

# Communicating with Collaborating Teachers

## Course Summaries

Collaborating Teachers (CTs) find the course summaries and letters which course instructors write to be quite useful. They believe that the summaries give them a much better idea of what course instructors are trying to accomplish, what teacher candidates are expected to do or can do in CTs' classrooms, and what CTs can do to help them. Chances are that the Subject Area Leader or course leader for the TE course you are teaching already has a letter format which you can use for this purpose.

### **Here is a list of ideas generated from Collaborating Teachers (CTs) about the most helpful information to include in the letter summary:**

- The sample mixes genres, combining a heading similar to a memo with a familiar first paragraph of the sort that one might see in a letter.
- Use a bold heading
- The address lines should clearly show that it is written for CTs and it is great if it can also show the cluster and schools the summary applies to.
- CTs are more likely to deal with multi-page course summaries if the first page summarizes the whole thing, and the remaining pages provide detail and support.
- CTs are more likely to see and act on the message if the "gist" is in bold, with supporting detail in regular type. Paragraph length, "bullets," and the use of white space also affect this response.
- If the course instructor wants CTs to do something, the instructor can help by providing a checklist or form for doing it.
- Continue to use the terms, "teacher candidates" or "candidates." One virtue of this usage is that it acknowledges entry to our program as a passage into a particular status. Another is that it avoids confusion in labeling MSU students as distinct from school pupils.

## *Sample Course Instructor Letter for CTs #1*

MSU Teacher Preparation Program, Lansing Area Elementary Team (K-8)

**TE 402**, Spring, 200X, Section x

**COURSE SUMMARY FOR COLLABORATING TEACHERS in Cluster A:** [list schools]

**Instructor:** Henrietta Miller. xx Erickson Hall, millerh@pilot.msu.edu, 355- (w), xxx-xx (h)

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Hello. I appreciate your willingness to work with teacher candidates from the TE 402 course; teacher candidates placed in your school will be taking my section of the course. I hope you will feel that you and I both are the candidates' instructors.

In my section of 402, the candidates will be studying strategies for teaching and learning science and social studies. This semester serves as an important transition for them -- during the semester they will be finding out about their internship placements. Now is the time for candidates to prepare for that internship by taking an active role in your classroom and by trying out some teaching and management tasks.

**Schedule and Attendance.** Candidates should be in your classroom on a regular basis (typically two 2-hour visits per week). Please keep a written record of your candidates' attendance and punctuality; let [the cluster leader] or me know immediately if there are any problems. We won't eat the candidate; we will try to impress upon the candidate the importance of keeping appointments and meeting commitments.

**Course-Related Field Assignments.** There are three field assignments for which the candidate will need your help. A summary of these assignments is attached, along with some guidelines for getting started in the science unit plan assignment. When candidates teach the conceptual change unit, we hope you will be able to provide observations and feedback; a form for that is attached.

**Involving the Candidate(s) In Your Classroom.** Beyond the required course assignments, The LAET hopes that you will provide your candidate(s) multiple opportunities to take active, leadership roles in your classroom this semester. Please plan on their presence and encourage them to take responsibility for a variety of tasks. A list of "ideas for ongoing classroom participation" is attached.

**End-of-semester Event.** During exam week (week of date), we would like to invite you to attend an event in which the candidates will present some of their learning this semester. We are trying to find an after-school time that fits the candidates' schedules. We will be in touch with details and hope that you can enrich this experience for the candidates by attending and participating in reacting to their ideas and learning.

Thanks again for working with us this semester. I hope your work with your candidate(s) will be as productive and rewarding for you as it is likely to be for them.

**Attached:** Course-related field assignments; Getting started with the science unit plan; Ideas for ongoing classroom participation; Cooperating teacher feedback form

## *Sample Course Instructor Letter to CTs #2*

MSU Teacher Preparation Program, Lansing Area Elementary Team (K-8)  
TE 402, Spring, 200X, Section x

### **COURSE-RELATED FIELD ASSIGNMENTS**

NOTE: If you have two seniors, they will plan and team teach for these assignments.

**1. Teach a “Science Talk” lesson -- any topic that fits the CT's curriculum.**

**Week of Feb. 10**

A Science Talk is a discussion session of a special kind. The discussion focuses around a question for which there is no easy answer and lots of student ideas. It is especially interesting if the question came from the students. The science talk is a place to encourage wondering and to teach students about ways in which scientists talk and build arguments -- asking questions, developing hypotheses, pointing to a variety of sources of evidence, listening to evidence and theories of others, maintaining a healthy skepticism, developing and changing theories, etc.

**2. Plan and teach a learner-focused, conceptual change science unit.**

**Weeks of March 10, March 17, March 24**

**The unit should include:**

- A Pre-assessment (interviews, pretest, or class discussion/brainstorming)
- Four lessons
- A Post-assessment (interviews or post-test)

**3. Plan and teach a social studies lesson.**

**Week of April 21**

The students will be gathering information and resources for planning a unit that they will teach next year in their internship classroom. We would like them to take one idea they are developing for that larger unit and to try it out in your classroom.

**4. Final Presentations and Transition to the Internship: Sharing Your Learning with Collaborating Teachers and Peers in a Celebratory Setting.**

**Week of April 28: Exact time and location to be announced.**

### *Sample Course Instructor Letter to CTs #3*

MSU Teacher Preparation Program, Lansing Area Elementary Team (K-8)  
TE 402, Spring, 200X, Section x

#### **GETTING STARTED WITH THE SCIENCE UNIT PLAN**

**To get us started in the planning process, you need to meet with your senior(s) to:**

- Discuss the expectations for the unit teaching assignment
- Choose a unit topic that fits the school curriculum and that also is on our class list of unit topics below. If there is not an overlap, the senior should e-mail me immediately so we can start brainstorming about other options.
- Decide on approximate dates for the pre-assessment, the 4 lessons, and the post-assessment (refer to your course schedule for possible dates). If there are scheduling problems, the senior should e-mail me immediately so we can start brainstorming options.
- Give your senior(s) suggestions about resources/materials/equipment available in the school to support the science unit planning and teaching. It is especially important for the senior to get a copy of the curriculum objectives for the unit topic and a copy of any teacher's materials/ teacher's guide.

#### **UNIT TOPICS**

**Floating and sinking** (a great one for lower grades)

**States of Matter** (solids, liquids, gas, exploring water, water cycle, etc.)

**Light and Shadows** (typically lower grades)

**Light and Seeing** (typically upper grades)

**Water in/and Plants**

**Water Shapes the Earth**

**Weather**

NOTE: Most of these topics have State of Michigan Science Objectives and District Curriculum Objectives at multiple grade levels.

### *Sample of Course Instructor Handout for CTs #4*

#### **IDEAS FOR ON-GOING CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION IN TE 40X**

Teach small group or whole group lessons

prepare/read a story or book chapter

plan and teach a get-to-know-you activity

lead singing, finger play

morning routines (attendance, lunch count, calendar)

closing activity

Co-plan lessons with collaborating teacher or intern

Co-teach lessons with collaborating teacher or intern

Help individual and small groups of students

Observe, interact with, and collect written work of one child over time.

Monitor group or seat work

Have students read out loud, practice a skill

Work with computer

Help plan and make arrangements for a field trip

Grade papers with help from CT on what to focus on

Respond to student journals

Prepare bulletin board for curricular area

Observe how children get along

Observe for CT (decide on particular focus ahead of time)

Observe and take notes for another intern or teacher candidate

Prepare questions to discussion with mentor during planning time/lunch/after school

Label materials

Become familiar with curriculum and materials

Assist in getting students to line up

Walk students to lunch, library, buses, etc.

Assist students in getting coats, hats, shoes on.

Collect homework

Observe a lesson, generate questions, discuss after lesson

Interview school staff (e.g., principal, counselors, nurse, computer lab)

Learn about equipment available (A-V, copying, computers)

## *Sample Course Instructor Letter to CTs #5*

MSU Teacher Preparation Program, Lansing Area Elementary Team (K-8)  
TE 40X, Spring, 200X, Section Y

### **COOPERATING TEACHER FEEDBACK FORM**

Student(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Collaborating Teacher \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLABORATING TEACHERS:** Please fill in notes in Sections 1 and 2 as you watch the lesson. Please fill in additional responses to these questions and others after the lesson.

1. Interesting comments, questions, contributions from the students during the lesson:
  
2. Strengths of the lesson (content, activities, active student involvement, management, etc.):
  
3. Comments about preparation and planning for this lesson:
  
4. Comments about timing, pacing, wait time:
  
5. Suggestions for improvement regarding classroom management issues:
  
6. Suggestions for improvement regarding the science content, processes, activities, showing the connectedness and usefulness of the content:
  
7. Other comments, reactions, questions:

*Sample Course Instructor Letter to CTs #6*  
MSU Teacher Preparation Program, Lansing Area Elementary Team (K-8)

**ADVICE TO CTS FOR TE 301, 401, 402**

In most cases, you will be working with a person who, quite understandably, has a student's habits of seeing, hearing, interpreting, and acting. That person needs both opportunities and help to start constructing a teacher's habits of seeing, hearing, interpreting, and acting. These suggestions begin with the first moment that the teacher candidate walks into your classroom to meet you.

**Introduce the teacher candidate to your pupils as Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, a "teacher candidate,"** someone who is preparing to be a teacher and who will be working with you for the next few months.

**Keep the candidate near you, in a teacher's place rather than a student's place,** where you can easily and quickly say something to the candidate, hand the candidate something, ask the candidate something, or tell the candidate to do something. This will help to put the candidate into the role of an apprentice or junior colleague who needs to see, hear, and think like a teacher. This useful interaction can go on even in 10-second snatches.

**Tell and show the candidate what's going on in your mind.** As students, candidates have watched and listened to teachers for thousands of hours. Seldom will they have had any similar opportunity to learn what teachers think about while they are teaching. Show the candidate whatever you have in the way of curriculum and plans. Tell the candidate your immediate goals, or alternatives that you are considering. Let the candidate know when you've done something that you would be proud to repeat, or that you wish you had done another way.

**Ask the candidate to tell you what s/he is reading, discussing, doing in the TE classes.** As you listen to the response, you probably will hear opportunities to help the candidate connect what s/he is studying with what s/he is seeing, hearing, and doing in your class and school.

**Get the candidate involved with students** in small ways. Give the candidate the class list to memorize. Ask the candidate to work with particular students or small groups by tutoring, listening to students' read, studying their work, etc. In this way the candidate can work up to the teaching assignments they will receive in TE 401 and TE 402.

**Give small pieces of your work to the candidate, with supervision.** For example, ask the candidate to help you monitor seatwork, groupwork, labwork, or work in activity centers. Or, ask the candidate to help you respond to students' written work. As you assign such tasks, tell the candidate what you'll be looking for and doing, so that the candidate can try to do likewise.

**Ask the candidate to observe students closely.** Teacher candidates need to build an informed and empathetic idea of the diversity of students in typical classroom. Candidates can do this by keeping an eye on particular students as the semester progresses, working with them regularly, keeping a collection of the students' work, keeping a journal of their interactions with the selected students, etc.

**Ask the candidate to take observation and note-taking breaks.** It can be hard to make sense of what's going on at the same time as you're trying to play (an unfamiliar) part in it. Almost always, candidates will have course assignments that require them to gather information from your class. Ask the candidate to take periodic breaks to observe, reflect, analyze, and write notes.

**Anticipate and arrange opportunities for the candidate to teach, in small chunks.** For TE 401 and TE 402, teacher candidates usually have assignments to plan and teach a short unit, or a sequence of lessons of different types or on different topics. Instructors should send you descriptions of these assignments. You are welcome to comment to the instructor on those assignments. By anticipating these assignments and planning ahead with the teacher candidate, you best can make the assignment work out for you and for your class.

**Share the professional norms of your school.** In every school, the staff more or less shares some ideas about how members of the staff should (and should not) act or interact. These norms are not highly visible to students. You can help the candidate to notice these norms both by giving your own account of them and by arranging opportunities for the candidate to ask other staff members about them.

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES**

### **Take an active interest in the school class:**

- make a map of the classroom--furniture, equipment, supplies;
- learn the students' names;
- prepare questions to discuss with the CT during planning/lunch time or after school;
- observe lessons and ask questions about them;
- survey the curriculum and instructional materials for the class;
- keep a journal or log about their participation in the class.

### **Work with and observe students:**

- observe, interact with, and examine the written work of two or three students over time;
- observe and analyze how students get along with each other and with adults in the classroom, hallways, school grounds;
- help students to practice skills;
- monitor and help students in group work or seat work;
- work with students at computers, in labs, or at activity centers.

### **Take on small parts of the teacher's work, with supervision:**

- complete classroom routines like taking attendance or lunch counts, collecting and distributing papers, etc.;
- respond to student journals;
- grade papers with direction from the CT;
- locate, gather, prepare, label instructional materials;
- prepare or help to prepare a bulletin board;
- help plan and make arrangements for a field trip;
- observe the class to gather data that the collaborating teacher (or intern) wants (decide on a particular focus ahead of time);
- in lower grades, assist students in getting their coats and shoes on, lining up, walking from place to place, etc.

### **With guidance and assistance, teach small group or whole class lessons:**

- develop and lead an opening or closing activity;
- plan and provide a presentation within a lesson;
- in lower grades, prepare and read a story or book chapter, plan and teach a get-to-know-you activity, or lead singing;
- co-plan a lesson with the collaborating teacher or intern;
- co-teach lessons with the collaborating teacher or intern.

### **In TE 401 and TE 402, plan and teach a short unit, series of lessons, or set of lessons**

- the assignment will be given by the TE 401 or TE 402 instructor.
- you can help by consulting with the candidate about the unit and/or lesson plans, and by providing feedback on the lessons when they have been taught.

### **Become acquainted with the school and its staff:**

- visit the school office, and talk with the principal, assistant principal, or secretary;
- visit the school library or media center, talk with the media specialist, and observe students working there;
- visit the teacher's workroom, and learn about the equipment available to teachers in the school;
- read the school's policies on attendance, safety, discipline, referrals to service, contacts with parents, etc.