

SATISFACTION WITH AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION STUDENT TEACHING

Curtis Borne
Fort Valley State College
Jeffrey W. Moss
University of Illinois

Student teaching refers to the period of time when college students gradually take over the duties and responsibilities of cooperating public school teachers. During this time, student teachers attempt to apply the theories and methods learned in education courses. According to Andrews (1964), "This application of theory in the real world (classroom) helps the student teacher to begin to develop a teaching style" (p. 9).

A theoretical basis for student teaching was suggested by Mead more than 50 years ago. According to Mead (1930), "Knowledge is not power until it is applied; before the application is made, it is only potentiality. Facts, principles, theories are useless unless applied to situations to which they are relevant" (p. 4). For a person preparing to teach, the most relevant experience is contact with real teaching.

A wide variety of coordinating procedures and length of time required for student teaching in agricultural education has always existed. Hutchinson (1961) found in a national study that student teaching in agricultural education ranged from 3 to 18 weeks. Twenty years later, Kirts and Claycomb (1981) found that the range was 6 to 18 weeks. There is also a lack of consistency as to the minimum number of visits made by the university supervisor during student teaching. A minimum of three visits is recommended in the Standards for Quality Vocational Programs in Agricultural/ Agribusiness Education, yet Kirts and Claycomb (1981) found that 25% of the university supervisors made less than three visits.

Although there are variations in methods of supervision and the length of student teaching, "proponents and critics alike generally accept student teaching as the most important phase of teacher education, yet limited research has been done to actually measure the effectiveness of student teaching" (Cruickshank and Armaline, 1986, p. 35). Public and private organizations such as The Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum recognize discrepancies in the quality of student teaching throughout the various states and see the improvement of student teaching as one of the most direct ways of improving the quality of teacher preparation. Studies of the effectiveness of student teaching can be used to provide constructive experiences during this critical phase of teacher preparation.

Purpose and Objectives

The purposes of this study were to describe student teaching practices in agricultural education and to determine satisfaction with student teaching. The objectives were as follows:

1. To describe student teaching in agricultural education in the Southern Region of the United States.
2. To determine the effectiveness of supervision, coursework, and facilities used during student teaching.
3. To determine satisfaction with selected components of the student teaching experience.

Procedures

Three target populations were identified as desirable sources of information for accomplishing the objectives of the study. The populations were comprised of individuals directly involved in agricultural education student teaching programs in the Fall of 1984, and Spring of 1985. The student teaching programs were in institutions in the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture (AATEA) Southern Region of the United States. The accessible populations consisted of 117 first year teachers employed during the 85-86 school year, 157 cooperating classroom teachers with whom the agricultural education student teachers were placed (some of the student teachers were placed in multiple teacher departments and supervised by more than one cooperating classroom teacher) and 58 university personnel who supervised the student teachers involved in this study.

Researcher-developed questionnaires were used to collect the data. Information on the structure of the student teaching experience and its effectiveness was collected from all three groups. Since each group represented a population, inferential statistics were not used. It was established a priori that a difference of one point on the five point Likert-type scales would be used to detect differences in opinions among the populations. Content validity was established by a panel of experts and the instruments were pilot-tested to check for reliability. Reliability as measured by Cronbach Alpha ranged from .84 to .96 for the scales measuring satisfaction with student teaching.

Each population was sent the appropriate questionnaire through the mail. Fifty-nine of the 117 (50.4%) first year teachers responded after two mailings. A random sample of 30 (50%) non respondents was telephoned and asked selected questions from the instrument. Responses to randomly selected questions from the first year teachers were not significantly different from those responding by mail.

Fifty-two of the 58 (89%) university supervisors completed the questionnaire and 112 of the 157 (71%) cooperating classroom teachers responded after two mailings. A random sample of 12 (25%) cooperating classroom teachers was contacted by phone and administered the full questionnaire. Significant differences in phone vs. mail responses were found for 6 of the 19 items. The phone results were not included in the data analysis and limits to the generalizability of the responses from the classroom teachers should be noted.

Results

The length of student teaching for the first year graduates ranged from 6 to 18 weeks. The median length of student teaching completed was 8 weeks with a mean of 9.4 weeks and standard deviation of 2.4 weeks. Eighty percent of the respondents completed less than 12 weeks of student teaching. Eighty-nine percent of the students taught all day and 11% of the students taught for a half day only. Opinions from the first year graduates as to how long student teaching should last ranged from 6 to 36 weeks with a mean of 12.8 weeks. University supervisors indicated student teaching should last approximately 11 weeks ($\bar{m} = 10.86$) and cooperating classroom teachers indicated student teaching should last 12 weeks.

Perceptions from all three groups regarding the length of student teaching are shown in Table 1. Responses are divided for groups where student teaching was less than 12 weeks versus 12 or more weeks. Regardless of the length of student teaching, a majority of the respondents indicated that the length was about right.

The largest percentage of respondents (42.6%) indicating that the time spent in student teaching was too short was in the group of first year teachers who student taught for less than 12 weeks. Cooperating classroom teachers working with student teachers less than twelve weeks were in close agreement with the opinions of their student teachers. Thirty-nine percent of the cooperating classroom teachers thought the time was too short.

The number of reported university supervisor visits ranged from 1 to 19 visits with a mean of 3.3 visits. University supervisors indicated they made 2 to 8 visits to the student teaching site (mean = 3.5) and cooperating classroom teachers indicated that the university supervisor visited from 1 to 7 times with a mean of 3.0 visits. Collectively, considering the responses from the three groups, the average number of visits made by the university supervisors fell between 3.0 to 3.5 visits.

Effectiveness of Supervision, Coursework and Facilities: The overall effectiveness of five selected components of student teaching was rated moderately high as shown in Table 2. The lowest rating (mean = 2.95) was given by first year teachers concerning the effectiveness of general education courses in preparation for student teaching. The highest rating (mean = 4.46) was given by first year teachers concerning overall effectiveness of the cooperating classroom teachers used during student teaching.

The university supervisors and cooperating classroom teachers rated each others effectiveness moderately high. All three groups rated the adequacy of the facilities used during student teaching moderately high.

Table 1
Agreement with Length of Student Teaching by Groups

Group	Length of Student Teaching			
	< 12 weeks		> 12 weeks	
	N	%	N	%
First year teacher				
Too short	20	42.6 ^a	3	25
About right	26	55.3	9	75
Too long	1	2.1	0	0
University supervisors				
Too short	8	20.5	1	7.7
About right	30	76.9	10	76.9
Too long	1	2.6	2	15.4
Cooperating classroom teachers				
Too short	29	39.2	2	5.4
About right	45	60.8	32	86.5
Too long	0	0	3	8.1

^aPercent of those student teaching less than 12 weeks.

Table 2
Effectiveness of Selected Components of Student Teaching

Component	First Year Teachers	Univ. Super.	Coop. Teachers
	Mean SD (N = 59)	Mean SD (N = 52)	Mean SD (N = 112)
Effectiveness of university supervision	3.66 1.20	-- ^a	3.93 0.81
Effectiveness of cooperating teacher(s)	4.46 1.02	4.08 0.62	-- --
Effectiveness of educ. courses in preparation for stud. teaching	2.95 1.24	--	--
Effectiveness of tech. ag courses in preparation for stud. teaching	3.92 0.97	--	--
Adequacy of facilities of depts. used for student teaching	4.15 0.83	3.92 0.68	4.14 0.72
Total	3.83 0.65	4.00 0.50	4.04 0.63

Note. Means based on scale of 1 = low and 5 = high.

^aNot asked of this group.

Satisfaction with the Student Teaching Experience: First year teachers, university supervisors and cooperating classroom teachers were generally pleased with the student teaching experience as shown in Table 3. First year teachers agreed most strongly that student teaching was a positive experience and disagreed most strongly that student teachers learn very little from student teaching. All three groups agreed that student teaching was the most valuable component of the teacher education program and disagreed with the statements, student teachers' work loads are too heavy and student teachers learn very little from student teaching.

Table 3
Level of Agreement with Statements Pertaining to Student Teaching

Comments	First Year Teachers	Univ. Super.	Coop. Teachers
	Mean SD (N = 58)	Mean SD (N = 52)	Mean SD (N = 110)
Student teaching was a positive experience	4.37 0.93	4.36 0.63	4.32 0.65
I was pleased with student teaching experience	4.36 0.91	4.29 0.64	4.17 0.54
Stud. teaching is most valuable component of teacher education program	4.31 0.90	4.42 0.80	4.47 0.81
Student teaching experiences encourage stud. teachers to become teachers	3.73 0.83	4.10 0.69	3.95 0.86
Student teachers were encouraged to try variety of teaching methods by coop classroom teachers	3.53 1.12	3.52 0.96	4.22 0.61
Student teaching is a realistic example of teaching	3.50 1.06	3.94 0.67	4.08 0.97
Student teachers' work loads are too heavy	2.25 1.01	2.25 0.79	2.06 0.75
Student teachers learn very little from student teaching	1.45 0.84	1.40 0.77	1.30 0.80
Total	4.01 0.63	4.12 0.38	4.23 0.41

Note. Means based on scale of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Scale for last two items were reversed to calculate total.

University Supervision: Respondents generally agreed with the statements assessing the quality of university supervision during student teaching as indicated in Table 4. First year teachers and cooperating classroom teachers agreed that the university supervisors used constructive criticism when discussing the student teachers' work. All three groups agreed with the statement, the university supervisor(s) visited the student teaching centers often enough. First year graduates indicated that they were at ease when the university supervisor visited, however, the university supervisors and cooperating classroom teachers were undecided about this statement.

Cooperating Classroom Supervision: First year teachers and university supervisors would recommend their cooperating classroom teachers to other student teachers and felt they kept the lines of communication open with the student teachers as reported in Table 5. Both groups disagreed with the statement, the cooperating classroom teachers interfered with student teachers' control of the class, and were undecided about requiring cooperating classroom teachers to take a course on the supervision of student teachers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a lack of uniformity of student teaching experiences among states in the southern region. Variations in the length of student teaching ranged from 6 to 18 weeks and the number of reported university supervisory visits varied from 1 to 19 visits. Most student teaching experiences last for less than 12 weeks and approximately 40% of the students feel this time is too short. A majority feel the length of student teaching is about right. Regardless of the length of student teaching, the participants were generally satisfied with the length of the student teaching experience.

The overall effectiveness of the university supervision of student teachers is adequate. The researchers recommend that the university supervisor visit the student teacher at least 3 times during the student teaching experience. In this study, university supervisors had visited their student teachers an average of 3 times which was judged as adequate. The overall effectiveness of the

Table 4
Level of Agreement with Statements Pertaining to the University Supervisor

Comments	First Year Teachers	Univ. Super.	Coop. Teachers
	Mean SD (N = 59)	Mean SD (N = 52)	Mean SD (N = 110)
The univ. super.(s) used constructive criticism when discussing the student teachers work	4.09 0.79	-- ^a	4.16 0.70
Student teachers had time to discuss their teaching problems with the university supervisor	3.97 0.98	--	4.16 0.65
The univ. supervisor(s) were a real help to the student teachers	3.83 1.10	--	4.10 0.70
The length of the university supervisor(s) observation was sufficient for evaluating stud. teachers	3.80 1.10	4.04 0.59	3.86 0.97
The university supervisor(s) visited the student teaching centers often enough	3.78 1.08	3.73 0.91	3.81 1.00
The university supervisor(s) conferences were a real help to the student teachers	3.71 1.05	--	4.07 0.73
The student teachers were at ease when the university supervisor(s) observed them	3.61 1.00	3.40 0.91	3.25 0.96
Total	3.83 0.85	3.72 0.61	3.91 0.53

Note. Means based on scale of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Scale for last two items were reversed to calculate total.

^aNot asked of this group.

Table 5
Level of Agreement with Statements Pertaining to the Cooperating Classroom Teachers

Statement	First Year Teachers	Univ. Super.
	Mean SD (N = 59)	Mean SD (N = 49)
The cooperating classroom teacher(s) used should be recommended to other student teachers	4.41 0.97	3.90 0.82
The cooperating classroom teacher(s) kept the line of communication open with the student teachers	4.32 0.99	4.02 0.46
Cooperating classroom teacher(s) should be required to take a course on supervision of student teachers	2.71 1.34	3.44 1.21
The cooperating classroom teacher(s) interfered with student teachers' control of the class	1.63 0.83	2.00 0.85

Note. Means based on scale of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

cooperating classroom teachers used during student teaching is adequate. It is recommended that the cooperating classroom teachers used for the 1984-85 student teaching experience in the southern region continue to be used for student teaching.

In general, the effectiveness of the components of the student teaching experience were rated moderately high. It is recommended that this study be replicated in other AATEA regions to determine perceived effectiveness of student teaching.

References

- Andrews, L. O. (1964). Student Teaching. New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education.
- Cruickshank, D. & Armaline, W. (1986). Field experiences in teacher education: considerations and recommendations. The Journal of AATEA, 37(3), 34-40.
- Hutchinson, J. H. (1961). A study of the participating experiences of student teachers of vocational agriculture. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University.
- Kirts, C. & Claycomb, D. (1981). Student teaching management in agricultural education: a national study. The Journal of AATEA, 22(1), 41-47.
- Mead, A. R. (1980). Supervised student teaching. Richmond: Johnson Publishing Company.