

From Conflict to Collaboration: An Exploratory Study of Professional Development for Preservice Teachers and Mentors

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Abstract

Conflict resolution skills are critical for maintaining positive relationships within the triad of cooperating teachers (CTs), student teachers (STs), and university supervisors in agricultural education. While student teaching internships provide opportunities for professional growth, they are also prone to conflicts related to personal, pedagogical, and professional issues in the mentor-mentee relationship. If unresolved, these conflicts could negatively impact the student's teaching internship experience and deter future educators from pursuing teaching careers. This study explored the sources of conflict within the triad relationship and examined how conflicts were navigated during the Spring 2024 student teaching internship. Using a qualitative exploratory case study approach, data were collected from CTs, STs, and university supervisors through pre- and post-internship surveys, collaborative discussions, and role-play activities during a pre-internship workshop. Findings revealed that pedagogical conflicts were the most frequently anticipated and experienced. Participants emphasized open communication, collaboration, and feedback as essential conflict resolution strategies. This study highlighted the importance of professional development in conflict resolution in strengthening mentor-mentee relationships. By equipping preservice teachers and mentors with these skills, agricultural education teacher preparation programs can continue to foster positive student teaching experiences and support teacher retention in the profession.

Introduction and Literature Review

Conflict resolution skills and strategies are necessary to maintain a positive relationship between the triad of the mentor cooperating teacher (CT), mentee student teacher (ST), and university supervisor (Nesbitt, 2024). CTs are in-service teachers who served in a mentoring role while hosting student teachers for their student teaching internship (Jones et al., 2014). STs are preservice teachers who take on all roles of a teacher, including the planning, delivering, and evaluating of lesson plans, and who are mentored by CTs during a student teaching internship in the CT's classroom (University of Florida, 2025). University supervisors are university faculty, staff, and graduate students who have previous teaching experience, and serve as liaisons between the university program and the cooperating schools. University supervisors also

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help facilitate the learning process of the ST, under the direction of the CT during a student teaching internship (University of Florida, 2025).

An important aspect of the triad model emphasized the mentor-mentee relationship between STs and CTs (Nesbitt & Barry, 2024; Roberts, 2006; Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Conflicts such as personal incompatibility, pedagogical issues, and professional challenges arise in the mentor and mentee relationship and need to be effectively navigated throughout the relationship (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). However, conflict resolution requires navigating and regulating the emotions of others while providing feedback and promoting the growth of the ST. The COVID-19 pandemic, with decreased face-to-face interactions, decreased social and emotional learning through attendance of online schooling (Duckworth et al., 2021; Ramos & Towns, 2023), which will continue to impact the upcoming generation of preservice teachers' abilities to navigate conflict resolution.

Previous research identified challenges with managing conflict and effective communication between STs and CTs (Barry, 2019; Montgomery, 2000; Nesbitt, 2024). Varying personalities in mentoring relationships are likely to occur, but the ability to recognize differences and find common ground can be the key to having a positive experience (Jones et al., 2014). Workshops and training that focuses specifically on effective communication, varying personalities, and conflict resolution can help establish expectations and set the stage for a more positive student teaching internship experience Barry et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2014). Previous studies with student teaching cohort interviews revealed that high conflict between STs and CTs may have attributed to instances of the STs decision to not enter a career teaching agriculture (Nesbitt, 2024). According to the National FFA Organization (2025), the prominent co-curricular association affiliated with agricultural education, the lack of qualified agriculture teachers entering the classroom persists as the most significant challenge in agricultural education. Therefore, CTs, STs, and university supervisors need strategies for navigating conflict resolution and increasing emotional intelligence to develop strong triad relationships that will support a positive student teaching internship experience.

Previous research has been conducted related to conflict between agricultural teachers and students in their classroom (Garton et al., 1997), teachers in multi-teacher programs (Collins, 2024), and personal/professional conflict such as work-family conflict (Sorensen et al., 2016), and how these conflicts relate to agricultural teacher retention and effectiveness. However, no research has been published on conflict experienced during the student teaching internship experience in SBAE. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the types of conflicts university supervisors, CTs, and STs anticipated and experienced during the student teaching internship experience. By improving triad training in collaboration, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution through role-play, this knowledge can help facilitate an increase in agriculture teacher retention.

Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

The student teaching internship experience has historically been one of the most influential components of formal teacher preparation, shaping student teachers' perceptions of the profession and their decision to enter teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Kagan, 1992). Based on this premise, this study and the mentorship experience between CTs and STs are grounded in constructivism. Constructivism is based on how individuals transfer their experiences through reflection to advance their knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). A constructivist lens allows the exploration of lived experiences of CTs and STs to interpret how conflict and mentorship between the CT and ST impacted their student teaching internship experience.

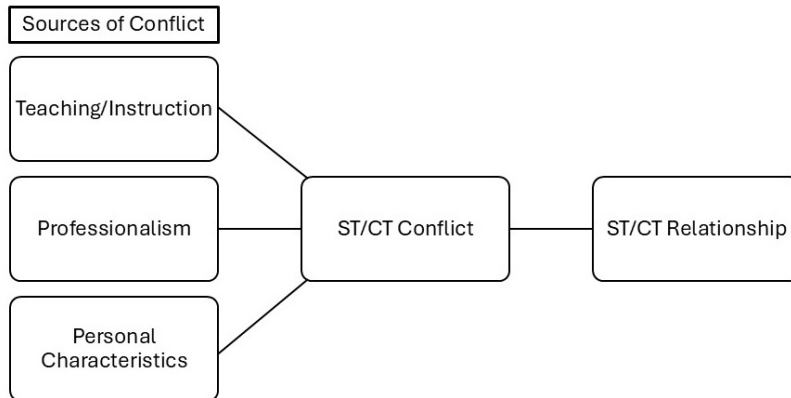
Social exchange theory (Homans, 1961) also served as a foundation framework for this study by providing a basis for understanding how interactions between the mentor and mentee relate to the costs and rewards associated with the interaction and overall development of a positive mentoring experience. The

mentor-mentee relationship should be mutually beneficial, which promotes maintaining a positive relationship (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). Mentors could benefit from professional development, while the mentees should view their student teaching internship experience as an opportunity to learn how to be an effective educator. Conflict or tensions that arise in this relationship can be stressful, increasing the costs related to maintaining the relationship being viewed as higher than the benefits to the relationship, which would lead to an overall negative learning experience and deterioration of the relationship (Homans, 1961). Preparing CTs with mentorship skills and STs and CTs with the skills to develop a positive ST/CT relationship benefits the student teaching internship experience overall.

Building on this theoretical foundation, Roberts' (2006) model of cooperating teacher effectiveness posits the ST/CT relationship is an essential component for preparing future agricultural teachers. The model identified four key domains of cooperating teacher effectiveness: Teaching/Instruction, Professionalism, Student Teacher/Cooperating Teacher Relationship, and Personal Characteristics (Roberts, 2006). The ST/CT teacher relationship included providing clear expectations, constructive feedback and evaluation, praising STs when appropriate, guiding STs as necessary, sharing resources, providing meaningful experiences, and anticipating the needs of the ST (Nesbitt & Barry, 2024). These actions or failure to engage in these practices can lead to conflict and a negative social exchange between the mentor (CT) and mentee (ST). Additional components of the model of cooperating teacher effectiveness included teaching/instruction (e.g., good subject matter knowledge, classroom management skills, effective teaching practices, etc.), professionalism (e.g., role modeling, effective communicator, relationships with other teachers and community, etc.), and personal characteristics (e.g., patient, trustworthy, dependable, etc.) (Nesbitt & Barry, 2024; Roberts, 2006). All of these practices are essential for overall CT effectiveness and ability to create a positive learning environment and relationship between the mentor and mentee.

While Roberts (2006) emphasized effectiveness, Hudson and Hudson (2018) examined tensions that can challenge the mentoring relationship. They identified three primary sources of conflict within the mentoring process between CTs and STs. These included personal, pedagogical, and professional issues. Personal issues included conflict related to personality, behavioral decisions, life experiences, views and values, etc. Pedagogical issues included conflict with preferred teaching methods, preparations, philosophy, classroom management, etc. Professional issues referred to conflict associated with relationships with students and colleagues, professional dress, networking approaches, career aspirations, etc. (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). Each type of conflict had the potential to disrupt collaboration and diminish the quality of the mentoring experience, particularly when left unresolved.

Synthesizing both frameworks, the conceptual model for this study integrated the categories of teaching/instruction, professionalism, and personal characteristics from Roberts' (2006) model as potential sources of conflict aligned with Hudson and Hudson's (2018) framework. These sources were conceptualized as influencing the occurrence and nature of the ST/CT conflict, which in turn affected the overall ST/CT relationship. The model also drew on constructivism, which emphasizes how individuals build understanding through reflection on lived experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, social exchange theory framed mentoring as a balance of costs and rewards that shape interactions between CTs and STs (Homans, 1961). Together, these perspectives offered a lens to interpret how mentors and mentees made sense of their experiences and how perceived benefits or tensions influenced their relationship during the internship. Ultimately, this conceptual model illustrated how interpersonal, pedagogical, and professional dynamics within the mentoring triad influence the perceptions and experiences of conflict in the ST/CT relationship.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework for Conflict's Influence on the ST/CT Relationship*

Note. Adapted from Hudson and Hudson's (2018) conflict levels and Roberts' (2006) model of cooperating teacher effectiveness.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the sources and navigation of conflict within the triad relationship of CTs, STs, and university supervisors in the context of agricultural education. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) have university supervisors experienced or anticipated between CTs and STs?
2. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) do CTs and STs anticipate in their relationship?
3. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) did the CTs and STs experience?
4. How did CTs and STs navigate the identified conflict?

Methods

This exploratory study used a qualitative exploratory single case study approach to address the research purpose and questions by gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions of CTs and STs in regard to conflict (Merriam, 2009). According to Yin (2014), the use of a case study is justified when modern phenomena is being investigated in a real-life context. Exploratory case studies are appropriate to use when addressing "how" and "what" type questions that are focused on gaining an extensive and in-depth understanding of social experiences (Yin, 2014). The phenomenon in this study was the conflict present among CTs, STs, and university supervisors during the 2024 and 2025 student teaching experiences. Utilizing this method helped us gain preliminary insights into the sources and navigation of conflict during the student teaching internship experience. Using a purposive sampling technique, all CTs, STs, and university supervisors from the Spring 2024 cohort and CTs and STs from the Spring 2025 cohort were recruited for this study. We collected data using a participatory discussion during mentorship training, pre-survey to university supervisors, and post-survey with CTs and STs. The target population for this case study included secondary school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers who served as CTs and their STs during the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (UF

AEC) Spring 2024 ($n = 8$ pairs) and 2025 ($n = 4$ pairs) student teaching internship ($N = 12$ pairs). As well as the university supervisors tasked with overseeing the internships in 2024 ($N = 9$).

University Supervisor Survey

In January 2024, university supervisors were sent a pre-internship survey through Qualtrics that asked eight open-ended reflective questions related to any previous experiences observing or anticipated observations of personal, pedagogical, professional, and other conflict. Nine university supervisors ($N = 9$) were surveyed, and seven ($n = 7$) responded, resulting in a 78% response rate. Of these nine university supervisors, two were current PhD students, and seven were faculty and staff with PhDs in agricultural education. Seven had served previously as CTs, and all but one had previously been a university supervisor. Experience as a university supervisor ranged from one to 10+ years of experience. Demographics of the university supervisors were not collected in the survey to protect the individual respondent's identity. Additionally, we elected to not repeat the survey in 2025 as any new university supervisors had never been university supervisors before and therefore did not have any previous experiences overseeing CT and ST pairs.

Mentorship Training Program and Collaborative Discussion

In 2018, the UF AEC launched a mentorship training program to equip CTs with the knowledge and skills needed to mentor STs effectively throughout the internship experience. The program emphasizes three key aspects of mentoring: social support, professional support, and role modeling (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Barry, 2019; Nesbitt & Barry, 2022; Russell & Russel, 2011). The training program included a pre-internship workshop, bi-weekly mentorship-focused emails and infographics sent to CTs, monthly collaborative Zoom meetings, and a dedicated support website. In 2020, the program expanded to include STs in the pre-internship workshop, which offered them training on receiving and applying feedback provided by the CTs effectively (Nesbitt & Barry, 2024).

In December 2023, conflict resolution professional training for STs and CTs was an addition to the pre-internship workshop. This training was designed to uncover and address the complexities of the mentor-mentee relationship by focusing on conflict resolution and emotional intelligence. During this training, participants were given an overview of conflict and three types of conflict they may encounter during the internship experience. Workshop facilitators also emphasized the impacts of conflict on the ST/CT relationship (Roberts, 2006). Conflict areas included personal, pedagogical, and professional types of conflict. For this study, personal conflict was any conflict related to personality, behavioral decisions, life experiences, and views and values (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). Pedagogical conflict was described as conflict related to preferred teaching methods, preparations, philosophy, and classroom management. Professional conflict was defined as conflict related to relationships with students and colleagues, professional dress, networking approaches, and career aspirations (Hudson & Hudson, 2018).

After becoming familiar with the types of conflict, the CTs and STs engaged in collaborative discussions with their peers (i.e. CT groups and ST groups) to identify potential sources of conflict they may encounter during the student teaching internship. These sources included interactions with each other, students, administrators, community members, parents, etc. The data from flipcharts and shared responses were collected for analysis and notes were taken from the sharing portion of this exercise. This was followed by participation in a session on delivering and receiving feedback. Following this session, CTs and STs were provided with tools related to conflict management, enabling them to navigate conflict dynamics better by utilizing Thomas & Kilman's (1974) five conflict styles. This session concluded with STs and CTs working together to unpack their personal histories and conflict styles to address how they would approach and navigate different role-play scenarios.

Post Survey

After the 14-week student teaching internship, all CTs and STs were surveyed via Qualtrics and asked to respond to nine open-ended questions. These questions asked them to reflect on their experiences and identify conflicts that occurred in the personal, pedagogical, and professional categories, how they navigated conflict, what feedback they gave/received and how they responded, what tools they used to navigate the conflict, and what additional training was needed. Out of the 12 CTs and 12 STs ($N = 24$), a total of 10 CTs and eight STs ($n = 18$) completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 75%.

Nine of the 10 CT respondents disclosed their demographics. This group had six female respondents and three male respondents. Seven CTs were initially certified in agricultural education through UF AEC, while two had a non-education major. At the time of completing their survey, six CTs had teaching experience between 5-10 years, two had teaching experience between 11-15 years, and one respondent had over 15 years of experience. Six CTs had mentored 1-2 previous interns, four were over the age of 40, and no participants were under 29. The demographics of the ST respondents ($n = 8$) show that seven participants were female and one male. The age distribution included two respondents aged 19-20 years, five aged 21-22 years, and one aged 23-24 years.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed from both the collaborative participatory discussions during the mentorship training and open-ended questions from the surveys using an open, inductive coding with a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We utilized an exemplary coding scheme for responses, and reviewed participants responses for each source of conflict, according to the associated question (i.e. personal, pedagogical, and professional). Data was then analyzed according to the specified sources of conflict (see Table 1). If a conflict was identified in a source response question (i.e. classroom management as a personal issue as opposed to a pedagogical issue), we grouped the response in the appropriate source during the data analysis process. This two-step process follows the recategorization method (Saldaña, 2024). We then categorized and made meaning of responses for sources of conflict related to anticipated and experienced conflict.

Table 1

Coding Scheme

Code	Definition	Key Themes
Personal Conflict	Personal issues included conflict related to personality, behavioral decisions, life experiences, views and values, etc.	Personality differences Attitude Respect Receiving feedback
Pedagogical Conflict	Pedagogical issues included conflict with preferred teaching methods, preparations, philosophy, classroom management, etc.	Teaching style differences Classroom management Lesson planning Student engagement Student discipline Teaching philosophies
Professional Conflict	Professional issues referred to conflict associated with relationships with students and colleagues, professional dress, networking approaches, career aspirations, etc.	Work Ethic Student interactions Professionalism Mentor flexibility Career goals

Note. Coding scheme based on Hudson & Hudson (2018).

Trustworthiness

Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, the study's trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Multiple strategies were implemented to enhance credibility and ensure trustworthiness in this study. Data triangulation was achieved by collecting feedback from CTs, STs, and university supervisors, which provided a holistic view of the triad relationship. The team engaged in routine peer debriefing and collaboration meetings to challenge assumptions and minimized the potential for biases during qualitative analysis. Prolonged engagement with the data further strengthened the authenticity of interpretations.

Transferability

Detailed descriptions of the context, participants, and procedures have been provided to help enhance the study's transferability to similar agricultural education settings.

Dependability

An audit trail was maintained throughout the study. The coding process included a code-refinement cycle by first coding for meaning and category and then verifying the associated source of conflict. Peer debriefing included review by all researchers of the associated codes.

Confirmability

Strategies to enhance confirmability included researcher reflexivity and traceability of researcher claims. Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research as it acknowledges the researchers' backgrounds, experiences, and potential biases that may influence the research process (Creswell, 2013). The research team for this study included two faculty members, a PhD candidate at the time of the study, and a PhD student in UF AEC. Three researchers have extensive agricultural education experience, served as secondary agricultural teachers and FFA advisors, and had varying experiences with the CT mentorship training program. Two served as CTs at some point while in the secondary agriculture classroom. One researcher is trained in conflict resolution and management and played a key role in designing and implementing the conflict resolution component in the professional development and assessments. To mitigate bias, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing to ensure transparency and rigor throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

RQ1. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) have university supervisors experienced or anticipated between cooperating and student teachers and their external environment?

Personal

Four of the university supervisors provided instances of personal issues as sources of conflict, namely related to personality characteristics and perspectives of the world. One shared about differences in communication styles, stating "the cooperating teacher was extremely open and straightforward with feedback, but the student teacher needed a little less openness." They went on to share that they anticipated potential issues with their current ST/CT pairing with the ST being more "bubbly" and the CT being more

“straightforward.” Others shared differences in values and views regarding life experiences, work ethics, and opinions.

Pedagogical

All university supervisors shared previous experiences or anticipated pedagogical issues between CTs and STs. They shared differences in lesson planning, openness to change or trying new things, classroom management, and expectations of students. One shared about a previous experience where the CT “had management in her classroom and enjoyed participating in student drama which made the student teacher feel uncomfortable.” Another shared that at times the CTs have to be reminded of the “novice” level their STs are at stating, “they need coaching and guidance along the way they should not expect them to make the same decisions as an experienced teacher.” They followed that up by sharing the STs need to remember to ask questions to learn and grow.

Professional

All university supervisors identified previous experiences or anticipated professional issues related to navigating relationships with students, their attire, social media, time management, career aspirations, and commitment level. A university supervisor shared regarding commitment level that, “Ag teachers are often 110% committed to the job. Student teachers sometimes are not that committed.” Navigating relationships and setting boundaries with students was shared most often. One shared STs often struggle with this sharing about their challenges related to, “drawing a line between them and their students socially.” Another echoed this by stating, “sometimes CTs will feel that STs are too friendly and not strict enough with students.” University supervisors were experienced in navigating challenges in the areas of boundaries and the frustrations they had experienced with CTs and their STs.

RQ2. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) do cooperating and student teachers anticipate in their relationship?

Personal

Anticipated personal conflicts included differing emotional responses and behaviors between CTs and personal issues impacting work. CTs noted anticipated challenges with emotionally sensitive STs, who may be prone to crying when given feedback. CTs also noted openness on social media and personal drama leaking into their role as a concern. STs anticipated potential friction could be created if classroom rules and expectations differ from what they are accustomed to. STs also noted they were concerned about how previous relationships with current students and parents, or their own personal issues, may impact their work in the classroom.

Pedagogical

Pedagogical conflicts were the most anticipated with both CTs and STs due to differences in teaching methods and instructional priorities. CTs expressed concerns about STs’ preferred teaching styles, noting they would have to remember STs’ teaching styles may not replicate their practices. Conflicts over how to integrate theory into practice, meet core content priorities, ensure effective classroom management, and the efficient use of laboratory spaces were also anticipated by the CTs. STs also anticipated conflicts stemming from their limited familiarity with their CTs’ FFA program expectations, especially those with no FFA background, and the role of the FFA advisor. CTs also discussed how their views on students may differ from their STs, as well as how they demonstrated empathy for students.

Professional

Both CTs and STs anticipated professional conflicts related to maintaining authority and professionalism in STs' interactions with students, parents, and alumni. CTs worried about their STs setting proper boundaries with their students. They emphasized the importance of professionalism when setting authoritative boundaries with students, noting that the STs would need to avoid being overly accommodating and being a "yes man". STs mainly anticipated professional conflict with their CTs when interacting with parents and alumni. They stated they may approach these relationships differently than their ST.

RQ3. What sources of conflict (personal, pedagogical, and professional) did the cooperating and student teachers experience?***Personal***

Both CTs and STs reported minimal or no personal conflict within their mentor-mentee relationships. CTs noted that there was "very little" personal conflict, and STs affirmed this. One ST stated, "we didn't have any conflicts in this area" and another "we didn't face any she was very understanding." One ST did note that they experienced a little conflict regarding differences in "views and values."

Pedagogical

Pedagogical conflicts were the most frequently reported, with both CTs and STs identifying areas of tension. CTs described challenges with their STs related to lesson preparation, time management, confidence in varying teaching methods, and differing views on students. One CT stated, "I had thought that she had already planned a bunch of lessons the semester before, but that did not seem like the case." Another CT stated, "I encouraged her to teach her way as long as the information that was taught was fully inclusive. At times she did, and it turned out very good. When she did not, she was less confident." STs acknowledged similar concerns. One ST stated, "At the start of the semester, just planning ahead so she could give me feedback." Another ST recognized their need to "develop more classroom management styles and test multiple types out to see what works." However, neither stated how the conflict with feedback or management was seen with their CT. Additionally, STs noted a difference in teaching philosophy and their view on students, stating "We saw students differently she just saw them as a student I saw them as a person with feelings." Differences in teaching styles and approaches to managing students were most prevalent.

Professional

Neither CTs nor STs reported professional conflicts.

Synthesis of Feedback

Below is a synthesis of the pedagogical, professional, and personal issues found throughout this study (Table 2).

Table 2*Comparison of feedback from data collection*

Data Collection	Type of Feedback		
	Personal	Pedagogical	Professional
University Supervisor	Differing communication styles (e.g., straightforward vs. sensitive); differences in values, views, and personality traits.	Differences in lesson planning, openness to change, classroom management, and expectations of students. CTs sometimes struggle with remembering STs' novice status.	Challenges with STs navigating relationships (e.g., boundaries with students), dress, social media, and time management.
CT & ST Anticipated Session	Emotional responses, e.g., CTs anticipating STs being sensitive to feedback; differing classroom rules/expectations.	Conflicts over teaching methods, theory-to-practice integration, classroom management, lab space usage, and familiarity with CT's FFA program expectations (particularly for STs without FFA background).	CTs concerned about STs maintaining boundaries with students. STs concerned about interactions with parents and alumni.
CT & ST Post-internship Experience	Minimal or no personal conflict reported.	Most frequent conflicts; challenges with lesson preparation, classroom management, and confidence in teaching methods. Both CTs and STs identified struggles but used feedback and communication to improve.	Neither CTs nor STs reported professional conflicts.

The table provides a comparison of the university supervisors' previous experiences with conflict with the anticipated and actual internship experiences with conflict for CTs and STs. Interestingly, there were less experiences with conflict than anticipated. Resolutions strategies, as suggested by Hudson & Huson (2018) that were provided in pre-internship training may have helped mitigate potential conflicts.

RQ4. How did cooperating and student teachers navigate the identified conflict?

Both CTs and STs emphasized open communication and collaboration as the primary strategies for navigating conflict. CTs highlighted reflection and constructive dialogue as essential tools, with one stating, "We worked collaboratively to reach common growth goals." Another CT described using open-ended questions and listening to the ST's perspective to guide discussions. STs echoed this response, explaining that conflicts were addressed through honest conversations. One ST remarked, "Whenever we would come across these differences, she would often take a step back and let me have the chance to roll with my opinions."

Feedback was a central component of the mentoring relationship. CTs described providing frequent and constructive feedback, often during or immediately after lessons. They noted efforts to balance feedback with encouragement, focusing on 2-3 areas of growth at a time to avoid overwhelming their

interns. STs expressed appreciation for the feedback, describing it as "encouraging and positive." One ST noted, "I didn't take the feedback negatively but instead as an area needing growth."

Both CTs and STs did report on the use of tools provided in the professional development training. CTs mentioned utilizing weekly graphics to guide their feedback, while STs found the conflict-style activity and discussing communication preferences early in the semester helpful in preparing to receive and apply feedback. One ST shared, "I reminded myself of which conflict style I was, and I think this helped me get in the right mindset when receiving feedback." A CT stated, "I think the biggest take away was to stop and think about the situation before reacting so that feedback was given effectively and not based on emotions."

Although participants reported minimal conflict, CTs and STs offered insights for improving professional development. One CT suggested addressing generational differences between mentors and mentees, reflecting, "I just reminded myself that she is young and still has a lot of learning and life to live." STs generally found the training effective, with one stating, "I enjoyed what we were taught and thought it was applicable."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pedagogical conflicts, particularly around teaching methods, lesson preparation, and classroom management, were the most frequently reported issues. Conflicts could be reduced by helping to prepare both CTs and STs for potential differences in philosophies and approaches in pedagogical practices through use of scenarios and discussion (Nesbitt, 2024). Professional development sessions hosting CTs and STs together would allow space to talk through potential differences of opinion in pedagogical approaches and how to navigate this successfully (Barry, 2019; Barry et al., 2021). Student teachers and cooperating teachers reported that the open communication and collaborative approaches that were supported by tools provided in the professional development sessions were central to successfully navigating conflicts. Conducting professional development for CTs and STs and creating space for role play and discussion should be considered as a major component for pre-internship preparation in teacher education programs (James et al., 2025). Both CTs and STs valued frequent, constructive, and balanced feedback as a key component of the relationship. The training targeted for each group of mentor CTs and mentee STs on how to receive and deliver feedback effectively was appreciated by both CTs and STs.

Professional issues related to STs establishing professional relationships with students were anticipated by CTs, STs, and university supervisors. University supervisors shared previous experiences related to STs struggling to find the balance in maintaining boundaries with their students. While this type of conflict was anticipated, it was not shared by CTs or STs in the post-survey. This could indicate that this group of STs was either particularly advanced in this area or received helpful feedback from their CT in this area. Future research and exploration of this area could provide insight into this phenomenon. Additionally, it could provide insight into how the mentorship training program assists in success in this area.

Compared to the previous cohort, the Spring 2024 cohort appeared to have a reduction in conflicts between CTs and their STs (Nesbitt, 2024). This may be attributed to the implementation of conflict resolution training before the internship experience. Roberts' (2006) model for cooperating teacher effectiveness defined teaching/instruction, professionalism, personal characteristics, and the CT/ST relationship as important elements for guiding the CT's mentorship of their ST. In this study, we explored a conceptual framework related to teaching/instruction, professionalism, and personal characteristics as sources of conflict that could potentially impact the CT/ST relationship. Our findings indicate mostly positive experiences in building the CT/ST relationship through meaningful feedback in these areas rather than experiencing conflict related to differences or small tensions. This study provides preliminary support

for continued training on mentoring and inclusion of conflict resolution in this training to build positive CT/ST relationships.

We recommend continuing and refining this training for future SBAE CT and ST workshops. Generational differences between CTs and STs should also be acknowledged as a potential source of misunderstanding, and intentional strategies for bridging these gaps should be considered (Hudson & Hudson, 2018). Targeted resources addressing recurring issues, such as pedagogical conflicts, FFA-related challenges, and authority dynamics with students, parents, and alumni, should be developed to further mitigate more commonly reported conflicts. These recommended resources align with Hudson & Hudson (2018), and the need for ongoing professional development for cooperating teachers (James et al., 2025; Nesbitt & Barry, 2023; Nesbitt et al., 2024). Feedback-related training could also include additional tools for understanding and navigating different conflict styles between CTs and STs (Nesbitt, 2024). Additionally, training for university supervisors to better support CTs and STs in navigating conflicts could strengthen the triad relationship.

Another takeaway from this study was the benefit of collaboration between subdisciplines in agricultural education departments. The mentoring training provided included both agriculture teacher education faculty and agricultural leadership faculty to provide training on navigating conflict. This collaboration for both the training and this research study allowed for a more in-depth examination of the dynamics of conflict and tension related to CT/ST relationship development (Homans, 1961; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, it provided an opportunity to harness different expertise to further advance mentorship training and experiences of CTs and STs in the student teaching internship experience. We recommend continuing to advance opportunities for discussion and collaboration as opportunities for more well-rounded mentorship programs.

Further research is needed in mentorship and conflict related to CT and ST relationship development to understand and anticipate potential conflicts (Nesbitt, 2024; Nesbitt et al., 2024). We recommend an additional follow-up study that further explores experienced conflict in these relationships to provide more depth and breadth to our current findings. Additionally, we recommend exploring how feedback was given and received in instances of tension and conflict between the CT and ST to gauge more understanding of the benefits of conflict resolution training as a part of mentorship training.

Conflict resolution training prior to the internship experience holds the potential for reducing conflicts and strengthening mentor-mentee relationships within the SBAE triad. By proactively addressing conflicts, this training could enhance the student teaching internship experience and increase the likelihood of STs pursuing careers in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Kagan, 1992). Future research should explore the long-term impact of such workshop training and further define the university supervisor's role in conflict resolution as perceived by triad members. Additionally, this approach has broader applications and could be adapted to other mentor-mentee relationships across agricultural disciplines, reinforcing the value of collaborative solutions between fields such as agricultural education and leadership.

We acknowledge the limitations of this study due to the small sample size and representation of only one university department program. Even with the small sample size, findings from this study can help unveil the need to communicate with all triadic members that play a role in the student teaching experience. This study also highlights the continued need to communicate with all members on ways to overcome varied perspectives and conflict styles, so that student teachers can utilize feedback and experiences that move them forward in their teaching careers in a positive way. We also recognize that some of the data collected in this study was collected through post-internship reflection of conflict that was experienced. Although student journals were collected and reviewed in real time, the data were not included in this study. Utilizing weekly student journal entries and identifying the conflict that was experienced could help add to the body

of this work. We recommend duplicating this study in similar university programs to help capture a broader understanding of the influence of conflict training sessions in supporting positive student teaching experiences. In addition, we recognize the wide range of personalities, conflict styles, and communication skills present in each cohort of STs and CTs and acknowledge that this may influence the data collected from year to year. This study is being replicated for the Spring 2026 cohort of STs and CTs from the same university department program to explore additional data that can contribute to understanding conflict management within this dynamic and complex relationship. Additionally, we plan to do focus groups from previous ST and CT groups prior to the inclusion of this training to explore the phenomenon further.

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