please let us know.

We want to hear suggestions about how to improve the program. We also want to hear how you are doing after you graduate. We often ask graduates to speak in our Education Program classes, because you are our best spokespeople. If you are interested in doing this, please let us know.