COOPERATING TEACHER ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS REGARDING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION STUDENT TEACHING EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

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The student teaching experience is a critical element in teacher education programs. The quality of the student teaching experience, because of its potential effect on preservice teachers, is a concern to the profession.

University expectations for the student teaching experience are based on accepted professional standards for program conduct and program components such as those outlined by Phipps (1980), and the Standards for Quality Programs in Agricultural/Agribusiness Education (1977). Research conducted by Kirts and Claycomb (1981), found specific requirements for student teachers and student teaching programs vary widely across agricultural teacher education institutions, but many common elements and policies remain. In order to communicate expectations to cooperating teachers, most universities with teacher education programs develop and distribute handbooks or manuals containing expectations to their cooperating teachers (Martin & Yoder, 1985). Why then, are there differences perceived between university expectations and cooperating teacher performance? These differences in expectations have led to calls for certification of cooperating teachers by some educators (Morris, Pannell, & Houston, 1984-85).

An explanation for these differences between expectation and performance may be the attitudes of the cooperating teachers toward university expectations. By definition, attitudes are precursors of behavior (Cohen, 1964) and may affect the way in which cooperating teachers approach university expectations. The attitudes of cooperating teachers may reflect their personal experiences and concerns related to the supervision of student teachers (Horst & Des Jarlais, 1984). According to Boiarsky (1985), attitudes and behaviors of teachers can be influenced by feedback and coaching from university teacher education faculty. Henson (1987) suggested that attitude change can be enhanced by involving those affected by the change, developing a sense of "ownership" in the change, and providing support for the change in attitude or behavior. Therefore, it appears that teacher educators can influence attitudes of cooperating teachers.

Research involving the role of cooperating teachers has been conducted by Castillo (1971) and by Grimmett and Ratzlaff (1986). The role of cooperating teachers was defined by Lucio and McNeil (1979) as follows:

1. To help the beginning teacher find purpose in learning.
2. To further the beginning teacher's sensitivity to individual students and the dynamics of the classroom.
3. To enable the beginning teacher to vitalize instruction.
4. To give the student teacher a view of teaching as learning.
5. To influence the student teacher to act professionally.

University-developed student teacher handbooks and student teaching manuals, no doubt, assist cooperating teachers in carrying out these general roles by providing more specific instructions and activities to be completed by student teachers. However, cooperating teachers may have had little input in the development of student teaching expectations, policies, and procedures. In a national study of secondary agriculture teachers, Lelle and Kotrlik (1987) found that vocational agriculture teachers felt they had little opportunity for input in agricultural teacher education policies.

The student teaching experience was considered a strong or very strong influence on the decision to teach for 63% of those who enrolled in agricultural education with plans to teach and for 43% of

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those who enrolled for other reasons (Todd, 1983). Student teachers have reported that they learned most about teaching from their cooperating teachers (Haberman & Harris, 1982). One area in which the cooperating teachers were found to be especially influential was with the morale of student teachers (Byler & Byler, 1984). Parkey (1982) found that student teaching had an effect on attitudes toward professional practice and imagined feelings as a teacher. Byler and Byler (1984) also reported that student teachers in Mississippi tended to develop a strong rapport with their cooperating teachers, especially in their attitudes toward the professionalism of teaching. According to their cooperating teachers, student teachers began to approximate the attitudes of their cooperating teacher (Yee, 1969).

Purpose and Objectives

If attitudes are precursors of behavior and the attitudes of cooperating teachers influence student teachers, it is important to determine the attitudes of cooperating teachers toward student teaching. The first use of these data would be to identify the areas of conflict between teacher attitudes and university expectations. This knowledge would provide a basis for evaluating university expectations and/or providing inservice activities that would attempt to influence the attitudes of cooperating teachers.

As teacher education continues the current reorganization process, adjustments in student teaching programs may be mandated by accrediting agencies, and additional changes may be required. Input from the cooperating teachers could prove valuable in changing procedures and programs to meet new standards.

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To determine the attitudes of agricultural education cooperating teachers in three states regarding university expectations for cooperating teachers and the student teaching experience.

2. To determine the opinions of agricultural education cooperating teachers in three states regarding procedures to be used in the field experience program.

Procedures

The population of the study consisted of all vocational agriculture teachers in Mississippi, North Carolina, and Florida ($N = 92$) who had served as cooperating teachers from 1983-1987 and were still teaching. The cooperating teachers in these states provided the researchers with an accessible population from which to collect data. However, the findings of this study are limited to the population and generalizations should not be made beyond the population studied. The entire population was surveyed in the Fall of 1987 by the use of a mailed instrument. Each of the three state cooperating teacher groups were surveyed through one of the agricultural teacher education departments in that state with an appropriate cover letter from that institution. Nonrespondents received a mailed reminder and were followed up by telephone. Usable responses were received from 82 cooperating teachers for a response rate of 89%. Due to a response rate of almost 90%, nonresponse error was not considered to be a threat to the validity of the findings of this study (Borg and Gall, 1983).

The instrument was developed by the researchers using student teaching expectations from the institutions involved, as well as student teaching expectations from other selected agricultural teacher education programs. Items included in student teaching handbooks, manuals, or printed policies were assumed by the researchers to represent university expectations for the student teaching experience. The instrument consisted of three parts. Part I consisted of 31 items related to university expectations of the student teaching experience to which cooperating teachers responded to a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Part II contained 18 items to obtain cooperating teachers' opinions of the policies and procedures recommended by the universities related to student teaching. Part III of the instrument consisted of five demographic items.

Content validity of the instrument was established by agricultural education faculties at the three universities conducting the study. The instrument was pilot tested for clarity and reliability in a state not included in the study. The instrument was revised by eliminating items to increase the overall reliability. Part I of the instrument included four subscales with the following coefficients of internal

consistency (Cronbach's Alpha): (a) role of the cooperating teacher = .69; (b) responsibilities of the student teacher = .70; (c) professionalism = .68; and (d) program components = .75.

Since this study involved the entire population, parameters were employed instead of statistics. Frequencies of responses, percentages, and population means were used to describe the data.

Results

The cooperating teachers in this study had been teaching an average of 15.6 years, with six of the 82 teaching less than five years and two teaching 26 years or more. Masters degrees were held by 64.5% of the cooperating teachers, with 12.6% of the respondents earning advanced degrees of certification beyond the masters degree (Ed.S. or masters + 30 hours). The remaining 23% of the cooperating teachers held a bachelor's degree. The cooperating teachers' major area of agricultural teaching responsibility was fairly evenly distributed throughout the taxonomy areas of agriculture, with production agriculture and agribusiness being the most common areas taught.

The agricultural education cooperating teachers in this study had supervised an average of 2.7 student teachers during the last five years, with 31% (25) supervising one student teacher, 39% (28) supervising two or three student teachers, and the remaining teachers serving as cooperating teachers for four or more student teachers. The respondents had supervised an average of 6.6 student teachers in all of their years as cooperating teachers. Almost 60% of the respondents had supervised five or fewer student teachers, but six of the teachers reporting supervising over 20 student teachers during their tenure as cooperating teachers.

Cooperating Teacher Attitudes: The data indicated that agricultural education cooperating teachers tended to agree with most of the university expectations for student teaching. Twelve items in Part I of the instrument dealt with the role of the cooperating teacher. The overall mean for this subscale was 2.99 (see Table 1). Included in this subscale was the item that was ranked fourth in agreement with university expectations by the cooperating teachers, "Cooperating teachers should be on the school grounds when the student teacher is teaching" ($\underline{M}$ = 3.52). Cooperating teachers also felt that they should maintain a teaching calendar so student teachers could teach prepared plans ($\underline{M}$ = 3.26) and that student teachers should be provided with written evaluations or their performance on a weekly basis ($\underline{M}$ = 3.25). Although the cooperating teachers indicated some level of disagreement with several of the university expectations regarding their role, several items were of special concern to the researchers because of the number of teachers who expressed disagreement. These included: (a) "Cooperating teachers observing and evaluating student teachers along with the university supervisor during his/her visit" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.98); (b) "Providing student teachers with instructional units to be taught the term/semester before student teaching" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.95); (c) "Cooperating teachers observing the student teacher teach every day" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.79); and (d) "Reviewing every teaching plan before the student teacher teaches the plan" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.74).

The subscale involving the responsibilities of student teachers consisted of the six items shown on Table 2. The overall mean for the subscale was 3.18, indicating that cooperating teachers tended to agree with university expectations involving student teacher responsibilities. The cooperating teachers felt it was important for student teachers to dress professionally ($\underline{M}$ = 3.54), to participate in all of the activities conducted by the cooperating teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.47), and to have written lesson plans for classroom and laboratory activities ($\underline{M}$ = 3.45 and $\underline{M}$ = 3.26, respectively). Cooperating teachers reported less agreement with the student teacher responsibilities involving "having written teaching plans completed at least one week in advance of teaching" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.75) and "being required to live in the community in which they are student teaching" ($\underline{M}$ = 2.42).

The eight items included in the "program components" subscale are shown on Table 3. The cooperating teachers' overall mean agreement with the university expectations for the components of the agriculture program for student teaching centers was 3.05, indicating that the cooperating teachers tended to agree with university expectations in this area. The highest level of agreement with university expectations among the cooperating teachers was for "safe, adequate, and properly maintained laboratory facilities" ($\underline{M}$ = 3.61). Other items in this area with which cooperating teachers tended to agree were "having written policies and standards for FFA" ($\underline{M}$ = 3.38) and "SOE" ($\underline{M}$ = 3.27) and "having functioning advisory committees" ($\underline{M}$ = 3.28). This subscale also included two items with which cooperating teachers expressed some of the highest levels of disagreement. These items involved the need for having FFA Alumni Affiliates in order to serve as a student teaching center ($\underline{M}$ = 2.72) and the need for student teaching centers to conduct adult/young farmer programs ($\underline{M}$ = 2.32).

Table 1
Attitudes Toward the Role of the Cooperating Teacher in the Student Teaching Experience

Item	Frequencies[a] 4	3	2	1	u
-Cooperating teachers should be on the school grounds when the student teacher is teaching.	46	33	3	0	3.52
-Cooperating teachers should make every effort to maintain their teaching calendar so student teachers can teach prepared plans.	28	49	3	2	3.26
-Cooperating teachers should complete written evaluations of student teachers at least once per week.	30	40	10	0	3.25
-Cooperating teachers should give student teachers the opportunity to perform independently as FFA advisors.	27	40	15	0	3.15
-Cooperating teachers should have written summer programs.	21	44	13	3	3.00
-Cooperating teachers should observe and evaluate student teachers along with the university supervisor during his/her visit.	27	29	23	3	2.98
-Cooperating teachers should be free to leave the school grounds when the student teacher is in charge.	18	44	16	3	2.95
-Student teachers should be provided with instructional units to be taught the term or semester before student teaching.	20	41	18	3	2.95
-Cooperating teachers should be responsible for providing university required experiences if not routinely available.	10	50	15	5	2.81
-Cooperating teachers should observe the student teachers' teaching performance each day.	20	28	31	3	2.79
-Cooperating teachers should review every teaching plan before the student teacher uses the plan.	12	38	31	1	2.74
-Cooperating teachers should be responsible for finding housing for student teachers, if necessary.	7	33	30	12	2.43
				Grand Mean	2.99

Note. 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree. [a]N = 82.

Cooperating teachers expressed the highest levels of agreement for those items included on the "professionalism" subscale (overall M = 3.30). Cooperating teachers tended to agree with four of the five items on this subscale, with item means ranging from 3.60 to 2.79. Cooperating teachers expressed strongest agreement with "Cooperating teachers being members of their professional organizations," but 41% of the respondents did not agree that cooperating teachers should be required to hold at least a master's degree.

Cooperating Teacher Opinions Regarding Student Teaching Policies and Procedures: The cooperating teachers were provided an opportunity to express their opinions regarding policies and procedures used in administration of student teaching programs by the universities. Almost three-fourths (74%) of the cooperating teachers felt that student teachers should be allowed to select the student teaching center of their choice. The length of the student teaching experience recommended by cooperating teachers ranged from 8 weeks to 12 weeks, with a mean response of 11 weeks. During the student teaching experience cooperating teachers felt that university supervisors should conduct 3-4 supervisory visits. Ninety percent of the cooperating teachers indicated that the final grade for student teaching should be the combined responsibility of the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher.

Table 2
Cooperating Teacher Attitudes Toward Student Teacher Responsibilities

Item	Frequencies[a] 4	3	2	1	u
-Student teachers should be responsible to dress professionally while student teaching.	46	33	2	0	3.54
-Student teachers should be required to participate in all the activities participated in by the cooperating teacher.	43	33	5	0	3.47
-Student teachers should have written teaching plans for every classroom session they are responsible for teaching.	39	41	2	0	3.45
-Student teachers should have written teaching plans for every laboratory session they are responsible for teaching.	27	49	6	0	3.26
-Student teachers should have written teaching plans completed at least one week in advance of teaching.	13	36	31	1	2.74
-Student teachers should not be required to live in the community in which they are student teaching.	8	26	39	1	2.42[b]
				Grand Mean	3.18

Note. 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree. [a]N = 82. [b]Item was reverse coded.

Table 3
Cooperating Teacher Attitudes Toward Student Teaching Center Program Components

Item	Frequencies[a] 4	3	2	1	u
-Cooperating schools should have laboratory facilities that are safe, adequate, and properly maintained.	50	32	0	0	3.61
-Cooperating teachers should have written policies and standards for their vocational agriculture program, including FFA.	26	52	4	0	3.38
-Cooperating schools should have functioning advisory committees.	27	50	3	1	3.28
-Student teachers should be assigned to a site matched to their needs and areas of specialization.	34	37	11	0	3.28
-Cooperating teachers should have written standards for their vocational agriculture program, including SOE.	26	52	4	0	3.27
-Cooperating school programs should have chartered FFA Alumni Associations.	17	27	36	2	2.72
-Cooperating teachers should have to be on 12-month or the equivalent contracts.	24	14	37	7	2.67[b]
-Cooperating schools should not be required to have adult/young farmer programs in place.	6	26	38	12	2.32[b]
				Grand Mean	3.05

Note. 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree. [a]N = 82. [b]Item was reverse coded.

Table 4
Attitudes Toward Characteristics of Professionalism Needed to Serve as Cooperating Teachers

Item	Frequencies[a] 4	3	2	1	u
-Cooperating teachers should be members of appropriate professional organizations.	52	28	1	1	3.60
-Cooperating teachers should demonstrate an appropriate dress example for the student teacher.	44	36	2	0	3.51
-Cooperating teachers should have demonstrated professional growth through participation in other than district sponsored programs.	40	40	2	0	3.46
-Student teachers and cooperating teachers should both be present during discussions following observations by university supervisors.	26	42	12	1	3.15
-Cooperating teachers should hold the masters degree or above.	26	22	25	9	2.79
				Grand Mean	3.30

Note. 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree. [a]N = 82.

A majority of the respondents (61%) felt that only one student teacher should be placed under the supervision of a cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers were asked how often student teachers should be placed at a student teaching center. Over half (51%) of the cooperating teachers preferred placing student teachers in a center only once a year, rather than every semester or every other year.

Regarding the requirements for being selected as a cooperating teacher, all respondents believed three or more years of teaching experience should be required prior to serving as a cooperating teacher, with 51% of the teachers preferring five years or more. In addition, 63% of the cooperating teachers felt that three or more years of employment at the current school was necessary before serving as a cooperating teacher. Although 74% of the teachers indicated that cooperating teachers should be required to complete special training before serving as a cooperating teacher, a vast majority (88%) did not feel training should be required each time a student teacher is placed in a program. Cooperating teacher training had been completed by 67 respondents, with 77% indicating they found this training useful. In response to the question "Do you feel you fully understand the university expectations of you as a cooperating teacher?", 83% responded "yes".

Most cooperating teachers (83%) believed they should be compensated in some form for supervising student teachers. Tuition waivers or credits or stipends of less than $100 were indicated as satisfactory compensation. While the cooperating teachers did not feel that student teachers should be compensated for their teaching responsibilities, 57% of the respondents believed that student teachers should be reimbursed for professional travel expenses incurred during student teaching.

Discussion

Agricultural education cooperating teachers in Mississippi, North Carolina, and Florida generally agreed with the expectations of the universities for the student teaching experience, as well as the policies and procedures used to administer the programs. The cooperating teachers were in strongest agreement with teacher educators on the items related to professionalism. Even though there was considerable agreement among cooperating teachers concerning university expectations, the fact that several of the cooperating teachers disagreed with or did not understand some expectations was a concern and provided a basis for discussion. Teacher educators in agriculture should be concerned, for example, that 17% of the cooperating teachers in this study did not fully understand what was expected of them as cooperating teacher. Certainly, there is room for development in this area. Teacher educators should do a better job of communicating expectations and the underlying rationale to the cooperating teachers who do not fully understand the university expectations for student teaching.

As might be expected, the items related to the expectations for cooperating teachers tended to receive lower levels of agreement among the cooperating teachers. Responses of the cooperating teachers indicated that they felt less supervision of student teachers was needed than did teacher educators. When over 40% of the cooperating teachers disagreed that they should observe the student teacher every day, perhaps teacher educators should be concerned about the quantity and quality of supervision provided to student teachers. This is pointed out by a substantial percentage (39%) of cooperating teachers who did not feel it was important to review lesson plans of student teachers prior to the lesson being taught.

Agricultural teacher educators should continue to provide special training for cooperating teachers, especially for those serving as cooperating teachers for the first time. Cooperating teachers felt that the training they had received in the past had been valuable. Additional training for cooperating teachers should focus on the importance of the expectations of cooperating teachers and provide justification for those expectations questioned by cooperating teachers.

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