



Teacher Educator Story 4



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

I am an institute-based teacher educator (IBTE), with 10 years of experience in teacher education. When I parked my car on a beautiful day shortly before the summer holidays, at a big secondary school, I didn't know that something unexpected was going to happen that morning. The school-based teacher educator (SBTE) who was coordinating the teacher training within the school, the teacher mentors and I were planning to carry out final assessments of six student teachers. We had prepared for the assessments thoroughly, having read through their school-based evidence, prepared questions and discussed possible marks. There was no reason for us to have concerns about the results. The teacher mentors had given their advice on the feedback and mark the student teacher should get, and I would verify the final assessment, because the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is ultimately accountable. Everything was complete, we would interview the student teachers, and determine the final marks. Then the school-based experience would be over; and the student teachers could concentrate on their academic exams and then enjoy the summer holidays.

The conversations started around a small table with four chairs; one for the SBTE, one for the student teacher, one for the teacher mentor and one for me, the IBTE. The first conversations went as expected. I asked critical questions about the student teachers' professional development around the school-based training competences. The student teachers named their strengths, weaknesses and their learning targets for the new academic year. Personal attention was paid to the well-being of each student teacher, successes were recognized, and reciprocal thanks expressed by student teachers and the colleagues of the school. There were no special details about the sixth student teacher, so I thought the assessments were almost finished. Now I realize that the challenge started at that moment!

The teacher mentor of the sixth student teacher entered the room, with steam coming from his ears! The student teacher joined us. The teacher mentor was given the floor and he spoke the disquieting words: 'This student teacher will not pass'. Everyone was shocked, what had happened, what had changed? The first assessment seemed positive, and now this? The teacher mentor explained that the student teacher should have gone on a school trip the day before and had cancelled at the last minute. This unprofessional attitude of the student teacher had led to a complicated organizational problem for the other supervisors of the group.



Part 1

- Discuss together. What is the problem? What is your impression? What are your first thoughts?
- Identify with the IBTE. What would you do in his/her shoes?
- Read the second part of the story and compare your solution with what happened.
- What are the similarities?
- How does it differ?
- Would the strategy used be a strategy you could use too?



Part 2

I knew immediately that this couldn't be a reason to give an inadequate assessment, as the student teacher is only learning. The teacher mentor was very angry, and actually he had a point. The student teacher had tears in his eyes.

The SBTE looked at me uncomfortably and let me have the floor. I straightened my back and immediately decided to address the student teacher on his responsibility: 'Is this correct, do you understand that this is very annoying for your colleagues, what happened?' The story was right; due to a delay in traffic the student teacher couldn't have got to school on time and he made the choice, whilst he was driving, to step down, while his colleagues and pupils were already waiting for him. And yes, he understood that it was very annoying for colleagues and he understood the anger of the teacher mentor, but he had no idea how he could solve this now.

Honestly, me neither. Firstly, I wanted to get the atmosphere in the conversation back in the right direction as quickly as possible. I took the decision to proceed directly to the business of the assessment process, discussing the competences with the completed assessment form before us, until we were at the last standard, including teamwork. That gave some breathing space for people to calm down, I hoped. During the discussion of some of the earlier competences, something special happened. The student teacher said that he was football coach of a youth team. He considered his classes as his team, in which each pupil had his own role. He taught the pupils to accept each other's roles and to work together for their learning. He didn't have problems with behaviour management, he was popular with pupils and colleagues, and his pupils had good results. He was very consistent in his practice. His vision was that he never wanted to exclude a pupil. He didn't do that in his football team either, every player is needed to achieve the best result. The integrity and the outspoken vision that permeated his story were disarming.

The SBTE nodded approvingly, and I saw a solution. Everyone would benefit from a quick conclusion of the conversation. I briefly summarized the issues: the unexpected and unwelcome behaviour of the student teacher; his successes; his vision; and the irritation that he'd caused to his colleagues. I proposed, in my role as IBTE and moderator, that during the period until the summer holidays the student teacher could participate twice more with colleagues at the school, to evidence working together with them for the competency. He would carry out a number of directed tasks in consultation with his teacher mentor. As moderator, I would consider the recorded evidence following those activities and the conclusions of the current conversation and I would agree a final grade. Everyone took a sigh of relief and agreed. We shook hands and wished each other a good holiday. On the way to my car, the student teacher caught up with me. The only thing he said was: 'Do you know how alone I felt yesterday?' He wiped his eyes, 'but I'm going to fix it, I'm going to work very hard these last days'. In the end, the period of school-based experience was passed.

My challenge was to lead the assessment conversation professionally, to stand up for the student teacher, and in the meantime not to let down the colleagues from the school and achieve a fair assessment grade. Unexpectedly, the input from the student teacher gave me the opportunity to 'bend' the conversation. What I learnt was always keep listening carefully, taking into account unexpected situations and, if necessary, vigorously take control in a conversation if it goes the wrong way. In addition, I've realized that an IBTE could be a coach of a team of student teachers. Now I regularly discuss this idea in meetings with colleagues inside and outside the institute.



- What do you like about the IBTE actions?
- Have you had a comparable experience?
- What did you do?