

Cooperating Teachers' Perspectives of Student Teaching Skills and Activities

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This article is a product of the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, Ames, Iowa. Project 3713 and sponsored by Hatch Act and State of Iowa funds.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which cooperating teachers deem required student teaching skills and activities relevant to the agricultural education student teaching experience. The population for this descriptive study consisted of individuals who served as cooperating teachers in Iowa and South Dakota during the last 5 years (N = 70). The study focused on activities in eight constructs: evaluation of student performance, teaching, FFA, planning instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), teaching profession, school–community relations, and adult education. Cooperating teachers surveyed in this study believed that seven of the eight constructs were very relevant to the student teaching experience. They thought the eighth construct, adult education, was irrelevant. This study serves as a feedback loop to university agricultural education student teaching coordinators. Since cooperating teachers exert a powerful influence on practices adopted by student teachers, it is critical that training for cooperating teachers emphasizes the importance of skills and activities required during the capstone student teaching experience. Agricultural education programs nationwide can use these results as guidelines when reviewing expectations for student teaching and cooperating teachers.

Keywords: cooperating teachers; student teachers; student teaching activities

The importance of the capstone student teaching experience is well documented and has been identified as “a central component of nearly every U.S. teacher education program” (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012, p. 1196). This capstone experience is generally the culminating activity of a teacher preparation program; it integrates theory and practice to support the attainment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009) necessary for preservice candidates to become “minimally competent in the specialized knowledge, human relations, and professional skills” (Henry & Weber, 2010, p. 4) needed by a beginning teacher.

Numerous studies have queried the experience of the student teacher (Dahlgren & Chiriack, 2009; Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2011; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Smalley, Retallick, & Paulsen, 2015; Torres & Ulmer, 2007; Torrez & Krebs, 2012; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Recent research has highlighted the relationship between the preservice teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher. One of the most important roles of a

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cooperating teacher has been identified as that of mentor (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; Enz, Cook, & Wallin, 1991; Sudzina & Coolican, 1994). Scherff and Singer (2012) stated that “preservice teachers seek emotional support and task assistance from their mentors, and that the specific ways that mentors dialog with preservice teachers is important” (p. 264). Additionally, Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2014) further expounded that cooperating teachers serve several important roles in the capstone student teaching experience: provider of feedback, gatekeeper of the profession, modeler of practice, supporter of reflection, purveyor of context, convener of relation, agent of socialization, advocate of the practical, gleaner of knowledge, abider of change, and teacher of children.

Cooperating teachers exert a strong influence on the teaching practices of student teachers (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012) and the manner in which they “come to know and participate in the profession” (Clarke et al., 2014, p.182). Cooperating teachers often guide student teachers in practical teaching matters such as “safety, due process, when is it necessary to obtain approval from the administration, when a counselor should be consulted, etc.” (Awaya, McEwan, Heyler, Linsky, Lum, & Wakukawa, 2003, p. 53). Additionally, Torrez and Krebs (2012) reported that master cooperating teachers also provide positive contributions to the student teacher with resources and materials such as access to teaching files, copies of textbooks, and assessments. When considering the vast gamut of roles the cooperating teacher plays, it is not surprising that student teachers believe the cooperating teacher “to be one of the most important contributors to [the] teacher preparation program” (Clarke et al., 2014, p. 163).

According to Henry and Weber (2010), “a teacher who agrees to supervise a student teacher has consented to assume one of the most responsible, influential, and exciting roles in teacher education” (p. 2). When considering the importance of the cooperating teacher’s impact on the success of a teacher education program, it is surprising that “the voices of the cooperating teacher...largely remain absent in the extant literature” (Torrez & Krebs, 2012, p. 486).

Rozelle and Wilson (2012) explained that values and behaviors exhibited by cooperating teachers exerted “a dominant influence” (p. 1204) on the practices adopted by the student teachers. Since the “most legitimate knowers” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 209) are the ones who participate in an experience, it is important that cooperating teachers are given the opportunity to share their perspectives of important aspects of student teaching clinical activities and experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is founded in Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior—“a theory designed to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts” (p. 181).

Three primary beliefs—behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs—converge to determine one’s intention to perform a given behavior. An individual’s attitudes about implementing a particular behavior come specifically from personal consideration of the potential outcome of a given behavior. An individual’s normative beliefs influence perception of peer acceptance of implementing a specific behavior. The third antecedent of intention, perceived behavioral control, is based on an individual’s perception of the level of difficulty in performing the behavior.

Cooperating teachers are an important extension of the teacher education program (Clarke et al., 2014). Their perceptions of the relevance of activities required in the teacher education program impacts their intentions to implement the activities in their agricultural education programs. Because cooperating teachers are role models who can influence student teachers’ teaching practices (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012), it is important to understand cooperating teachers’ attitudes and beliefs. Building on the theory of planned behavior, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which cooperating teachers deem required student teaching skills and activities relevant to the capstone agricultural education student teaching experience.

Methods and Procedures

The population for this descriptive study consisted of individuals who served as cooperating teachers in Iowa and South Dakota during the last 5 years ($N = 70$). We purposively selected this convenience sample to better understand perceptions of cooperating teachers in these two states. The teacher education coordinator at each institution provided a contact list for cooperating teacher host sites. We collected all data during the fall semester 2014.

The instrument used in this study was developed by Smalley et al. (2015), who studied agricultural student teachers' perspectives of the relevance of student teaching skills and activities. They developed the instrument by reviewing student teaching handbooks ($N = 22$) from each NC-AAAE teacher preparation institution to determine requirements of the student teaching experience. A document analysis of the handbooks resulted in a list of student teaching activities categorized into eight primary constructs: planning instruction, teaching, evaluation of student performance, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), FFA, school–community relations, adult education, and teaching profession.

Smalley et al. (2015) piloted the instrument and reported 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).

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

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

We used Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) tailored design method to develop the electronic survey instrument and data collection process. Though specific activities were not identical across programs, all programs' activities fit into the same eight constructs. Cooperating teachers 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*). The midpoint of the scale, *relevant*, was appropriate because activity statements were derived from handbooks and activities currently required in agricultural teacher education capstone experiences. 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 74.28% ($n = 52$), and included responses from cooperating teachers in Iowa and South Dakota. 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. We analyzed data 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 cooperating teachers deem required student teaching skills and activities relevant to 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 to the student teaching experience. They considered the adult education construct irrelevant.

Table 2

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Construct Relevance

Construct	Grand mean	SD
Evaluation of student performance	2.90	0.31
Teaching	2.71	0.43
FFA	2.63	0.49
Planning instruction	2.61	0.51
SAE	2.60	0.53
Teaching profession	2.50	0.55
School–community relations	2.36	0.61
Adult education	1.52	0.56

Note. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Planning instruction activities focused on collecting/reviewing documents and reviewing agricultural education classroom procedures. Respondents considered all but two planning instruction activities very relevant (Table 3). Respondents considered the remaining two activities relevant: *participate in administrative duties of the agricultural education program* and *review articulations/other agreements between the agricultural education program and postsecondary program(s)*.

Teaching activities focused on successful classroom teaching in a variety of settings. Respondents considered all teaching activities very relevant with the exception of *utilize a resource person*, 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).

Table 3

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Planning Instruction Activities

Planning instruction activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Meet with the advisory council/committee about the local agriculture program.	52	0	0.00	1	1.92	51	98.08	2.98	0.56
Inventory and evaluate references and instructional aids in the school and community.	52	0	0.00	11	21.15	41	78.85	2.79	0.41
Determine school policies and procedures for handling FFA and other organization accounts.	52	0	0.00	11	21.15	41	78.85	2.79	0.41
Develop a unit plan for each unit you teach.	52	0	0.00	11	21.15	41	78.85	2.79	0.41
Utilize a plan book or appointment book to schedule classes and activities.	52	0	0.00	14	26.92	38	73.08	2.73	0.42
Develop learning experiences for students with special needs along with the special education teacher.	52	0	0.00	14	26.92	38	73.08	2.73	0.42
Determine procedures for purchasing tools, equipment, teaching materials, and supplies.	52	2	3.85	15	28.85	35	67.31	2.63	0.56
Develop learning experiences for talented and gifted students.	52	1	1.92	17	32.69	34	65.38	2.63	0.58
Review and demonstrate proper safety procedures in the school agriscience or ag mechanics lab.	52	2	3.85	15	28.85	35	67.31	2.63	0.56
Obtain a copy of your cooperating teacher's course outlines, description, or syllabus.	52	0	0.00	19	36.54	33	63.46	2.63	0.49
Survey the agriculture facilities to determine the quantity and quality of tools and equipment by instructional areas.	52	2	3.85	27	51.92	23	44.23	2.40	0.57
Prepare and use teaching/lesson plans for all lessons.	52	3	5.77	25	48.08	24	46.15	2.40	0.6
Participate in administrative duties of the agricultural education program including Perkins reports, FFA program of activities, and Annual FFA and SAE reports.	52	4	7.69	31	59.62	17	32.69	2.25	0.59
Review articulations/other agreements between the agricultural education program and postsecondary program(s).	52	4	7.69	33	63.46	15	28.85	2.21	0.57
Planning activities construct								2.61	0.51

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Table 4

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Activities

Teaching activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Direct student laboratory experiences.	52	0	0.00	3	5.77	49	94.23	2.94	0.24
Conduct a class discussion.	52	0	0.00	6	11.54	46	88.46	2.88	0.32
Prepare and use a variety of teaching aids.	52	0	0.00	6	11.54	46	88.46	2.88	0.32
Prepare a bulletin board for teaching/learning or motivation.	52	0	0.00	6	11.54	46	88.46	2.88	0.32
Plan, organize, conduct, and evaluate a field trip.	52	0	0.00	8	15.38	44	84.62	2.85	0.36
Use interest approaches to motivate students to learn.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Direct a student presentation.	52	1	1.92	8	15.38	43	82.69	2.81	0.44
Evaluate your cooperating teacher's teaching performance.	52	0	0.00	11	21.15	41	78.85	2.79	0.42
Have a full teaching load of all classes.	52	0	0.00	12	23.08	40	76.92	2.77	0.42
Teach a lesson using a computer.	52	0	0.00	12	23.08	40	76.92	2.77	0.42
Develop and present a program or presentation on agricultural awareness.	52	1	1.92	11	21.15	40	76.92	2.75	0.48
Utilize students' experiences in the teaching/learning process.	52	0	0.00	14	26.92	38	73.08	2.73	0.45
Review discipline policies and procedures with the cooperating teacher and prepare written classroom and laboratory rules that you will enforce.	52	1	1.92	12	23.08	39	75.00	2.73	0.49
Conduct a class using small group instruction.	52	0	0.00	16	30.77	36	69.23	2.69	0.46
Use reference and resource materials.	52	0	0.00	21	40.38	31	59.62	2.60	0.50
Direct students in problem solving.	52	1	1.92	19	36.54	32	61.54	2.60	0.53
Supervise students engaged in independent learning activities.	52	2	3.85	28	53.85	22	42.31	2.38	0.57
Utilize a resource person.	52	13	25.00	27	51.92	12	23.08	1.98	0.67
Teaching activities construct								2.71	0.43

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Table 5

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Evaluation of Student Performance Activities

Evaluation of student performance activities	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>			%
Construct tests to assess student understanding, growth, and development.	52	0	0.00	3	5.77	49	94.23	2.94	0.24
Develop and communicate methods for evaluating student performance.	52	0	0.00	4	7.69	48	92.31	2.92	0.27
Develop and use a grading rubric for class evaluation.	52	0	0.00	6	11.54	46	88.46	2.88	0.32
Review tests and other evaluation instruments with the cooperating teacher.	52	0	0.00	6	11.54	46	88.46	2.88	0.32
Utilize a grading system consistent with school policy and expectations of the cooperating teacher.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Evaluation of student performance construct								2.90	0.31

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Supervised Agricultural Experience activities focused on helping students with their SAE projects and gaining a better understanding of the SAE program. Respondents considered all SAE activities very relevant with the exception of *work with employers and/or parents to develop students' SAE programs*, which they considered 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 one FFA activity very relevant (Table 7). They considered *assist in organizing the local FFA test plot* relevant.

School–community relations activities focused on providing visibility for an agricultural education program. Respondents considered 8 of 14 school–community relations activities very relevant (Table 8). They considered six activities relevant: *visit with agribusiness leaders about the local agriculture program*, *attend or assist with a school function or athletic event*, *visit with other community leaders about the local agriculture program*, *attend at least one community related meeting*, *visit the county Extension office to gather information about agriculture in the community*, and *trade student teaching responsibilities with a student teacher in another school*.

Table 6

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Evaluation of SAE Activities

SAE activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Relate classroom instruction to students' SAEs.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Direct students in keeping records of their SAE.	52	1	1.92	9	17.31	42	80.77	2.79	0.46
Help students with SAE plans and agreements.	52	1	1.92	10	19.23	41	78.85	2.77	0.47
Discuss SAE with the cooperating teacher and/or administrator.	52	2	3.85	11	21.15	39	75.00	2.71	0.54
Guide students in the selection and/or expansion of their SAE.	52	2	3.85	17	32.69	33	63.46	2.60	0.57
Help students understand how SAE relates to tasks performed by people in agricultural occupations.	52	1	1.92	17	32.69	34	65.38	2.63	0.53
Assist students in solving problems associated with their SAE programs.	52	1	1.92	22	42.31	29	55.77	2.54	0.54
Teach two lessons integrating personal finance into SAE.	52	0	0.00	28	53.85	24	46.15	2.46	0.50
Conduct SAE follow-up sessions.	52	4	7.69	24	46.15	24	46.15	2.38	0.63
Work with employers and/or parents to develop students' SAE programs.	52	6	11.54	25	48.08	21	40.38	2.29	0.67
SAE activities construct								2.60	0.53

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Table 7

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of FFA Activities

FFA activities	n	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		M	SD
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
Supervise one FFA activity other than a regular meeting.	52	0	0.00	4	7.69	48	92.31	2.92	0.27
Discuss with the cooperating teacher how to appropriately integrate FFA into classroom instruction.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Help officers plan an agenda and serve as FFA adviser for one or more FFA meetings.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Prepare a team (or individual) for a CDE event.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Discuss fundraising activities with the cooperating teacher.	52	0	0.00	10	19.23	42	80.77	2.81	0.40
Assist FFA officers with their duties as needed.	52	1	1.92	12	23.08	39	75.00	2.73	0.49
Assist in planning/attend/participate in a state or national FFA leadership conference.	52	1	1.92	14	26.92	37	71.15	2.69	0.51
Relate FFA activities to class instruction.	52	0	0.00	18	34.62	34	65.38	2.65	0.48
Obtain and review a copy of the FFA chapter's program of activities.	52	0	0.00	20	38.46	32	61.54	2.62	0.49
Teach one or more lessons on leadership or FFA.	52	2	3.85	17	32.69	33	63.46	2.60	0.57
Plan and supervise an overnight trip involving students.	52	2	3.85	20	38.46	30	57.69	2.54	0.58
Assist a member in applying for an award or scholarship.	52	2	3.85	20	38.46	30	57.69	2.54	0.58
Assist a committee in planning and conducting an event.	52	1	1.92	23	44.23	28	53.85	2.52	0.54
Review procedures for state and county fair entries.	52	5	9.62	18	34.62	29	55.77	2.46	0.67
Assist in organizing the local FFA test plot.	52	17	32.69	27	51.92	8	15.38	1.83	0.68
FFA activities construct								2.63	0.49

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Table 8

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of School–Community Relations Activities

School–community relations activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Confer with administrators about the qualities they want to see in a good teacher and go over important points in interviewing for a teaching position.	52	2	3.85	8	15.38	42	80.77	2.77	0.51
Develop correspondence for teachers, administrators, and parents to inform and secure permission for field trips and/or overnight trips.	52	4	7.69	9	17.31	39	75.00	2.67	0.62
Participate in parent–teacher and/or IEP conferences.	52	3	5.77	11	21.15	38	73.08	2.67	0.58
Attend school related meetings such as faculty meetings, parent's association, school board, etc.	52	3	5.77	14	26.92	35	67.31	2.62	0.60
Have a school district administrator who is responsible for teacher evaluation observe your teaching and provide suggestions for improvement.	52	3	5.77	14	26.92	35	67.31	2.62	0.60
Visit a high school agriculture program in a neighboring community. Consider visiting a school that is on a different schedule (block or traditional) from your student teaching center.	52	4	7.69	13	25.00	35	67.31	2.60	0.63
Visit one or more other classes.	52	3	5.77	15	28.85	34	65.38	2.60	0.60
Visit other rural and/or agricultural businesses in the community.	52	3	5.77	23	44.23	26	50.00	2.44	0.61
Visit with agribusiness leaders about the local agriculture program.	52	5	9.62	35	67.31	12	23.08	2.13	0.56
Attend or assist with a school function or athletic event.	52	9	17.31	29	55.77	14	26.92	2.10	0.66
Visit with other community leaders about the local agriculture program.	52	7	13.46	37	71.15	8	15.38	2.02	0.54

School–community relations activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Attend at least one community related meeting such as civic organizations, garden clubs, Farm Bureau, fair board, etc.	52	11	21.15	30	57.69	11	21.15	2.00	0.66
Visit the county Extension office to gather information about agriculture in the community.	52	12	23.08	32	61.54	8	15.38	1.92	0.62
Trade student teaching responsibilities with a student teacher in another school for one day.	52	17	32.69	27	51.92	8	15.38	1.83	0.68
School–community relations construct								2.36	0.61

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Adult education activities focused on promoting agricultural education beyond the classroom. Respondents considered all adult learning activities irrelevant (Table 9).

Table 9

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Adult Education Activities

Adult education activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Meet with an advisory committee to plan adult education activities.	52	24	46.15	23	44.23	5	9.62	1.63	0.66
List procedures used by the cooperating teacher in planning, conducting, and evaluating adult education activities.	52	26	50.00	24	46.15	2	3.85	1.54	0.58
Review past adult education activities conducted by the cooperating teacher.	52	25	48.08	26	50.00	1	1.92	1.54	0.54
Participate in adult education activities.	52	28	53.85	23	44.23	1	1.92	1.48	0.54
Plan, conduct, and/or coordinate an adult education activity.	52	30	57.69	22	42.31	0	0.00	1.42	0.50
Adult education activities construct								1.52	0.56

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Teaching profession activities focused on being part of organizations and excelling at classroom teaching. Respondents considered all but three teaching profession activities very relevant (Table 10). They considered three activities relevant: *attend a local education*

association or school professional development event, meet with the local educators' association representative, and serve on a faculty/staff committee.

Table 10

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Profession Activities

Teaching profession activities	<i>n</i>	Irrelevant		Relevant		Very relevant		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Discuss with the cooperating teacher the appropriate balance between personal and professional responsibilities.	52	0	0.00	4	7.69	48	92.31	2.92	0.27
Review and discuss with cooperating teacher their teaching and extended/summer contract including salary schedule.	52	0	0.00	9	17.31	43	82.69	2.83	0.38
Attend a subdistrict/district/area/regional teacher ag association or FFA meeting.	52	0	0.00	14	26.92	38	73.08	2.73	0.45
Become familiar with the teaching standards. Complete a mock evaluation with the cooperating teacher and begin identifying artifacts that would demonstrate proficiency.	52	3	5.77	10	19.23	39	75.00	2.69	0.58
Discuss professional organizations (local and state education associations, NAAE, ACTE, etc.) as well as local community organizations with the cooperating teacher.	52	3	5.77	11	21.15	38	73.08	2.67	0.58
Attend a local education association or school professional development event.	52	8	15.38	23	44.23	21	40.38	2.25	0.71
Meet with the local educators association representative.	52	13	25.00	23	44.23	16	30.77	2.06	0.75
Serve on a faculty/staff committee (e.g., School Improvement).	52	18	34.62	25	48.08	9	17.31	1.83	0.71
Teaching activities profession construct								2.50	0.55

Note. Item mean is shown in boldface. Scale: 1 = irrelevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = very relevant.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This study reveals cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding the relevance of activities inherent to the agricultural education student teaching experience and serves as a feedback loop to university agricultural education student teaching coordinators. Since cooperating teachers exert a powerful influence on normative belief development (Ajzen, 1991) and, ultimately, on practices adopted by student teachers (Rozelle and Wilson, 2012), it is critical that training for cooperating teachers emphasizes the importance of skills and activities required during the capstone student teaching experience.

Cooperating teachers surveyed in this study considered seven of the eight overall constructs very relevant. These findings confirm the relevance of skills and activities currently used by teacher education programs in Iowa and South Dakota. Respondents considered the adult education construct irrelevant. Given the decreased focus on adult farmer programs in Iowa and South Dakota, it is logical that cooperating teachers in this study found adult education less relevant than the other constructs. Because there is no immediate need for adult education in current high school agricultural education programs, cooperating teachers feel less time should be spent on adult education during student teaching. Though Knowles, Horton, and Swanson (2012) would argue that some adult teaching methods are appropriate for secondary students, agriculture teachers might be better served if adult education programming was offered through graduate or continuing education after they gain some experience in the classroom.

Findings from this study are consistent with those of Torrez and Krebs (2012), who suggested that part of being a master cooperating teacher is assisting student teachers with teacher development activities associated with evaluating student performance. In the present study, such activities included developing tests to assess students, developing a method for evaluating student performance, and utilizing a grading system. The cooperating teachers surveyed in this study considered all activities and skills related to evaluation of student performance very relevant to the capstone student teaching experience.

The results of this study provide further confirmation that the current core of required student teaching activities and skills is appropriate. However, these skills and activities are based on previous and current practices and philosophies. There is a need to determine whether these skills and activities will still be required or will need to be improved upon to meet the needs of the next generation of teachers. There is also a need to explore which activities are not currently required but may be vital in the future.

This study has implications for teacher education programs in agricultural education. Teacher educators can incorporate cooperating teachers' perceptions of student teaching activities and experiences into cooperating teacher training. Facilitating discussion on this topic will provide an opportunity for cooperating teachers to reflect on and discuss strategies for implementing required activities among peers. Additionally, such training activities may help cooperating teachers self-evaluate how they implement activities in their own programs, which can serve as part of a comprehensive program evaluation.

We recommend additional research in several related areas. Further investigation into the relevance of adult education activities during student teaching is warranted. The student teaching activities and experiences in this study came from student teacher handbooks in two North Central states, so it is important that future research determine relevance of these activities nationwide. Replicating this study across all teacher education programs would enhance the current knowledge base regarding the student teaching experience. When considering the triadic partnership inherent in the student teaching experience, it is evident that the voice of the university supervisor is missing. And because cooperating teachers have consented "to assume one of the most responsible, influential, and exciting roles in teacher education" (Henry and Weber, 2010, p. 2), it is critical that we continue to understand their impact on the student teaching experience.

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