

Steps to Resolving Conflicts for Interns and Mentor Teachers

First, a note about conflicts: Conflicts in life and particularly, in close working relationships, are inevitable, like change, the sunrise in the morning, and the blues in February. Running into difficulties with each other does not mean you have failed or that the placement is falling apart (at least not usually); it just means you need to talk. Interns and teachers are often reluctant to say difficult things to each other because you have to spend every day with each other; you don't want to ruffle any feathers. But things not said tend to fester and cause more problems in the end. So, if you find you have something you need to get off your chest, take a deep breath and try some of the following ideas. If the two of you find that you cannot resolve things between you, take the next step to ask for help.

1. Step One: Direct communication between intern and mentor teacher.
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Getting prepared:

Get clear about the issue - you might try writing about it or talking it over with the MSU field instructor in your building. For example, is the problem that the intern cannot control the class or that he is not doing enough planning and preparation and is causing himself management problems?

Try phrasing it in a non-threatening, non-blaming way. For example, try "you seem to be having trouble estimating the amount of time things will take," rather than "you are taking too long."

Think about some possible solutions or ways of proceeding that you might propose but remain open to possibilities that the other person might propose.

Practice in front of a mirror to be sure your facial expressions and tone of voice will not look or sound threatening or aggressive.

The conversation:

Use statements that express what you observe, or what you feel, or what you think you need rather than statements that blame the other person for something.

Check your understanding of what each other is saying by paraphrasing what the other person says and asking, "Is this what you mean?"

If the issue causes a strong emotional reaction in the other person, offer to let them think about it overnight and talk about it more tomorrow.

Try to find a solution that works for both of you.

Documentation:

Each of you should write a paragraph explaining what you think the conversation was about and the solution you agreed to. Compare notes to be sure you both have the same understanding. Exchange paragraphs.

Check In:

Plan to check in with each other the following week about this issue. How does each of you feel things are going?

Step Two: Ask for help.

If you cannot find a resolution or if the conversation becomes too emotional for you to handle, ask the MSU field instructor to help mediate the conflict.

Getting prepared:

Each of you (intern and mentor teacher) should write a reflection prior to the meeting, outlining what you think the issue is. Also, write about your goals for the students in your classroom and how they relate to the issue. Include possible solutions (but remain open to other possible solutions).

The meeting:

The MSU field instructor may ask someone else to be at the meeting as appropriate (principal, team coordinator).

Again, use statements that express what you observe, or what you feel, or what you think you need rather than statements that blame the other person for something. Check your understanding of what each other is saying by paraphrasing what the other person says and asking, "Is this what you mean?"

Try to find a solution that works for both of you.

Documentation:

Develop a written plan that you all agree to.

Check In:

Plan a time to check in about this issue in a week or two.

Step Three: Ask for more help.

If the conflict continues, the MSU field instructor will consult with the Team Coordinator to develop an appropriate plan of action. Every effort will be made to resolve the conflict and maintain the placement, however, if a conflict escalates and appears to be unresolvable after several attempts, it may be necessary to remove the intern from the placement.