



Teacher Educator Story 7



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

I am writing as a school-based teacher educator (SBTE) who supervises the student-teachers within my school. In the fifth year of being a SBTE, Debbie, a young student-teacher started with us. Debbie seemed to be eager and interested but lacked confidence and was quite defensive when receiving feedback. Her mentor, an experienced teacher and brilliant mentor, had very specific expectations. These included things such as: going through lesson plans; discussing all taught lessons in mentor meetings; giving written feedback on all lessons; and the student-teacher using their own strategies to improve their practice rather than relying on being given 'the answers'. These are all strategies and ways to help student-teachers progress and be reflective practitioners. This proved very difficult for Debbie. She would often get upset and feel under enormous pressure to complete all the things being asked of her.

In light of these anxieties, the mentor found it really difficult to tackle targets and ways to progress for Debbie and they seemed to hit a stalemate. When the mentor gave Debbie more than one target, she would complain that she was given too much to do and no advice on how to achieve the targets being set. She also objected to the written feedback as she saw it as being formally assessed after each lesson rather than seeing that the notes were intended to be supportive.

From the mentor's point of view, Debbie was moving too slowly and she was frustrated that the same targets seemed to be being set week upon week.

I then stepped in. It was true, Debbie was moving particularly slowly and was deflecting any comments or advice that the mentor was giving because she felt as though the mentor was being unreasonable. Each thing that was offered was declined or an excuse was given as to why she could not take the advice. From the mentor's perspective, Debbie was being stubborn and uncooperative. We agreed between us that a decision had to be made. Debbie was told to take some time to really consider her options and think about how she could approach the rest of her training and be more proactive, (if she wanted to continue).

I suggested a change of mentor.

This really worked. We saw an instant change in Debbie's attitude and approach to her training. She was less obstructive and more proactive in her practice and seemed to respond to (the same) targets with a different and more positive energy. There are still issues such as behaviour and pace of lesson but Debbie has just been graded a 2 where, two months ago, I had doubts that she would finish the course.



Critical incidents

McAteer et al. (2010:107) provide the following helpful prompts to guide reflection on critical incidents:

What was the trigger?

- 'What happened and where and when? Give a brief history of the incident.'
- What is it that has made the incident 'critical'?
- What were your immediate thoughts and responses?
- What are your thoughts now? What has changed/developed your thinking?
- What have you learned about (your) practice from this?
- How might your practice change and develop as a result of this analysis and learning?'

Using these prompts - do you think that this story is about a critical incident? Why/Why not?



Examining the story

A 'critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think differently'.

McAteer et al. (2010:107).

- Read through the story. This stalemate was a critical incident identified by the SBTE that was significant to their professional learning. Identify the triggers that caused the stalemate.
- What options could have been available to overcome the stalemate?
- What other consequences could have arisen from the course of action taken?
- Reflect on your learning from this story and on participating in the activity. Share with the group.



Taking it further

Consider your own practice; does a critical incident come to mind? Try using these prompts to help you to reflect on the critical incident.



Reading

Example Critical Incident Reflections

www.crec.co.uk/literature_138397/BCU - Example Critical Incident Reflection

McAteer, M., Hallett, F., Murtagh, L. & Turnbull, G. (2010) *Achieving your Masters in Teaching and Learning*. Exeter: Learning Matters.