

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS
GUIDE FOR TCs
*Using observation, communication, and information
to get to know students as individuals*



This guide provides you with some concrete steps you can take to learn more about your students as individuals at the start of the school year. Note that you will often have to actively seek out opportunities and information yourself; placements do not necessarily provide these opportunities for you.

Observation:

- Listen to the sounds of your school. When you are outside the classroom in the hallway, schoolyard, or cafeteria: What do you hear? Are the sounds subdued, relaxed, and calm? Are the sounds lively? Is there laughter, or do you hear what might be aggression in some students' voices? How are the sounds changing over the course of the day, over the course of the week?
- Take time to observe students outside the classroom. Which students stand together, and how do they interact? Which students are on their own? Why do you think this is the case? How do adults and students interact? Do you see patterns? Is there something that surprises you? What can you learn from these observations?
- Observe how your mentor and other teachers greet their students when they come to class. What do you notice?
- Examine artifacts (e.g., on bulletin boards, in the hallway) of how students express who they are. You may find photos, poems, or drawings from students displayed.

Communication:

- Try to connect with your students often via eye contact and a smile. (However, be sensitive to the fact that not all cultures appreciate or even allow for as much eye contact as is custom in the United States.)
- In most schools, it is customary to greet students at the door when they come to class. You may prepare greetings and questions for your students.
- Make sure you check in with different students each day (keep a tally).
- Seek to become a "real person" in students' eyes. Laugh at yourself, share a bit of yourself with students.
- Be available to "just talk" and demonstrate that you are approachable by greeting students in the hallway and sharing when you are available for drop-in conversations.
- Introduce yourself to your classes: Work with your mentor to decide how you want to refer to each other and define your roles with students, and identify ~5 minutes in each class for introductions during the first days of school. Prepare a slide or two

with pictures that help tell about yourself, your interests, and what brought you into teaching your subject.

- Quickly learn your students' names with correct pronunciations. Teachers often use strategies like the following to do so:
 - Drawing seating charts with their names
 - Taking photos and adding students' names, or working from a school-generated photosheet
 - Addressing students with their names as often as possible—this may feel awkward, but it solidifies your memory and makes an impression on students when you address them personally
- When your mentor prepares a letter or email to be sent out to students' parents and caregivers, ask if you may write and include a brief introduction of yourself.

Information:

- Ask your mentor teacher about:
 - IEPs and ELL recommendations and other assistance for students
 - Students' medical conditions and other issues you should be aware of
 - Resources and help available for students
- Start connecting with specialists and other teachers—aim to seek out at least one other colleague or staff member per week. (See the brief on *Connecting with Colleagues* for tips.)
- Ask yourself what you know (and do not know) about the cultural backgrounds of your students. Doing some research on the countries and regions your students come from may be eye-opening (especially if they are new to the area).

For next year:

Finally, we recommend that you collect artifacts (photos, materials, notes) that will remind you of activities that helped you connect with students and create a sense of community. These will be helpful references for what you could do at the beginning of the next school year, when you start out in your own classroom.