

Many practicum partners find scaling questions to be a useful strategy for reflection and problem solving when discussing a teaching experience with a teacher candidate. Scaling questions give ownership of the reflection and planning process to the teacher candidate by asking the teacher candidate to identify what worked in their lesson and possible areas of improvement and next steps. The strategy follows a rather simple template. First, the practicum partner, in your case, the Associate Teacher or Mentor Teacher, asks the teacher candidate to rate their lesson on a scale of 1 to 10.

You might say something like this:

“On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worse lesson you ever taught, and 10 being a perfect lesson, how would you rate today’s lesson?”

It really doesn’t matter what number the teacher candidate rates their lesson or whether you agree with their rating. Whether a teacher candidate rates their lesson a 5 or a 9 is not as important as what comes next.

Let’s say that the teacher candidate rates his or her lesson a 7.

You would then ask the teacher candidate, “What made it a seven?”

This encourages the teacher candidate to focus on the parts of the lesson he or she feels went well. All too often teacher candidates immediately focus on what didn’t work in their lesson. It is important for teacher candidates to identify the strengths in their planning and teaching. While you listen attentively to your teacher candidate’s reflection, you could use paraphrasing and probing questions to help the TC articulate their rationale. From here, you would then ask: “What will you do next time to bump your lesson up a notch from a 7 to an 8?” We want to encourage small steps forward. Focusing on improving teacher candidate planning and performance from a 7 to an 8 rather than a 10 is less overwhelming and encourages the teacher candidate to focus on one skill at a time. Further, when we ask the teacher candidate to identify the plan for improvement, complete ownership of this learning process resides with them. Should their plan for improvement not work, they cannot blame some one else. They can’t say, “My Mentor Teacher’s suggestion didn’t work.” Rather, they are forced to reflect upon the lesson again, and come up with a different plan.

Asking scaling questions is paradigm shift for many. Rather than the Mentor Teacher taking on the consultant role, evaluating the teacher candidate's performance and offering suggestions for improvement, the Mentor Teacher simply coaches the teacher candidate through the reflection and planning process. Even if the teacher candidate rates their lesson a perfect 10, you can still continue with this process by asking the teacher candidate to identify what made it a 10. For next steps, you would ask the TC to consider what could be done differently to make it a 10+ or how they might differentiate the lesson to meet different learners' needs. Based on the teacher candidate's response, you would then decide if you would stay in a coaching stance or shift to a consultant stance.