



Teacher Educator Story 1



Read through this story and see what teacher educator dilemma(s) you can spot.

In my role of school-based teacher educator (SBTE), supervising the training of student-teachers within my school, I monitor their progress. When I saw this third-year student for the first time working as a teacher in the group, my image was immediately very positive. She had a cheerful appearance, she was very positive towards the children and was open to feedback from her mentor and myself. The feedback she received was almost instantly visible in her lessons and actions. However, after the first 'personal development plan' and reflections, a number of points of attention emerged: not only were there many language errors, it lacked vision ... Why do you do what you do? On what do you base your choices? What considerations do you include in making your choice? In short she had to go more in-depth in her reflections and personal development plans. With this feedback the student started to work bravely and determinedly. In the days after this feedback conversation we saw some development in the reflections and that feels good as a coach because it means you can make a difference for the student; you can take her to a higher level.

However, after a number of weeks the mentor wanted to talk to me about this student: the student followed up the feedback but the improvement was only of short duration. The feedback was used that week; however it was not taken into the following week. Thus, the mentor had the feeling she had to start every week from scratch with the student, it wasn't a cumulative development. When I visited the student again in class, I also observed the points mentioned by the mentor. The pupils were less engaged at times, which requires appropriate action as a teacher, to act according to the pedagogical and educational needs of the pupils. After the lesson, we talked about this. It turned out that the student notices the low level of involvement and unrest but doesn't have sufficient personal resources to adequately respond to this. This is gained by experience, exercising, trying and reflecting. In consultation, we discussed extending the school-based training and a number of clear points were drawn up for attention. The student formulated higher and concrete objectives from these points.

The dilemma we faced, however, was that after a number of weeks the development we saw in this student wasn't sufficient; the student didn't react adequately to pupils' behaviour and needs. The question arose, when are we actually going to give an 'inadequate'? This student works very hard, but the development isn't the progress we would expect, taking into account that the guidance of her mentor was quite intensive. There were almost daily long reflective conversations and intensive coaching. With this student it was especially difficult because we very much hoped that she would succeed, because she worked hard, enjoyed working with the children and really wanted to grow and learn. That makes it incredibly difficult to remain objective and to focus on skills and competencies/ability. For the mentor it's also difficult because a bond has been built up and it almost feels as if their guidance has been insufficient.

What to do? We carefully considered the above issues. Discussions took place between mentor, student and institute-based teacher educator and we decided to take into account the student's performance during previous school placements. We learned that they showed the same pattern; a very energetic start, then a dip and by the end another sprint. In this way, the student was successful in her placement last year with the benefit of the doubt. All these cases have made us decide to assess her teaching as inadequate.

Teacher Educator Story 1 continued...

It has really felt like a dilemma because you have to stay objective and at the same time give someone a positive experience. The golden questions that supported our decision were 'Could we see this student run the class independently in half a year? Does she have sufficient skills to do this in a good way?'

We look back on a constructive process in which we think we've acted carefully, by having a lot of coaching and giving timely feedback. It remains a shame to have to give an inadequate. However, all considerations and taking as many aspects as possible into account led us to the point where it eventually felt like a well-founded decision.



I can relate to ...

Resonance/Dissonance

- What is your initial response?
- How does this story relate to you and your practice as a teacher educator?
- Which parts of the story resonate with you?
- Which parts of the story conflict with your experience?
- What difficult assessment decisions have you had to make?
- Are there strategies that these teacher educators use that you would use?
- Are there other strategies that you use that you would recommend in challenging assessment situations?



When a student-teacher is not making adequate progress, it is one thing to draw up clear points for attention, it is another to enable them to achieve those targets. How do you move from telling a student-teacher what they are not doing, to scaffolding their learning and supporting development of appropriate skills?



Further reading on the challenges faced in making authentic, appropriate and informed assessment decisions

- Aspden, K. M., & McLachlan, C. (2017). A complex act – Teacher educators share their perspectives of practicum assessment. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(3), 21–32. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v22i3.377>
- Tillema, H.H., Smith, K. & Leshem, S. (2011) Dual roles – conflicting purposes: a comparative study on perceptions on assessment in mentoring relations during practicum, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34:2, 139-159. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2010.543672>