

# Selection of Student Teaching Centers and Cooperating Teachers in Agriculture and Expectations of Teacher Educators Regarding These Components of a Teacher Education Program: A National Study

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The student teaching experience serves as a culmination of the teacher education process. It is a time for individuals preparing for a career in education to apply the theories and methods that they have studied during their teacher preparation program. The student teaching center and the supervising (cooperating) teacher are the most important ingredients in the student teaching experience. These components are essential if student teaching is to be a meaningful activity. Kuehl (1984) stated that: "Student teaching is a complex learning experience that requires careful supervision. Cooperating teachers must create a sustaining environment that will facilitate maximum development of student teachers" (p. 2). However, this may not always be the case. Kuehl warned, "Despite its importance, there is no assurance that student teaching is a carefully controlled and supervised experience" (p. 1).

Much has been written about the roles that the student teaching center and the supervising teacher play in the development of the student teacher. Roe, Ross and Burns (1984) described student teaching as a time which should be spent: developing appropriate relationships with a variety of people—students, college supervisors, cooperating teachers, other school personnel, student teachers and parents.

The following sections provide a synopsis of some of the literature concerning the criteria which might be examined during the process of selecting supervising (cooperating) teachers and student teaching centers.

## Review of Literature

Supervising (Cooperating) Teacher Qualities: The most commonly mentioned qualities that supervising (cooperating) teachers are to: (a) possess a willingness to devote time each day to the student teacher, (b) display a demonstrated interest in professional improvement—professional activities, summer school, workshops, etc., (c) have the ability to motivate students, as evidenced by high enrollment levels and successful membership and participation in the FFA, (d) display a basic understanding of university goals for teacher education, (e) be well-organized and meet report deadlines, and (f) have a personal philosophy of teacher education that is well thought out and relevant (Priebe, Owen, & Luft, 1986; Sparks, 1987).

Student Teacher Center Qualities: Those involved in teacher education tend to agree on many of the qualities considered necessary in successful student teaching centers. The following are characteristics commonly observed to determine successful student teaching centers: (a) quality Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, (b) extent and nature of on-site instruction, (c) percent of students completing the program and employed in a related field, (d) physical facilities and condition of equipment, (e) content and organization of instructional materials, (f) balance of curriculum offered, and (g) adult programs, SAEP, and FFA are all parts of the total program (Priebe, Owen, & Luft, 1986).

Duties such as obtaining housing for the student teacher, preparing classes for arrival of the student teacher, daily counselling of the student teacher, orientation of the student teacher to the school and administrative policies, and other activities were suggested as roles of the supervising teacher (Abel, Ansel, Hauwiller, & Sparapani, 1986; Kuehl, 1984; Niemeyer, & Moon, 1987; Priebe, Owen, & Luft, 1986; Sparks, 1987). However, are supervising teachers fulfilling the expectations of the teacher educators? One of the most important aspects of the supervising teacher's role is counseling and guiding the student teacher, yet Abel, Ansel, Hauwiller and Sparapani (1986) stated: "cooperating teachers usually gave student teachers considerable feedback on content, but very little feedback about methodology...feedback which was often casual and haphazard in that the cooperating teacher seldom conducted formal conferencing" (p. 5).

If this is true, why does this situation exist? Ekpunobi (1986) stated "It could be that the official goals of practice teaching are different from what participants in the programme construe as the operative goals" (p. 5). Deeds, Arrington, and Flowers (1988) reported that 41% of the cooperating teachers whom they surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed that they should observe the student teacher teach every day and that 39% felt that they should not review every teaching plan prior to its use by the student teacher. Surely this suggests conflicts among perceptions of the role of the cooperating teacher.

How are student teaching centers and cooperating teachers selected in agricultural education? A study conducted by Borne and Moss (1988) stated that student teaching experiences among states in the southern region lacked uniformity in the manner in which they were conducted. Could one set of criteria be posed? Are student teaching centers and supervising teachers fulfilling the expectations of the teacher educators involved in teacher preparation across the nation? This study will attempt to answer these questions.

### Purposes and Objectives

The purposes were to compare the actual characteristics of student teaching centers and cooperating teachers in agricultural education programs nationwide with the ideal characteristics, and to compare the actual roles of the student teaching center and the supervising (cooperating) teacher with teacher educators' expectations of those roles. Specific objectives were:

1. Determine the (ideal) characteristics, duties, and qualities of supervising (cooperating) teachers and student teaching centers and university teacher education programs as perceived by "head" teacher educators at each institution.
2. Determine the criteria and procedures actually being used by institutions to select student teaching centers (schools) and supervising (cooperating) teachers.
3. Compare the ideal characteristics, duties, and qualities of supervising (cooperating) teachers, student teaching centers, and university teacher education programs identified by teacher educators with those actually being used by institutions to select student teaching centers and cooperating teachers.

### Procedures

A survey containing questions related to four areas of a teacher education program in agriculture was mailed to each institution with a program of teacher education in agriculture. The population consisted of all head teacher educators in the United States. Responses were grouped into three categories based on the type of institution represented by the respondent: 1862 Land Grant Institutions ( $n = 50, 59.5\%$ ), 1890 Land Grant Institutions ( $n = 6, 7.2\%$ ), and State Universities ( $n = 28, 33.3\%$ ). Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences between the responses of the groups ( $p < .05$ ).

The instrument was developed by the researchers based on their review of literature; it measured teacher educators' perceptions concerning characteristics of supervising teachers, student teaching centers, duties of supervising teachers, and responsibilities of institutions placing student teachers. A five point Likert-type scale was used to measure teacher educator perceptions of the ideal situation and the level at which the institutions were meeting these ideals. Also, several fill-in-the blank questions were used to measure teacher perceptions of minimum requirements for various portions of a student teaching program.

After two mailings and a telephone follow-up of non-respondents, a 91% return rate (84/92) was achieved. Mean scores was calculated for each question pertaining to teacher education programs to determine the average perception of teacher educators toward an ideal and toward the actual level of that characteristic being achieved by the institution. For rated items, a correlated  $t$ -test was employed to determine if statistical differences existed between teacher educators' perceptions of the ideal and the actual level of performance that they reported for institutions. Concerning statistical significance, an a priori alpha level of  $p < .05$  was established. If an item was open-ended, then the mean score for the ideal number of SAE visits, weeks of student teaching, etc., was reported. The ideal was a rating of 1-5 to indicate the degree to which each program was achieving the ideal. The  $r$  value in this instance represents the relationship between the ideal and the actual.

## Results

The researchers were able to arrive at suggested criteria for four components of a teacher education program in agriculture.

Characteristics of Supervising (Cooperating) Teachers: Table 1 summarizes teachers educators' responses concerning the characteristics which supervising (cooperating) teachers should possess. Also, this table indicates the level at which the institutions met the teacher educators' expectations of supervising teachers.

Table 1  
Relationship Between Teacher Educator's Perceptions Concerning "Ideal" Personal Characteristics of Supervising (Cooperating) Teachers and Actual Practice by the Institution

Supervising Teacher should:	Perceptions		Actual Practice		t	r
	n	Mean	n	Mean		
practice good student management skills in both the classroom and lab	78	4.83	77	4.04	8.69*	.13
display continual professional growth	78	4.67	77	4.03	5.67*	.11
practice good housekeeping in classroom and lab	78	4.47	77	3.68	7.54*	.02
have state staff approval	72	4.32	71	4.00	3.00*	.70
dress in and exemplary manner as a role model	78	4.31	77	3.66	6.19*	.20
have teaching style observed by university	78	4.22	77	3.43	6.17*	.41
be compensated (monetarily)	71	4.16	70	3.89	1.94	.65
have Master's degree	78	4.10	76	3.84	2.19**	.51
identified as an opinion leader	77	3.87	76	3.61	3.57*	.52
be graduate of institution placing student teacher	78	2.87	76	3.35	-3.73*	.36
have ___ years teaching experience in the school system	78	3.27	74	4.46		-.25
have minimum of ___ years total teaching experience	78	4.22	73	4.49		-.25
be on a ___ month contract	76	11.46	72	4.13		.08
conduct at least ___ SAEP visits/year	76	3.13	73	3.48		.12

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ .

Teacher educators believed that the ideal supervising teacher should (a) have a master's degree, (b) be identified as an opinion leader by other teachers, (c) have displayed continual professional growth through participation in workshops and technical courses, (d) have taught in the local school 3 years, and (e) have a minimum of 5 years total teaching experience. Concerning personal qualities of an ideal supervising teacher, the respondents indicated that prior to being awarded student teachers, the supervising (cooperating) teacher's teaching style should be observed and approved by a university official, and that these teachers should be exemplary in their dress, practice good housekeeping in the classroom and laboratory, and be an outstanding manager of students. Finally, teacher educators indicated that supervising teachers should be on 11.5 month contracts (minimum), be conducting at least 3 SAEP visits per student each year, have the approval of the state staff connected with agricultural education, and be compensated (monetarily) for supervision of student teachers.

Upon examining the relationship between teacher educators responses and the level of actual practice by the institution, one will note that with but one exception, teacher educators had higher expectations concerning the characteristics of supervising teachers than was the actual practice in the institutions for which they worked. The only instance in which actual practices exceeded the teacher educators' expectations resulted from teachers being a graduate of the institution. Teacher educators did not feel that supervising teachers needed to be graduates of the program which was placing student teachers, but indicated that this occurred frequently.

**Duties of Supervising (Cooperating) Teachers:** Table 2 summarizes the responses of teacher educators concerning the duties which a supervising (cooperating) teacher should possess, as well as the relationship between these responses and the actual level of adherence by institutions.

**Table 2**  
**Relationship Between Teacher Educator's Perceptions Concerning "Ideal" Duties of Supervising (Cooperating) Teachers and Actual Practice by the Institution**

Supervising Teacher should:	Perceptions		Actual Practice		t	r
	n	Mean	n	Mean		
meet with student teacher before first day of class	78	4.81	76	4.63	2.41**	.57
observe student teachers teach once per day	78	4.58	77	4.03	7.04*	.56
be required to attend a special course or workshop	78	4.50	76	3.79	5.68	.48
approve all lesson plans prior to use	78	4.45	75	3.79	7.43*	.42
set aside a formal time to critique and counsel student teacher each day	76	4.42	76	3.34	9.92*	.44
aid in helping student teacher find housing	78	4.04	76	6.54	6.37*	.62
handle major discipline problems	78	3.94	75	3.93	0.48	.81
require the student teacher to observe ___ days prior to teaching	76	4.45	75	4.05		-.02
require student teachers to teach at least ___ adult/young farmer class/es	73	1.03	66	2.76		.12
be responsible for determining ___ % of student teacher's grade	76	55.39	71	4.21		.06

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ .

The single most important duty of a supervising (cooperating) teacher as identified by teacher educators was that they meet with the student teacher prior to the first day that they are to begin their student teaching experience. The responses of the teacher educators indicated that most of the supervising (cooperating) teachers employed by their institutions were following this practice. Teacher educators strongly believed that supervising (cooperating) teachers should be required to attend a special workshop or course before being placed in charge of student teachers. This duty ranked third in importance based on the mean score (4.50) of teacher educators' responses, but the study indicated that institutions were requiring special courses or workshops at a significantly ( $p < .01$ ) lower level.

**Qualities of Student Teaching Centers:** Responses of teacher educators concerning the qualities of student teaching centers are summarized in Table 3. The relationships between teacher educator responses and actual practice by the institutions are also shown in Table 3.

Teacher educators' wanted the following qualities in student teaching centers: (a) teaching centers need not be multi-teacher departments; (b) they should have an active adult/young farmer program; and, (c) have a record of outstanding accomplishments and be consistently ranked above other departments; (d) have cooperation from the local administration; (e) have up-to-date equipment; and, (f) furnishings and a clean safety record. The center should also contain (g) an updated library; (h) be located in a comprehensive high school; (i) have an active FFA chapter; (j) have a student/teacher ratio of 48/1; and, (k) require students to have an approved SAEF. Teacher educators stated that centers should, be selected based on the scope and quantity of courses offered, reimburse student teachers for formal expenses, be assigned no more than 1 student teacher per supervising (cooperating) teacher, and be used as a center only once per year.

Institutions failed to meet the expectations of teacher educators except for the use of multi-teacher departments, use of a center only once per year, and the location of the center in a comprehensive high school. In these instances the actual practice exceeded the teacher educators' expectations.

**Table 3**  
Relationship Between Teacher Educator's Perceptions Concerning "Ideal" Student Teaching Centers and Actual Practice by the Institution

Supervising Teaching Centers should:	Perceptions		Actual Practice		t	r
	n	Mean	n	Mean		
have an active FFA chapter	75	4.86	74	4.42	5.77*	.25
have cooperation from the local administration	75	4.84	74	4.54	4.95*	.38
have a clean safety record	75	4.48	74	4.05	4.99*	.35
require students to have an approved SAEP	74	4.43	73	3.59	8.24*	.42
contain an updated library	75	4.41	74	3.57	8.57*	.09
have a record of outstanding accomplishments	75	4.32	74	3.78	8.05*	.46
have up-to-date equipment and furnishings	75	4.32	74	3.64	8.02*	.26
be consistently ranked above other departments	75	4.25	73	3.93	4.66*	.57
be used as a center only once per year	74	4.00	73	4.15	-1.76	.66
be selected on the scope and quantity of courses offered	75	3.96	74	3.62	3.86*	.76
reimburse student teachers for formal expenses	74	3.81	73	2.86	7.14*	.58
have an active adult/young farmer program	75	3.76	72	2.79	8.60*	.58
be multi-teacher departments	74	2.57	72	2.69	-1.25	.37
have a student/teacher ratio of ___/1	68	48.42	67	3.73		-.07
be assigned no more than ___ student teachers per supervising teacher	71	1.48	69	4.71		-.08

\* p < .01.

Responsibilities of University Student Teaching Programs: Table 4 portrays the responses of teacher educators concerning the responsibilities of university teacher education programs and the relationship between these perceptions and the actual practice of the institutions represented.

**Table 4**  
Relationship Between Teacher Educator's Perceptions Concerning "Ideal" University Student Teaching Programs and Actual Practice by the Institution

University Student Teaching Programs should:	Perceptions		Actual Practice		t	r
	n	Mean	n	Mean		
allow faculty members to make final student teacher placement decision	78	4.69	77	4.57	1.89	.54
require field experience prior to student teaching	78	4.60	76	4.42	1.31	.32
"match" student teachers and supervising teachers based on personalities, etc.	78	4.37	77	4.03	4.23	.71
provide information on possible student teaching centers	78	4.31	77	4.05	2.76	.50
require the student teacher to live in the community	78	3.83	77	3.36	4.96	.65
allow each student teacher to select student teaching center	78	3.13	76	3.24	-0.93	.68
require student teacher experience to last at least ___ weeks	78	10.62	71	4.69		-.18
establish a maximum teaching load of ___ classes	76	4.58	70	4.26		.27
compensate student teachers in the amount of ___ dollars	62	9.63	69	3.44		-.21

Teacher educators were strong in their opinion that a field experience prior to student teaching should be required. Also, they believed that it was important to provide information about possible

centers to their prospective student teachers. Teacher educators were neutral concerning student teachers' selection of their teaching center, but were strong in their belief that student teachers and supervising (cooperating) teachers should be matched based on personalities and other qualities. The strongest belief held by teacher educators was that faculty members should make the final decision concerning placement of student teachers. Finally, teacher educators believed that student teachers should be required to live in the community, teach for a minimum of eleven weeks, teach a maximum of five classes, and receive no compensation for their student teaching experience.

Responses indicated that in most instances the institutions were meeting or exceeding the expectations of teacher educators. Only when it came to providing students with information about the teaching center, matching student teachers and supervising (cooperating) teachers, and requiring the student teacher to live in the community did actual practice fall significantly ( $p < .05$ ) below the expectations of the teacher educators.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Programs of teacher education have higher ideals for characteristics and procedures for their student teaching programs than exists in actual practice. Teacher educators appear to be in agreement as to what they want from supervising (cooperating) teachers, student teaching centers, and university programs for teacher education. However, these expectations are, in most cases, not being achieved.

The major recommendation from this study is to conduct a similar survey of supervising (cooperating) teachers. A comparison of the teacher educators' responses to those of the supervising teachers may indicate areas where the mission of the institution and the ideals held by those individuals who may be the most influential in the student teacher's life (the supervising/cooperating teacher) are different, and should be changed. It is also recommended that each teacher education department take a close look at how well their teacher education program is meeting their expectations.

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