

Relevance of Student Teaching Skills and Activities from the Perspective of the Student Teacher

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive survey study was to determine the extent to which student teachers deem traditional student teaching skills and activities relevant as part of the capstone student teaching experience. The study population consisted of all (N = 140) fall 2012 and spring 2013 agricultural education student teachers in the North Central Region of the American Association for Agricultural Education (NC-AAAE). The findings shed light on student teachers' perspectives regarding the relevance of student teaching activities. Student teachers considered the activities associated with the eight constructs in this study relevant or very relevant. Future research should determine if all teacher preparation programs require similar student teaching experiences. Little is known about how student teaching experiences are reviewed and how recommendations are handled at each teacher preparation institution. This study provides feedback to university agricultural education student teaching coordinators regarding the skills and activities student teachers believe are relevant to their capstone student teaching experience.

Keywords: Preservice teachers; school-based agricultural education; student teaching

“The intended purpose of teacher education programs is to prepare prospective teachers to teach in our schools” (Mueller & Skamp, 2003, p. 432). High-quality teacher preparation programs traditionally include a combination of didactic as well as clinical curriculum used to prepare the student for a culminating student teaching experience (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The coursework and clinical experiences included in teacher preparation programs typically coalesce with a student teaching field experience under the supervision of a university teacher preparation program supervisor and a cooperating teacher (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009).

Student teaching has been described as the capstone experience of the preservice teacher education program and is critical to the process of preparing future teachers (Borne & Moss, 1990; Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2011; Edwards & Briers, 2001; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007b). Capstone student teaching experiences require “substantial lead teaching responsibilities...under the guidance of an in-service teacher” (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012, p. 1092). Through full immersion in a “hands on, real world [student teaching] experience” (Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007a, p. 31), preservice teachers begin to master and use professional knowledge such as various “aspects of [student] learning, responsibility, and collaboration” (Dahlgren & Chiriack, 2009, p. 993). Further, Robinson, Krysher, Haynes, and Edwards (2010) posit these experiences help to “meet the needs of pre-service interns by exposing them to real life situations” (p. 142). The experiences acquired by the preservice candidate during student teaching are “probably the most

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crucial activities involved in the development of prospective...agriculture teachers” (Schumann, 1969, p. 156).

The experiences to which student teachers are exposed are vital in the fusion of practice and theory (Retallick & Miller, 2007), and these experiential learning activities associated with student teaching experiences have been identified as an important component of teacher preparation programs (McLean & Camp, 2000; Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012; Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, & Algozzine, 2008). Traditional agricultural teacher education programs even go so far as to provide student teaching handbooks that outline required skills and activities, yet little is known about these activities.

Although student teaching is one of the most widely and commonly used teacher preparation components (Carnegie Forum’s Task Force, 1986), Valencia et al. (2009) posited, “It remains one of the most difficult experiences to understand” (p. 304). Roberts et al. (2009) noted, “It is imperative to conduct research in an effort to better understand the student teaching phenomenon” (p. 137). Additionally, Harlin, Edwards, and Briers (2002) recommended that current practices in student teaching be examined to determine their relevance in the teacher development process, while Mueller and Skamp (2003) espoused compelling reasons for listening to the student teachers who participate in teacher preparation programs. Therefore, it is important to determine the clinical activities and experiences student teachers consider important in their development as future teachers.

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed conceptually using Whittington’s (2005) model for teacher preparation in agricultural education (Figure 1). The model was built upon four primary objectives of teacher education reform: (a) foundations and major goals; (b) knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (c) state and national teacher licensure standards; and (d) the scope, structure, and sequencing of educative experiences. These four objectives were used to identify four stages of development for preservice teachers.

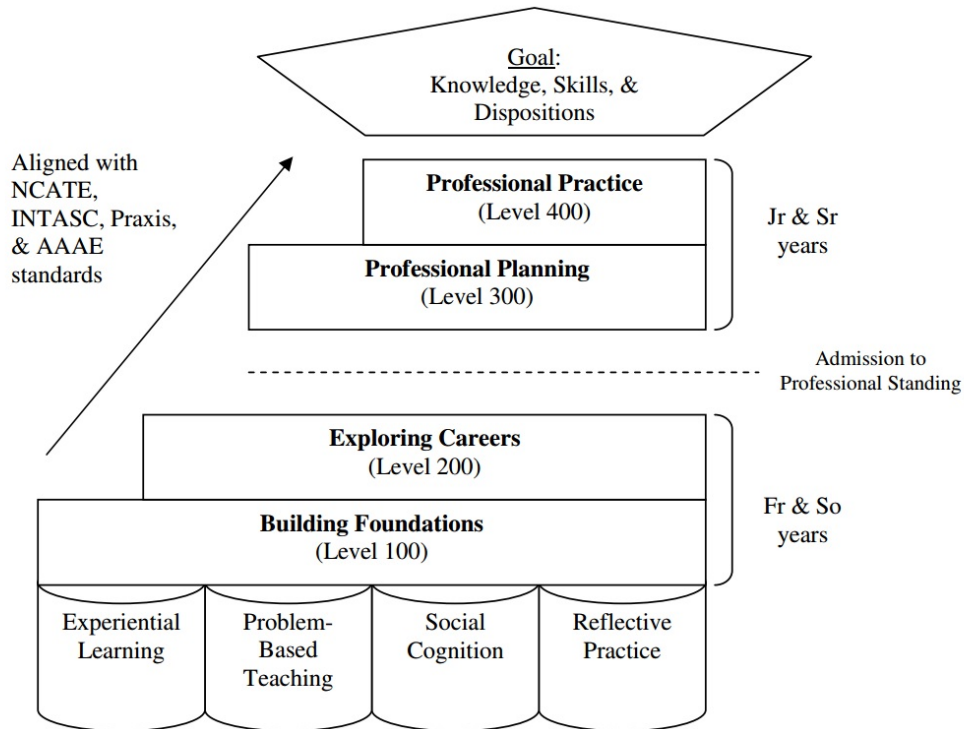


Figure 1. A model for teacher preparation in agricultural education. (Whittington, 2005).

The foundation and major goals of the model developed from four primary “philosophical foundations of agricultural education teacher preparation” (Whittington, 2005, p. 92), which included experiential learning (Dewey, 1938), problem-based teaching (Lancelot, 1944), social cognition (Bandura, 1986), and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of agricultural education teachers have been embedded into the model and reflect the recommendations of Darling-Hammond (1997) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001). “Preservice teachers should know and demonstrate proficiency in content knowledge, learning theory, pedagogy, pedagogy-content knowledge, and professional knowledge” (Whittington, 2005, p. 92). National teaching standards developed by Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which evolved from the consolidation of NCATE and TEACH, Interstate New Teachers’ Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992), Educational Testing Services (ETS, 2001) licensure criteria, and the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) provided additional framework for the model. The final objective of career and teacher education reform used in development of the model was embedding educative experiences within the agricultural education teacher preparation program. Dewey’s (1938) experiential learning theory provided a framework for implementation and for sequencing courses and experiences into the program.

The model depicts four levels of coursework and experiences that move toward the goal of developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a successful agricultural education teacher. The levels, based on the work of Lancelot (1944), included: (a) building foundations, (b) exploring careers, (c) professional planning, and (d) professional practice. The building foundations stage focuses on providing students with initial coursework and field experiences that develop their interest in agricultural education. The second stage, exploring careers, emphasizes placement in formal and nonformal educational settings, which provides additional opportunities for preservice candidates to evaluate their personal interest in becoming a teacher. After admission to the teacher education program, students move to the third stage of the model, professional planning. This stage

provides coursework and clinical experiences in which preservice candidates learn to “conceptualize technical knowledge and plan to teach it based on effective pedagogical knowledge” (Whittington, 2005, p. 95). In the professional practice stage, which is the focus of this study, student teaching takes place followed by a capstone course designed to help transition preservice candidates into the profession of agricultural education.

A successful student teaching experience requires a triadic (i.e., student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor) approach. While it is important to understand the perspective of the teacher educator and cooperating teacher, there is also value in understanding the student perspective because it is critical to student success (Collier & Morgan, 2008), which impacts satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006) and career success. One of Whittington’s (2005) key recommendation was that teacher educators should review the structure of field experiences within teacher preparation programs. Mueller and Skamp (2003) gave compelling reasons for listening to the student teachers who participate in teacher preparation programs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which student teachers deem traditionally required student teaching skills and activities relevant as part of the capstone student teaching experience. One way to explore students’ perspectives is to ask them directly (Mankin, Boone, Flores, Willyard, & Marvin, 2004). Two specific objectives guided the study:

1. Examine which constructs are identified as relevant by student teachers in the North Central Region.
2. Identify the relevance of activities within the eight constructs associated with the student teaching experience.

Methods and Procedures

The population for this descriptive survey study consisted of all ($N = 140$) fall 2012 and spring 2013 agricultural education student teachers in the North Central Region of the American Association for Agricultural Education (NC-AAAE). We purposively selected this convenience sample to (a) better understand student teachers’ perceptions at the regional level and (b) allow us to obtain the requisite materials to develop the instrument for the study. We identified participants by contacting the teacher education coordinator at each institution ($N = 22$) that prepares agricultural education teachers. All data were collected during the middle of the student teachers’ experience in the spring of 2013. The population included undergraduate and graduate preservice students seeking teacher certification in fall 2012 and spring 2013.

To develop the instrument, we reviewed student teaching handbooks ($N = 22$) from each NC-AAAE teacher preparation institution to determine the requirements expected during the student teaching experience. Following a document analysis of the handbooks, we categorized requirements into eight primary construct areas: planning instruction, teaching, evaluation of student performance, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), FFA, school–community relations, adult education, and teaching profession. Next, we organized the student teaching skills and activities into the eight constructs. Similar activities were combined into a single activity statement. Each item was placed by construct into the web-based software package Qualtrics. The researcher-developed instrument was reviewed and deemed face valid by a panel of experts consisting of six agricultural teacher educators.

We piloted the instrument with 12 student teachers outside of the NC-AAAE region and determined internal consistency for each summated scale by construct (Table 1), as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Reliability coefficients ranged from $\alpha = 0.72$ to $\alpha = 0.88$ and were considered acceptable to good (George & Mallery, 2003). Thus, we made no changes to the pilot instrument before using it for the study.

Table 1

Constructs, Number of Items, and Internal Consistency of Researcher-Designed Instrument from Pilot Study

Construct	Number of items	Alpha ^a
School–community relations	14	0.88
Planning instruction	14	0.87
SAE	10	0.84
Teaching profession	8	0.82
FFA	15	0.81
Evaluation of student performance	5	0.79
Teaching	18	0.76
Adult education	5	0.72

^a = Cronbach's alpha. Scale: >.9 = Excellent, >.8 = Good, >.7 = Acceptable, >.6 = Questionable, >.5 = Poor and <.5 = Unacceptable (George & Mallery, 2003).

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) tailored design method was used to develop the electronic survey instrument and the data collection process. All activities were not identical among programs, but were developed into constructs. Respondents were asked to evaluate the perceived relevance of each student teaching skill or activity within each construct on a three-point Likert-type scale (1 = *irrelevant*, 2 = *relevant*, 3 = *very relevant*). All statements for the study were derived from student teacher manuals and were assumed relevant because they were currently being used in practice. Thus, the midpoint of the scale was determined to be relevant. Jacoby and Matell (1971) found justification in scoring Likert-type scale items dichotomously and trichotomously and concluded that "reliability and validity are independent of the number of scale points" (p. 498).

The usable response rate was 47.14% ($n = 66$), which represented respondents from 14 NC-AAAE institutions. To control for nonresponse error, we compared early and late respondents as recommended by Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001) and found no statistically significant differences. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To categorize each statement and construct, we established the following mean ranges: very relevant = 3.0–2.34, relevant = 2.33–1.67, and irrelevant = 1.66–1.00.

Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which student teachers deem traditionally required student teaching skills and activities relevant as part of the capstone student teaching experience. Summated means (grand means) were calculated for each of the eight constructs (Table 2). Respondents considered seven of the eight constructs very relevant for student teaching. They considered one construct—adult education—relevant for student teaching.

Table 2

Relevance of Constructs

Construct	Grand mean	SD
Evaluation of student performance	2.82	0.40
Teaching	2.68	0.50
SAE	2.64	0.56
FFA	2.63	0.55
Planning instruction	2.59	0.56
Teaching profession	2.52	0.66
School–community relations	2.44	0.66
Adult education	2.07	0.75

Note. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Planning instruction activities associated with the student teaching experience focused on collecting/reviewing documents and reviewing agricultural education classroom procedures. Respondents considered all planning instruction activities very relevant (Table 3).

Teaching activities associated with the student teaching experience focused on successful classroom teaching in a variety of settings. Respondents considered all teaching activities very relevant with the exception of “prepare a bulletin board,” which they considered relevant (Table 4). *Evaluation of student performance* activities focused on methods of student evaluation used during student teaching. Respondents considered all evaluation activities very relevant (Table 5).

Supervised Agricultural Experience activities focused on helping students with their SAE projects and gaining a better understanding of the SAE program. Respondents considered all activities in the SAE construct very relevant (Table 6). *FFA* activities focused on providing students with leadership development and gaining a better understanding of the FFA program. Respondents considered all but two FFA activities very relevant (Table 7). They considered “review procedures for state and county fair entries” and “assist in organizing the local FFA test plot” relevant.

School–community relations activities focused on providing visibility for an agricultural education program. Respondents considered 9 of 14 school–community relations activities very relevant (Table 8). They considered five activities relevant: “visit with other community leaders about the local agriculture program,” “attend at least one community related meeting,” “visit other rural and/or agricultural businesses in the community,” “visit the county Extension office to gather information,” and “trade student teaching responsibilities with a student teacher in another school.” *Adult education* activities focused on promoting agricultural education beyond the classroom. Respondents considered all adult learning activities relevant (Table 9).

Teaching profession activities focused on being part of organizations and excelling at classroom teaching. Respondents considered all but two teaching profession activities very relevant (Table 10). They considered two activities relevant: “meet with the local educators association representative” and “serve on a faculty/staff committee.”

Table 3

Relevance of Planning Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Ver relev <i>f</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Planning instruction activities	60	0	0.00	7	11.67	53 8
Review and demonstrate proper safety procedures in the school agriscience or ag mechanics lab	61	1	1.64	10	16.39	50 8
Obtain a copy of your cooperating teacher's course outlines, description, or syllabus	59	1	1.69	12	20.34	46 7
Determine school policies and procedures for handling FFA and other organization accounts	60	2	3.33	14	23.33	44 7
Utilize a plan book or appointment book to schedule classes and activities	60	2	3.33	15	25.00	43 7
Develop learning experiences for students with special needs along with the special education teacher	60	2	3.33	17	28.33	41 6
Develop a unit plan for each unit taught	61	1	1.64	20	32.79	40 6
Participate in administrative duties of the agricultural education program including Perkins reports, FFA program of activities, and Annual FFA and SAE reports.	60	2	3.33	20	33.33	38 6
Develop learning experiences for talented and gifted students	59	3	5.08	18	30.51	38 6
Determine procedures for purchasing tools, equipment, teaching materials, and supplies	61	5	8.20	24	39.34	32 5
Survey the agriculture facilities to determine the quantity and quality of tools and equipment by instructional areas	61	6	9.84	24	39.34	31 5
Meet with the advisory council/committee about the local agriculture program	60	6	10.00	25	41.67	29 4
Review articulations/other agreements between the Agricultural Education program and postsecondary program(s)	60	4	6.67	30	50.00	26 4
Prepare and use teaching/lesson plans for all lessons	61	6	9.84	28	45.90	27 4
Inventory and evaluate references and instructional aids in the school and community						
Planning instruction construct						

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 4

Relevance of Teaching Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

Teaching activities	n	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Conduct a class discussion	58	0	0.00	6	10.34	52	89.4
Prepare and use a variety of teaching aids	59	0	0.00	8	13.56	51	86.4
Direct student laboratory experiences	59	0	0.00	8	13.56	51	86.4
Direct students in problem solving	59	1	1.69	7	11.86	51	86.4
Utilize students' experiences in the teaching/learning process	58	0	0.00	9	15.52	49	84.4
Use reference and resource materials (e.g., AEA, Internet, Extension, colleges)	59	0	0.00	11	18.64	48	81.4
Review discipline policies and procedures with the cooperating teacher and prepare written classroom and laboratory rules that you will enforce	58	1	1.72	11	18.97	46	79.4
Direct a student presentation	59	0	0.00	14	23.73	45	76.4
Supervise students engaged in independent learning activities	59	2	3.39	10	16.95	47	79.4
Have a full teaching load of all classes	59	1	1.69	15	25.42	43	72.4
Plan, organize, conduct, and evaluate a field trip	59	1	1.69	17	28.81	41	69.4
Use interest approaches to motivate students to learn	59	3	5.08	13	22.03	43	72.4
Conduct a class using small group instruction	59	3	5.08	13	22.03	43	72.4
Teach a lesson using a computer	59	3	5.08	16	27.12	40	67.4
Utilize a resource person	59	5	8.47	19	32.20	35	59.4
Evaluate your cooperating teacher's teaching performance	59	8	13.56	15	25.42	36	61.4
Develop and present a program/presentation on agricultural awareness	59	5	8.47	22	37.29	32	54.4
Prepare a bulletin board (traditional or electronic) for teaching/learning or motivation	59	16	27.12	26	44.07	17	28.4
Teaching activities construct							

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 5

Relevance of Student Performance Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

Performance activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Develop and communicate methods for evaluating student performance	58	0	0.00	7	12.07	51	87.
Construct tests to assess student understanding, growth, and development	58	0	0.00	7	12.07	51	87.
Utilize a grading system consistent with school policy and expectations of the cooperating teacher	58	1	1.72	7	12.07	50	86.
Develop and use a grading rubric for class evaluation	58	0	0.00	12	20.69	46	79.
Review tests and other evaluation instruments with the cooperating teacher	58	2	3.45	12	20.69	44	75.
Evaluation of student performance construct							

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 6

Relevance of Supervised Agricultural Experience Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

SAE activities	n	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Discuss SAE with the cooperating teacher and/or administrator	58	1	1.72	10	17.24	47	81.0
Direct students in keeping records of their SAE	58	1	1.72	12	20.69	45	77.3
Assist students in solving problems associated with their SAE programs	58	1	1.72	13	22.41	44	75.8
Help students with SAE plans and agreements	58	2	3.45	13	22.41	43	74.1
Help students understand how SAE relates to tasks performed by people in agricultural occupations	58	2	3.45	14	24.14	42	72.4
Guide students in the selection and/or expansion of their SAE	58	3	5.17	13	22.41	42	72.4
Relate classroom instruction to students' SAEs	58	1	1.72	19	32.76	38	65.5
Conduct SAE follow-up session	58	4	6.90	17	29.31	37	63.8
Work with employers and/or parents to develop students' SAE programs	58	4	6.90	19	32.76	35	60.3
Teach two lessons integrating personal finance into SAE	58	10	17.24	18	31.03	30	51.7
SAE activities construct							

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 7

Relevance of FFA Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Ver. relev:
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
FFA activities						
Supervise one FFA activity other than a regular meeting	57	0	0.00	7	12.28	50 8
Prepare a team (or individual) for a CDE event.	57	2	3.51	10	17.54	45 7
Assist in planning/attend/ participate in a state or national FFA leadership conference	56	1	1.79	12	21.43	43 7
Help officers plan an agenda and serve as FFA advisor for one or more FFA meetings	57	1	1.75	13	22.81	43 7
Obtain and review a copy of the FFA chapter's program of activities	57	3	5.26	10	17.54	44 7
Assist a member in applying for an award or scholarship	57	2	3.51	12	21.05	43 7
Relate FFA activities to class instruction	57	1	1.75	15	26.32	41 7
Assist FFA officers with their duties as needed	57	2	3.51	14	24.56	41 7
Teach one or more lessons on leadership or FFA	57	1	1.75	17	29.82	39 6
Discuss with the cooperating teacher how to appropriately integrate FFA into classroom instruction	57	1	1.75	17	29.82	39 6
Assist a committee in planning and conducting an event	57	1	1.75	20	35.09	36 6
Plan and supervise an overnight trip involving students	57	5	8.77	13	22.81	39 6
Discuss fundraising activities with the cooperating teacher	57	4	7.02	16	28.07	37 6
Review procedures for state and county fair entries	57	7	12.28	24	42.11	26 4
Assist in organizing the local FFA test plot	56	16	28.57	18	32.14	22 3
FFA activities construct						

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 8

Relevance of School–Community Relation Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
School–community relations						
Participate in parent-teacher and/or IEP conferences	56	0.00	5	8.93	51	91.07
Confer with administrators about the qualities they prefer in a good teacher and go over important points in interviewing for a teaching position	55	1.82	5	9.09	49	89.09
Attend school related meetings such as faculty meetings, parent's association, school board, etc.	56	5.36	8	14.29	43	76.79
Develop correspondence for teachers, administrators, and parents to inform and secure permission for field trips and/or overnight trips	56	3	13	23.21	40	71.43
Have a school district administrator who is responsible for teacher evaluation observe your teaching and provide suggestions for improvement	56	3	14	25.00	39	69.64
Visit one or more other classes	56	8	14	25.00	34	60.71
Visit a high school agriculture program in a neighboring community. Consider visiting school that is on a different schedule (block or traditional) from your student teaching center	56	4	23	41.07	29	51.79
Attend or assist with a school function or athletic event	56	7	20	35.71	29	51.79
Visit with agribusiness leaders about the local agriculture program	56	10	17	30.36	29	51.79
Visit with other community leaders about the local agriculture program	56	12	18	32.14	26	46.43
Attend at least one community related meeting such as civic organizations, garden clubs, Farm Bureau, fair board, etc.	54	14	14	25.93	26	48.15
Visit other rural and/or agricultural businesses in the community	56	12	21	37.50	23	41.07
Visit the county Extension office to gather information about agriculture in the community	56	10	27	48.21	19	33.93
Trade student teaching responsibilities with a student teacher in another school for one day	56	19	19	33.93	18	32.14
School–community relations construct						

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 9

Relevance of Adult Education Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

	n	Irrelevant		Relevant	
		f	%	f	%
Adult education activities	56	10	17.86	28	50.00
List procedures used by the cooperating teacher in planning, conducting, and evaluating adult education activities	56	16	28.57	18	32.14
Participate in adult education activities	56	13	23.21	25	44.64
Review past adult education activities conducted by the cooperating teacher	55	15	27.27	22	40.00
Plan, conduct, and/or coordinate an adult education activity	56	15	26.79	28	50.00
Meet with an advisory committee to plan adult education activities					
Adult education activities construct					

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Table 10

Relevance of Teaching Profession Activities Associated with Student Teaching Experience

	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Teaching profession activities					
Discuss with the cooperating teacher the appropriate balance between personal and professional responsibilities	55	2	3.64	9	16.36
Review and discuss with cooperating teacher their teaching and extended/summer contract including salary schedule	56	3	5.36	10	17.86
Attend a sub-district/district/area/regional teacher ag association or FFA meeting	56	4	7.14	8	14.29
Discuss professional organizations (local and state education associations, NAAE, ACTE, etc.) as well as local community organizations with the cooperating teacher	56	5	8.93	11	19.64
Become familiar with the teaching standards.	56	4	7.14	13	23.21
Complete a mock evaluation with the cooperating teacher and begin identifying artifacts that would demonstrate proficiency					
Attend a local education association or school professional development event	56	7	12.50	10	17.86
Meet with the local educators association representative	56	14	25.00	21	37.50
Serve on a faculty/staff committee (ex. School Improvement)	56	18	32.14	19	33.93
Teaching profession activities construct					

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = Irrelevant, 2 = Relevant, 3 = Very relevant.

Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study shed light on student teachers' perspectives regarding the relevance of activities that are commonly part of the agricultural education student teaching experience.

Student teachers surveyed in this study considered seven of the eight overall constructs very relevant. They considered one construct—adult education—relevant. Given the decreased focus on adult farmer programs in the North Central Region, it makes sense that these student teachers find adult education less relevant than the other constructs.

Although the student teaching experience may be difficult to understand (Valencia et al., 2009), this study confirms that activities and skills currently used in the student teaching capstone experience are relevant to student teachers. Further, the findings from this study provide confirmation, at least from the student teacher perspective, that the activities in agricultural teacher education handbooks are appropriate and serve as the core activities for the discipline's capstone experience.

Much like Harlin et al.'s research (2002), this study looked at student teachers' perceptions of what was most important during the student teaching process and classroom instruction. The results affirm the relevance of the activities required of student teaching. We know from the literature that relevance improves student engagement and thus student learning. The activities and constructs in this study from a good base from which to develop what Whittington (2005) calls professional practice.

The student teachers surveyed in this study believe the most important activities in their capstone student teaching experience are related to planning for classroom instruction. This is consistent with the findings of Edwards and Briers (2001), who studied the important elements of student teaching as perceived by cooperating teachers and found laboratory classroom instruction to be most important.

The planning instruction construct is associated with student teaching experiences, which focus on developing learning outcomes, collecting/reviewing documents, and selecting appropriate pedagogical approaches to content delivery. Krysher, Robinson, Montgomery, and Edwards (2012) reported the importance of planning instruction. In their study, student teachers determined that competence in skills related to planning instruction contributed to their personal self-efficacy. In other studies, planning instruction was identified as consuming a significant portion of a student teachers' time. Specifically, Torres and Ulmer (2007) found that planning for instruction accounted for 26% of agricultural education student teachers' time.

This study has implications for institutions that are planning to evaluate current teacher education programs or preparing to revamp student teaching experiences. Whittington's (2005) model for teacher preparation in agricultural education, which was developed as a foundation for reforming educator preparation programs, recommended that teacher educators continue to "engage in examining programming efforts to identify [the] ...structure and sequencing of field experiences" (p. 96). Further, Retallick and Miller (2007) recommended that the study of field experiences in agricultural education should inform future changes in teacher preparation programs. Agricultural education programs nationwide can use the results from this study as guidelines when reviewing student teaching materials and overall requirements. This study also provides feedback to university agricultural education student teaching coordinators regarding the skills and activities student teachers believe are relevant to their capstone student teaching experience.

This study is also a foundation for further investigation. The voices of the other two parties associated with the student teaching triad—cooperating teacher and university supervisor—should be heard. Future research should seek to determine if all teacher preparation programs require similar student teaching experiences. Little is known about how student teaching experiences are reviewed and how recommendations are handled at each teacher preparation institution.

Replicating this study with all teacher preparation programs would add to the body of knowledge for the agricultural teacher education profession.

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