

Does the Mentorship of Cooperating Teachers Meet the Needs of Their Student Teachers?: A Mixed-Methods Exploration

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Abstract

The student teaching internship experience is one of pre-service teachers' most fundamental experiential learning opportunities during their traditional university certification process. During the internship, cooperating teachers are pivotal in creating an impactful experience for their student teachers. Cooperating teachers are being asked to take on the role of mentor when leading their student teachers to develop stronger teaching skills and the ability to manage a school-based agricultural education program. However, cooperating teachers are not always clear about their exact roles as mentors and need additional preparation and support. This study compares the perceived demonstration of mentorship by cooperating teachers and the observation of this mentorship by the student teacher after implementing a cooperating teacher support program at the University of Florida. The results suggest cooperating teachers are utilizing best practices for mentoring within all three areas of social support, professional support, and role modeling. The need for cooperating teachers to explain to student teachers why they do what they do was revealed. Further research in the preparation and support of cooperating teachers is necessary to continue to paint a picture of how these mentor behaviors are being implemented across the profession.

Introduction

Beginning teachers often feel overwhelmed by the transition into the classroom, however, an increased self-efficacy from a successful student teaching (ST) experience could help with this transition (Edgar et al., 2011; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Rocca, 2005). A successful ST experience has also been shown to have a direct impact on new teachers' ability to enter their classrooms prepared to positively impact their students' learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Previous research has indicated that cooperating teachers (CT) have one of the most significant roles in creating this successful experience (Matsko et al., 2020; Roberts, 2006; Young & Edwards, 2005).

Mentoring programs have been widely utilized across the profession to increase teacher self-efficacy and lower the high attrition rates plaguing the profession (Swan et al., 2011). Just as mentors are working with new teachers, CTs are being asked to elaborate their role toward a mentorship-centered approach. In 2006, Roberts developed a model for CT effectiveness as a foundation within school-based agricultural education (SBAE) to develop CTs for their role as mentors. Additionally, He (2010) began to discuss how mentoring programs can help CTs lead their STs to develop stronger teaching skills to have a successful start to their teaching career. Even so, CTs across the profession still express confusion around the mentorship components of their role (Dunning et al., 2011).

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Professional development that supports mentoring skills for CTs has previously been limited at the university level (Carroll, 2007; Margolis, 2007). Often, CTs are provided with a CT handbook and briefed on the expectations of the STs and the evaluation materials (Spencer, 2007; Zimpher & Sherril, 1996). To strengthen the CT's mentorship skills, formalized preparation and support for mentoring needs to be provided throughout the ST internship experience (Young & MacPhail, 2005).

Over a decade ago, Hamilton (2010) began to reveal CTs' perceived needs for this preparation and support. He stated that CTs needed more engagement from their universities, a more in-depth selection of ST partners, additional classes geared towards mentoring skills, and better guidelines for gradually releasing STs into a full teaching experience (Hamilton, 2010). Additionally, research supporting the relationship of the CT and their ST as mentor and mentee has indicated the need for CTs to implement best practices for mentoring (Korte & Simonsen, 2018). These practices can be categorized into three overarching themes: *social support*, *professional support*, and *role modeling* (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Russell & Russel, 2011). Along with understanding the best practices for mentoring, a mutual understanding of mentor and mentee roles should be sought after to increase the benefits of the CT and ST relationship (Kajs, 2002). The ST needs guidance on how to receive and utilize the mentorship, just as the CT needs guidance and training for their role (McIntyre & Killian, 1987). Beginning to understand how these best practices are implemented during the ST internship experience could help practitioners effectively create and maintain successful mentorship programs for their CTs and STs (Barry, 2019; Nesbitt et al., 2022).

The present study aims to build upon existing knowledge by exploring mentoring relationships between CTs and STs within SBAE. This research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how CTs can effectively support their STs in navigating the intricacies of early teaching experiences. This study not only addresses the need for more structured professional development for CTs but also explores the interactions that influence the success of mentorship in practice. Adding to this body of knowledge could provide practical insights for improving the mentoring competency of CTs in SBAE with the potential to help retain more graduates who enter the classroom teaching agriculture.

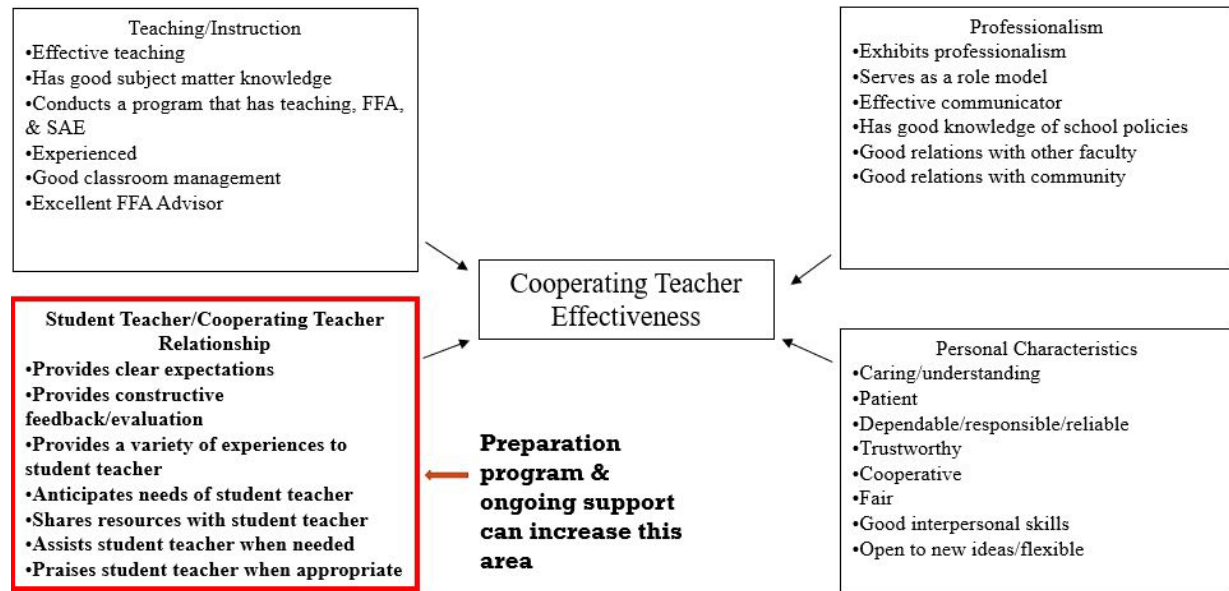
Conceptual Framework

For this study, we utilized an epistemological lens rooted in constructivism and grounded in the findings that CTs have one of the most impactful roles in the ST internship experience for creating effective STs (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Kagan, 1992). Constructivism is based on the assumption that learners create their knowledge of worldly understandings based on their understanding of experiences (Vijaya Kumari, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). By using this lens, we can begin to understand the mentorship that occurred between the CT and ST by examining their lived experiences of the mentorship that occurred during the ST internship experience.

Mentorship skills that are explored in this study support three major components of a successful mentorship program: *social support*, *professional support*, and *role modeling* (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; He, 2010; Russell & Russel, 2011). Utilizing Roberts' (2006) Model of Cooperating Teacher Effectiveness, more specifically the area of the ST/CT Relationship, efforts are needed to develop the mentorship skills of the CT and to prepare the next generation of SBAE teachers (Clarke et al., 2014).

Figure 1

Model of Cooperating Teacher Effectiveness



Note. Adapted from “Developing a model of cooperating teacher effectiveness” by T.G. Roberts (2006). *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 47(3), 1-13. (<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2006.03001>).

Additionally, Social Desirability Bias (SDB) was also drawn upon for this study. SDB is a participant’s unintentional altering of a response to appear more desirable to what they believe the researcher wants to hear (Beretvas et al., 2002). SDB can impact research in several ways, however, the potential of the CT altering their description of their use of best practices is an area of exploration in this study. To combat SDB, STs’ experiences were compared to the CTs’ to paint a more robust view of mentoring practices during the ST internship (Goneya, 2005).

Purpose and Research Objectives

This study aimed to describe the mentorship of CTs and how that mentorship met the needs of their STs. The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Describe the mentorship experiences within social support between the CT and ST.
2. Describe the mentorship experiences within professional support between the CT and ST.
3. Describe the mentorship experiences within role modeling between the CT and ST.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to address the research purpose and objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Utilizing this method helped us gain additional insight into the quantitative results by qualitatively explaining how mentoring best practices were utilized during the internship experience.

Description of the Program

The University of Florida established a mentorship training program for their CTs in 2018. The program's core goal is to prepare and support CTs for their mentorship role before and during the ST internship experience. The program focuses on best practices for mentoring within the topics of *social support*, *professional support*, and *role modeling* (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Russell & Russel, 2011). The program's main components in supporting these best practices for mentoring behaviors are a pre-internship workshop, bi-weekly emails and infographics to CTs concentrating on one mentorship skill, monthly collaborative zooms, and a CT support website. Beginning Fall of 2020, STs were included in the pre-internship workshop, and training was provided to STs on how to receive and utilize feedback from their CTs. The STs and CTs were given time to plan for lesson topics and other SBAE program components.

Target Population and Sample

The target population for this study was secondary SBAE teachers who served as CTs, as well as their STs, during the University of Florida Spring 2022 ST internship ($N = 15$ Pairs). Using a purposive sampling technique, all CTs and STs from the Spring 2022 internship who participated in all aspects of the CT support program were recruited for this study. Researchers were not able to compare this sample to the population of agriculture teachers in Florida as recent demographic data that was collected for Florida agriculture teachers were not representative of the total population.

Quantitative Phase

Quantitative Study Participants

A total of 15 CTs and their respective 15 STs completed the quantitative survey, providing a 100% response rate (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Demographics of the CT respondents (n =15)

Variables	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Sex	Male	6	40
	Female	9	60
Initial Certification	Ag Ed at the University of Florida	11	73.3
	Teacher certification in another field	2	13.3
	Non-education Major	2	13.3
Years Teaching	5-10 years	3	20
	11-15 years	4	26.7
	16-20 years	1	6.7
	Over 20 years	7	46.7
Number of Previous Student Teachers	No Previous Interns	5	33.3
	1-2 Interns	4	26.7
	3-4 Interns	2	13.3
	5 or more Interns	4	26.7

Table 2

Demographics of the ST respondents (n = 15)

Variables	Categories	f	%
Sex	Male	3	20
	Female	12	80
Age	19-20 years old	3	20
	21-22 years old	4	26.7
	23-24 years old	4	26.7
	25-26 years old	2	13.3
	27+-years old	2	13.3

Quantitative Study Instrument

Seventeen behaviors related to best practices for mentoring were included in the survey. These behaviors were organized into three constructs: perceived frequency use of social support, perceived frequency use of professional support, and perceived frequency use of role modeling. These best practices for mentoring behaviors were created from the work of Alemdag and Simsek (2017) and Russell and Russell (2011). Combined, their works focused on practicum experiences of pre-service teachers and the implications for more formal mentoring programs (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Russell & Russell, 2011). The constructs that included the 17 best practices for mentoring were vetted by three agricultural education faculty at the University of Florida to ensure content validity.

Perceived Frequency Use of Social Support. In the first survey sections, best practices were focused on the CT's attention to the ST's challenges (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Russell & Russel, 2011; Scandura, 1992). Items included: *provided weekly comprehensive feedback on performance in an uninterrupted setting; communicated openly with my student teacher/intern; supported my student teacher's effort by staying attuned to their mindset, attitude, and well-being; and communicated regularly with my student teacher/intern.*

Perceived Frequency Use of Professional Support. The second section included best practices that focused on the CT helping the ST navigate the many facets of teaching and the responsibilities that educators manage (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Russell & Russel, 2011; Scandura, 1992). The items included: *encouraged the student teacher to maintain active memberships in FFAE, NAAE, and FACTE; used observational data as the basis for feedback sessions; shared approaches for effectively managing the administrative aspects of teaching; including building effective relationships with administrators and other teachers; made an effort to help my student teacher develop positive views of teaching; discussed strategies for effectively managing time, priorities/projects, and email; encouraged the student teacher to take the lead in evaluating their teaching; and made an effort to introduce my student teacher to the school community.*

Perceived Frequency Use of Role Modeling. In the final section, best practices were focused on the CT modeling all aspects of their daily roles and responsibilities as agriculture teachers (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Russell & Russel, 2011; Scandura, 1992). The items included: *involved my student teacher in all of my roles as a teacher; talked to my student teacher about how to become an excellent teacher through all phases of their career; discussed effective student discipline strategies with my student teacher for maintaining a productive learning environment; coached my student teacher on strategies for developing a positive rapport with students; shared my approaches for SAE program development and supervision; and shared my philosophy for FFA advising.*

For all three sections of the survey, respondents were asked to rate CT's frequency of use of the 17 best practices for mentoring behaviors. Response options were as follows (1) *always*, (2) *often*, (3) *sometimes*, (4) *rarely*, and (5) *never*. The CTs self-reported their frequency of use of the 17 best practices for mentoring behaviors, while the STs reported on their observation of their CT's mentoring behaviors. The language was slightly modified to adjust for this perspective on each instrument. Researchers were interested in identifying how often CTs were implementing these best practices for mentoring behaviors during the student teaching internship experience.

Quantitative Data Collection

After the 14-week student teaching internship, surveys were distributed via Qualtrics software. For the ST participants, the initial email was sent out by one of the lead researchers with no ties to their final internship experience grade. ST participants were given their unique participant identification number at the completion of their final internship seminar and were given time to complete the survey if they elected to participate. All STs stayed to complete their survey.

For the CT participants, email correspondence with the Qualtrics link was sent out by the cooperating teacher support program leader at the completion of the internship experience. Following Dillman's Tailored Design Method, reminder emails were sent out to the respondents two and four weeks later (Dillman et al., 2014). A third reminder was not necessary, as a 100% response rate was collected after the second reminder email.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For data analysis, we used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to look at the descriptive statistics of the three areas of mentoring behaviors and the frequency tables for CTs and STs for the 17 mentoring behaviors. For the 2022 cohort, CT self-reported behaviors, as well as the observed behaviors from the STs were collected. The CT instrument in 2022 had a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .86$ for social support, $\alpha = .70$ for professional support, and $\alpha = .64$ for role modeling. The ST instrument utilized the same best practices behaviors as the CT instrument but from the perspective of the ST. The ST instrument had a Cronbach's alphas of $\alpha = .90$ for social support, $\alpha = .88$ for professional support, and $\alpha = .93$ for role modeling.

Qualitative Phase

While the descriptive statistics explained the frequency of use of the best practices for mentoring behaviors through the lens of CTs and STs, additional clarification on how these best practices were implemented was needed to better understand what occurred during the student teaching internship experience. The qualitative investigation was guided by a phenomenological approach, where we aimed to gain additional insight into how the participants' lived experiences through the CT support program affected their knowledge, perspective, and interpretation of how to implement mentoring best practices (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative Study Participants

All CT and ST respondents were asked to participate in one-on-one follow-up interviews. Of the 15 CTs and 15 STs, four CTs and five STs agreed to participate. Of these participants, two matched CT-ST pairs emerged. Participants were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Cooperating Teachers

Ms. Wilson was a middle school teacher who had taught agriculture classes for over 20 years. She gained her certification through a traditional agricultural education preparation program. **Ms. Adkins** was a middle school teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience at both the high school and middle school levels. She gained her certification through a traditional agricultural education program. **Mr. Porter** was a middle school teacher with over 15 years of teaching experience and did not disclose how he earned his certification. **Ms. Lang** was a high school teacher with over 25 years of teaching experience at the high school level and did not disclose how she earned her certification.

Student Teachers

Lillie was teaching at the time of the interview and was considering graduate school as her next step. She was a vet science student in high school and was highly involved in her FFA chapter by holding office showing livestock. **Kristen** had not attained a teaching position at the time of the interview. She was very involved in her agricultural education program in high school and was influenced by her FFA advisors to be a teacher. **Zack** had a teaching position lined up for the upcoming fall. He described himself as heavily involved in FFA in high school. **Mandy** had a teaching position lined up for the upcoming fall. She explained she was a late bloomer in her FFA career and vet assisting was her main involvement in high school. **Grace** had a teaching position lined up for the upcoming fall. She explained she had little agriculture background but was thankful for her involvement in FFA even if it was later on.

Qualitative Study Instrument

The goal of the protocol was to allow participants to share their experiences of mentoring and being mentored. The 17 best practices for mentoring guided the development of the interview questions. The semi-structured interview questions asked participants to provide a more robust description of how the best practices were being implemented during the internship experience. Additionally, questions were developed and added to the ST interviews to collect more information on how these mentorship experiences impacted the participant's decision to teach.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were utilized for data collection between May 2022 to August 2022. Individual interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed through Zoom. During the interviews, probing questions were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of experiences. Following the assignment of pseudonyms using a random name generator, transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. Once accuracy was verified, a two-read process was conducted to refamiliarize with the experiences of the CTs and STs (Saldana, 2013). In the third read, the predetermined constructs led to the structural codes that were utilized to distinguish the usage of best practices. The three major components of best practices for mentorship were *social support*, *professional support*, and *role modeling* (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; He, 2010; Russell & Russel, 2011; Saldana, 2013). Subsequently, in-vivo coding was used to identify additional themes that may have emerged within the structural codes (Saldana, 2013.)

Measures of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, investigator triangulation was utilized through field notes and participant observation of facial expressions and vocal tones. Member checking was also utilized with

participants to establish credibility in trustworthiness. Additionally, peer debriefing was used to ensure results remained accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Reflexivity is important because it acknowledges the researcher's background and bias as the primary research tool (Creswell, 2013). It helps the researcher, participants, and audience legitimize the claims from the research process. The two researchers involved in this study are both former secondary agriculture teachers and FFA advisors. Both researchers have previously taught in the same region as the data was collected. The research team consisted of a faculty member and a doctoral student at the University of Florida at the time of data collection and writing. The researchers also led the CT support program and professional development. The researchers acknowledge their biases from their own lived experiences as teachers, CTs, and within teacher preparation. They were cognizant of their own opinions regarding the support of CTs.

Findings

Research Objective 1. Describe the mentorship experiences within social support between the CT and ST.

Table 3 summarizes the perceived demonstration and observation frequencies for the best practices for mentoring related to social support. For three of the four best practices, the CTs felt they were demonstrating the best practices more than the STs observed. Additionally, a majority of CTs perceived themselves to be *always* implementing all four best practices for social support. A majority of the STs observed this as well. Alternatively, some of the STs *rarely* observed two of the mentoring behaviors. These behaviors were *provided weekly comprehensive feedback on performance in an uninterrupted setting* and *supported my student teacher's effort by staying attuned to their mindset, attitude, and well-being*.

Table 3

CT's Perceived Demonstration (n = 15) and STs Perceived Observation (n = 15) of Best Practices for Social Support Mentoring Behaviors

Behavior	Percentage (%)																			
	Always				Often				Sometimes				Rarely				Never			
	CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Provided weekly comprehensive feedback on performance in an uninterrupted setting	8	53.3	8	53.3	5	33.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0	3	20	0	0	0	0
Communicated openly with my student teacher/intern	11	73.3	12	80	3	20	2	13.3	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Supported my student teacher's effort by staying attuned to their mindset, attitude, and well-being	12	80	10	66.7	3	20	3	21	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
Communicated regularly with my student teacher/intern	13	86.7	11	73.3	2	13.3	3	20	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The qualitative data was used to further investigate how these social support best practices were being implemented during the internship experience. Communication emerged as a leading topic related to social support, and the CTs explained in detail how communication occurred between them and their STs. Interviews showcased STs' appreciation for CTs' comprehensive feedback and the CTs' ability to stay attuned to their mindset and well-being. Interestingly, the CTs were not as open and complimentary of their role in implementing this best practice.

One CT, Ms. Lang, highlighted her openness with her ST by stating, "I'm pretty direct. You know where you stand with me, and you know what I think. So, I was able to, like, express that." Comparably, the STs also explained how open their CTs were throughout the entire internship process. They mentioned communication occurring before and after school, during lunch, between lessons, in the evenings, and on the weekends. The STs expressed their appreciation for their CTs being willing to answer quick questions about lesson planning outside of school hours. Grace recognized that her negative internship experience within social support could have been due to her own lack of communicating her thoughts and needs to her CT. Although short in detail, the CTs talked about how their relationship with their ST was able to grow throughout the internship experience. Mr. Porter expressed how he began to recognize his ST's well-being by explaining the process of stepping in when needed. He stated:

You want your intern to be ready. But they're not going to be ready right away...it takes small steps...it goes back to them being successful...you don't want them to have a bad experience...so taking those small steps, it's just not a just one-and-done plunge.

Contrary to the quantitative results, all STs expressed noticing their CTs being in tune with their personal well-being. Interestingly, the STs shared details about how their CTs stepped in to help with behavioral corrections in the classroom when explaining their well-being being positively influenced by their CT.

Research Objective 2. Describe the mentorship experiences within professional support between the CT and ST.

Table 4 summarizes the perceived demonstration and observation frequencies for the best practices for mentoring in the context of professional support. For the majority of these seven best practices, the CTs felt they were demonstrating the best practices more than the STs observed. Even so, over half the CTs stated a frequency of *often* or less for three out of the seven best practices. Those behaviors were *encouraged the student teacher to maintain active memberships in FAAE, NAAE, and FACTE, used observational data as the basis for feedback sessions, and shared approaches for effectively managing the administrative aspects of teaching, including building effective relationships with administrators and other teachers*. Alternatively, only one behavior was perceived less than *always* by the majority of STs: *encouraged the student teacher to maintain active memberships in FAAE, NAAE, and FACTE*. However, all seven of the best practices for professional support mentoring behaviors were observed by one or more STs as *rarely* or *never* demonstrated.

Table 4

CT's Perceived Demonstration (n = 15) and STs Perceived Observation (n = 15) of Best Practices for Professional Support Mentoring Behaviors.

Behavior	Percentage (%)																			
	Always				Often				Sometimes				Rarely				Never			
	CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Encouraged the student teacher to maintain active memberships in FAAE, NAAE, and FACTE	6	40	6	40	5	33.3	1	6.7	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0	3	20	2	13.3	3	20
Used observational data as the basis for feedback sessions	6	40	8	53.3	8	53.3	4	26.7	1	6.7	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
Shared approaches for effectively managing the administrative aspects of teaching, including building effective relationships with administrators and other teachers	7	46.7	11	73.3	7	46.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	2	13.3	0	0	0	0
Made an effort to help my student teacher develop positive views of teaching	8	53.3	9	60	7	46.7	2	13.3	0	0	3	20	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
Discussed strategies for effectively managing time, priorities/ projects, and email	8	53.5	10	66.7	7	46.7	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	13.3
Encouraged the student teacher to take the lead in evaluating their teaching	11	73.3	10	66.7	4	26.7	3	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7
Made an effort to introduce my student teacher to the school community	12	80	11	73.3	3	20	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0

Based on interviews, feedback from participants looked different than the survey data. Feedback was expressed with the most appreciation from the STs. The STs elaborated on how their CTs utilized both formal and informal modes of feedback. They told stories about quick check-ins between classes, before and after school, and at lunch, as well as how open their CTs were in providing direct feedback about their lesson plans after school hours. One ST, Mandy, explained, “My favorite thing was she'd [ask], ‘What do you think went well?’ Or... ‘What happened?’... And if I didn't bring [something she saw] up...she would give me specific things like, ‘well, what about when this happens?’” Similarly, the CTs also explained their extensive use of informal feedback with their CT and elaborated on their use of observational note-taking guides for their feedback. Ms. Adkins explained:

I would always give her at the end of a, like, written observation, like, here's what I want you to do next week, and then next week, I would go, okay, did we meet that goal? Like, where are we trying to get? Did we get there? So, some weeks, we didn't get there, but we set ... that same goal for the next week.

Additionally, participants shared more details about introductions to the school and community and time management. Ms. Wilson specifically talked about how she explained the importance of building relationships with school staff, especially the maintenance staff, with her ST. Furthermore, all four CTs explained how they emphasized time management and keeping up with the daily tasks of being an agriculture teacher (i.e., administrative tasks, land lab maintenance, FFA planning, paperwork, etc.) but did not explain *why*. Mandy, Zack, and Kristin also explained how their CTs emphasized finding a work-life balance to sustain a career as an agriculture teacher. Lillie was left questioning if a work-life balance was possible after watching how her CT navigated the day-to-day operations of her program.

Research Objective 3. Describe the mentorship experiences within role modeling between the CT and ST.

Table 5 summarizes the perceived demonstration and observation frequencies for the best practices for mentoring in role modeling. For all six of the best practice behaviors, the CTs felt they were demonstrating the best practices more than the STs observed. Two of the behaviors had a majority of CTs state a frequency of *often* or less. Those behaviors were *involved my student teacher in all of my roles as a teacher* and *talked to my student teacher about how to become an excellent teacher through all phases of their career*. Only one behavior was perceived less than *always* by the majority of STs: *involved my student teacher in all of my roles as a teacher*. However, all six of the best practices for professional support mentoring behaviors were observed by one or more STs as *rarely* or *never* demonstrated. Of these six, one behavior had a combined *rarely* and *never* frequency rate higher than 27% for perceived observation from the ST: *shared my approaches for SAE program development and supervision*.

Table 5

CT's Perceived Demonstration (n = 15) and STs Perceived Observation (n = 15) of Best Practices for Role Modeling Mentoring Behaviors.

Behavior	Percentage (%)																			
	Always				Often				Sometimes				Rarely				Never			
	CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST		CT		ST	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Involved my student teacher in all of my roles as a teacher	7	46.7	6	40	7	46.7	3	20	1	6.7	4	26.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7
Talked to my student teacher about how to become an excellent teacher through all phases of their career	7	46.7	10	66.7	8	53.3	3	20	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.7
Discussed effective student discipline strategies with my student teacher for maintaining a productive learning environment	8	53.3	8	53.3	7	46.7	3	20	1	6.7	3	20	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
Coached my student teacher on strategies for developing a positive rapport with students	8	53.3	8	53.3	7	46.7	4	26.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	1	6.7
Shared my approaches for SAE program development and supervision*	11	73.3	9	60	4	26.7	0	0	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	3	20	0	0	1	6.7
Shared my philosophy for FFA advising*	13	86.7	10	66.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	2	13.3	0	0	0	0

Note. *Missing one ST response (n = 14), non-respondent (n = 1)

The qualitative data echoed the low-frequency rates in role modeling. While the STs were able to explain how they noticed their CTs navigating their roles as a teacher, FFA advisor, and SAE supervisor, many stated they never discussed these topics with their CT. The STs could explain what they saw their CT do but could not elaborate on their CTs' philosophies behind why they chose their actions.

When talking about the teaching profession, most of the CTs expressed how they emphasized the importance of being a life-long learner to their STs, with all four CTs having discussions with their STs about building rapport with students. Mr. Porter said, "I probably did that through demonstrating... Trying to make it fun, or it's just not. You can enjoy the experience. It's work. But it can be enjoyable as well. So, I let her see that I have fun doing it." The STs had mixed statements when talking about the teaching profession. Often their CTs explained their own experiences as new teachers, but Mandy, Zack, and Kristin did explain how their CT talked to them about how their teaching career has changed and what they did to continue to improve as teachers and remain happy throughout their career.

Conclusions

This study's purpose was to describe the mentorship of CTs and how it met the needs of their STs in a SBAE program. While we recognize these findings to be Florida specific, we believe these findings help to paint a picture of the mentorship experiences that are occurring between CTs and STs within SBAE and are translatable in other states and regions. Through this research, we were also able to understand specific practices by mentors in the areas of social support, professional support, and role modeling, as well as investigate variations in how participants implemented their mentorship practices (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Russell & Russell, 2011).

For all practices, STs felt that their mentor would often demonstrate something rather than explain it. In other words, they might show them how they manage an FFA activity but did not explain why that was their specific approach. The CTs appeared to echo what the STs stated, indicating that the CTs were recognizing their method of mentoring, and the sometimes lack of explanation involved in these methods. There was one pair that did not share the same perspective of mentorship practices during the ST internship experience. The CT felt confident in how they handled the ST internship experience and the support that they gave their ST. However, their ST felt their CT was often distracted and put too much emphasis on teaching for an exam that was given during the ST internship experience. This misalignment could be attributed to the CT's focus on how the exam preparation should be delivered, and the emphasis on student passing rates and district/school expectations, rather than giving the ST free-range with their creativity in how they approached lessons.

For research objective one, we compared the perspectives of the CT and ST for the frequency of use of best practices for social support mentoring behaviors. We wanted to compare the teachers' self-perceived frequency of social support mentoring best practices and compare that to the perspective of the ST, who would be on the receiving end of these mentoring best practices. Overall, the majority of CTs and STs' responses for implementing these best practices were between *always* and *sometimes*. While all four of the best practices in this area had over 50% of participants rank their perceived demonstration and observation with a frequency of *Always*, there is space for improving how mentor teachers can stay better attuned to the needs of their mentees during the ST internship. Interestingly, when analyzing the data from the interviews, the ST participants provided in-depth descriptions of their CTs implementations of these practices. The STs described the communication processes being implemented similarly to how CTs were trained and encouraged during the CT support program and expressed gratitude towards their CTs for supporting their mental well-being throughout the internship (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Russell & Russell, 2011). Additionally, the STs seemed to thrive when their CTs stayed in constant communication with them about their teaching practices and other SBAE priorities that they were part of, including FFA and SAEs.

This could be attributed to the current generation of students feeling like they need constant feedback to grow professionally (Half, 2015).

Research objective two compared the perspectives of the CT and ST for the frequency of use of best practices for mentoring behaviors around professional support. There were more ST responses than CT responses of *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never* than reported within the social support construct. It is plausible that the CTs self-reported implementation could be skewed by their desire to look more successful, while the STs perceived observation may be the more accurate depiction of what was occurring during the ST internship experience (Beretvas et al., 2002; Goneya, 2005). The qualitative portion of this objective painted a clearer view of the self-reported frequencies. The ST participants often explained how they observed their CT managing their many roles as a SBAE teacher, but STs reported that their CTs did not discuss why they chose their specific approach.

Research objective three compared the perspectives of the CT and ST for the frequency of use of best practices for role modeling mentoring behaviors. The CT and ST frequency responses were mostly congruent. The STs and CTs agreed that the frequency of use of the best practices within this area was low. The STs recognized their CTs did not elaborate on why they did what they did, and the CTs felt that they could have spent more time discussing their philosophies for FFA and SAEs. The findings show that STs want more explanation behind their CTs actions and how this aligns with their personal and professional philosophies, and the CTs recognized that they needed to improve in this area.

Recommendations/Implications/Limitations

We recommend CTs become more familiar with the three major areas for best practices for mentoring prior to the ST internship experience. Ideally, they should work to develop their mentorship skills through university programs or other mentorship training opportunities. CTs should be encouraged to self-reflect on their mentorship practices throughout the internship experience (Dunning et al., 2011). We recommended that CTs remind themselves to slow down and make the time to walk their STs through their thought processes. This means not only showing students how to do things but helping them understand the “*why*” behind it. CTs should be reminded that their explanation and sharing of their philosophies and the reasoning behind their actions to their STs is valuable for the professional growth of the preservice teacher. STs will benefit from both seeing and hearing why their CTs do what they do.

For university faculty that work closely with CTs, we recommend incorporating a preparation and support program geared specifically towards building mentorship skills (Carroll, 2007; Margolis, 2007). If this type of program is planned, we recommend that it be implemented in stages, so that the needs of both CTs and STs can be assessed and supported. It is imperative to look for all gaps that could be addressed by these support programs. Through interviews in this study, an added emphasis on building a community of CTs emerged. This feeling of community can be fostered through communication with CTs throughout the internship, as well as regular, synchronous sessions on platforms like Zoom, to provide an additional layer of support and the opportunity for conversations amongst CTs.

Program support components could include a resource website or specific page on a departmental website for CTs that contains regularly used forms, mentoring materials, and any other supporting items that can be easily accessed. Most student teaching internships utilize a handbook or guide for STs. We recommend procuring and using a CT teacher manual that focuses on resources that support CTs in their role as a mentor. We recommend that university faculty work to demonstrate their mentorship skills while interacting within the triadic model of ST, CT, and university supervisor that is often seen during the ST internship experience. Inclusion of the university supervisors in professional development and synchronous sessions is recommended to help build a stronger relationship between the university program and school sites.

Additionally, we recommend continued exploration of the lived experiences of the CTs and STs during the ST internship experience. These observations begin to help practitioners understand what is occurring in the day-to-day interactions between the CTs and STs. Ultimately, trying to understand the relationship and needs of CTs and STs can help create preparation and support programs that can better prepare CTs for their role as mentors for STs. These STs are at the cusp of their agriscience teaching career and the influence of their CT and the influence from this type of program could have a lasting impact on their decision to teach and remain in the profession. It is recommended to implement this type of program in multiple states and regions to bring in a more robust view of the experiences of CTs and STs across the profession. Findings from this study's phenomenological exploration can begin to help practitioners in the development of similar programs within teacher preparation programs (Barry, 2019; He, 2010).

We recognize the limitations of our study. Our study shares the mentor experiences of student teachers and cooperating teachers in Florida and cannot be generalized to the broader teacher education and SBAE population. We also recognize that the participants may have interpreted the frequency scale utilized in this study differently. For example, CTs may better understand how to rate the frequency of mentoring behaviors based on when it was appropriate for the ST. Whereas, the ST may have conceptualized the response options based on every interaction they had with their CT. We have chosen to adjust the instrument from *always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never* to *more than once a week, once a week, more than once a month but less than once a week, once a month, and less than once a month, or not at all* for future studies.

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