

## PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

School districts and their staff are working together to provide the best educational environments for their K-12 students. In this real world of teaching, you will begin to develop your professional self. Principals and teachers view the practicum experiences as your entrance into the profession of teaching. As a practicum student, you need to realize that you are in a real classroom and that as a participant; your actions should always be professional.

While not everything could possibly be included, the following is a partial list of guidelines that beginning professionals are expected to observe:

### Appearance

- Dress appropriately—dressing professionally gives students the signal that you, too, are to be respected as a teacher
- Use good hygiene

### Attendance

- Attend school each day during the hours agreed upon by you and your cooperating teacher. (It is assumed that this will be about 6 hours per day). You may need to come early or stay late on some occasions to assist your teachers.
- If you must be late or absent, call the school and leave a message for your teacher; this should be done with as much advance notice as possible—the teacher may be counting on you to assist that day.

### Relationship with Your Cooperating Teacher

This classroom belongs to your cooperating teacher. S/he may teach or interact in ways that are different than how you would do it. You are a guest of the school. It is up to you to work with the cooperating teacher and to support the learning that goes on in the classroom. If you feel that you are being asked to do something that is harmful to students—you may talk to the classroom teacher, the school principal, or to a WSU course supervisor.

- Take initiative in the classroom, while remaining supportive of student and teacher needs. Let your teacher know what you are comfortable doing and how you would like to help. Involve yourself in the daily activities of the classroom as much as possible.
- Be aware that teachers work hard and may not be able to spend much time with you outside of regular classroom time. However, if you have a concern about a student or your role in the classroom, you should set a specific time to talk to the teacher.
- Communicate daily with your cooperating teacher. Ask what needs to be done. If your teacher is busy, think of a way to help individual students with the assignments or choose one of the activities from Appendix B.
- If you are asked to do something you do not feel prepared to do, let your teacher know you need more time or assistance.

- Be open to different perspectives, to suggestions, to constructive criticism.
- Be responsible—follow through on assigned tasks and actively participate in classroom activities and duties.

### Taking Care of Yourself

- Be sure to take care of yourself—rest, eat well, get exercise, and reserve some time each day for yourself. It is difficult to give your best to others if your own needs are not being met.
- Let your spirit shine—show your joy and enthusiasm for working with youth.

You have worked hard to realize your goal of becoming a teacher...make sure that your teaching experience reflects the kind of professional you want to become.

### Relationships with Students

In working with students, there are some definite Do's and Don'ts. Ask your mentor teacher how to best handle any difficult situations that may arise with individual students.

#### DO

- Be supportive of students while remaining professional.
- Be aware and respectful of the diverse beliefs, values, and perceptions of students from varied families, cultures, and communities
  - Look for and respond to individual differences in student learning styles and needs
  - Check in with individual students to see how they are doing and if they need assistance
  - Give each student a new beginning each day that you work with him/her
  - Ask your mentor teacher for suggestions if you find it difficult to work with a particular student
  - Talk to students and/or the teacher in private when there is a problem; avoid confrontations in front of the class
  - Immediately report any threat a student makes to harm himself or another person to your mentor teacher
  - Immediately report any suspected abuse of or by the student to your mentor teacher

#### DO NOT

- Assume that all students should be responsive to you; three weeks will not be enough time to establish a working relationship with all students
- Assume that a student who does not begin working right away is lazy; check to see if s/he has understood the assignment or needs help getting started
- Assume that students don't care; often pretending not-to-care is a way to save face when work is too confusing or difficult or the student has no history of success in school; do remain positive and supportive of all students
- Try to take on or fix a student's personal problems; refer the student to a teacher, counselor or other trusted adult
- Share personal information or talk about your personal relationships, problems, or situations

These are the circumstances that most frequently arise for future teachers in the 317 practicum and our suggested responses to these situations:

A Student Begins to Share His/Her Personal Life...

- If you are not comfortable with this, simply say, "It sounds like you might want to talk to someone who can help you with this." Help them think of an adult they might talk to (school counselor, a teacher or staff person, a coach, their parents, etc.).
- If you are comfortable or feel you need to listen: Listen, then help the student think of an adult they might talk to (school counselor, a teacher or staff person, a coach, parents...)
- If the problem is simple (how to get homework done) you may use a problem solving model to help them list and explore options
- Use empathy statements ("I can see you are upset. Let's get some help so we can figure out what to do about this") but do not join the student in criticizing himself, his parents or family, his friends, other teachers or staff. Do not promise to fix or solve the problem
- If the student has harmed or threatens to harm himself or another person, you must report it immediately to the classroom teacher before the student leaves the classroom
- If the student has been harmed or abused in any way, you must also report this immediately to your mentor teacher.

A student asks you for a date or asks about your personal relationships...

- Remain professional; set a clear boundary between yourself and the student:  
"Teachers do not date students." Or "That's a personal question and I can't answer it." Keep it simple, clear, and short.
- Use the professional nature of your relationship as a reason. Do not put the student down or blame him/her in any way. Hurting or rejecting the student may only encourage him/her to come back at you.
- Document in your journal the date, time, location of the incident; what the student said; what your response was.
- Let your supervising teacher know what occurred and how you respond Working with Students Who Are Unmotivated or "Just Don't Seem to Care"
- One of the most important things is to talk to the student one-on-one. If you take an accusatory tone ("You are wasting my time and yours") the student will shut you out. You need to approach the student as a supportive mentor ("Is there anything I can do to support you?")
- If the student is still non-responsive do not take it personally. Leaving them with a supportive feeling is the most important thing you can do.

