

STUDENT TEACHING MANAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: A NATIONAL STUDY

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Providing meaningful student teaching experiences for individuals enrolled in agricultural education is a primary responsibility of teacher education institutions. Teacher educators in agricultural education who have received graduate and/or undergraduate degrees in more than one institution or who have changed jobs, and subsequently, relocated to various colleges and universities have undoubtedly observed variability in the requirements and procedures applied in managing student teaching. This variability is realistic considering there are more than 80 agricultural teacher education institutions in the United States. Consequently, there could conceivably be more than 80 different ways of structuring and managing student teaching. Is this the case? A review of literature has failed to reveal specific descriptions of management procedures and requirements.

Several studies verify that differences exist among institutions engaged in the preparation of vocational teachers for certification. A committee reporting to the American Vocational Association concluded that there was extensive divergence in certification requirements throughout the vocational service areas and across states (Miller and Roehrich, 1977). Furthermore, Yoder and Bender (1976) mentioned the variety among states in certification standards in their study concerning internship programs.

In terms of specific references to student teaching management in agricultural education, two studies included data describing the length of student teaching. McCracken (1976) concluded that the student teaching period in the central region ranged from six to 16 weeks with a mean of eight weeks. Benton (1973) concluded that student teaching in agriculture ranged from six to 18 weeks with a mean of 9.6.

Related literature concerning other aspects of student teaching management could not be located. Therefore, a description of the specific ways in which student teaching management is accomplished nationwide was deemed desirable.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the current state of the art in the management of student teaching in agricultural education on a nationwide basis. More specifically, the following research questions were studied.

1. Does the management of agricultural education student teaching vary among the teacher education institutions surveyed?
2. What procedures and requirements in the management of student teaching in agricultural education appear to be used by most institutions?
3. Which of the student teaching procedures and requirements affect the most student teachers?

Procedures

A descriptive study was conducted using survey methodology to determine how student teaching was managed. The *Student Teaching Management Questionnaire*, a researcher-designed instrument validated by panel review, was mailed to teacher education institutions within the 48 states listed in the *Directory of Agricultural Teachers Educators* (U.S.O.E., 1979). The teacher educators were asked to respond to the 12-item instrument and return it as soon as possible. After six weeks, a follow-up phone call was made to non-responding institutions.

Of the 88 institutions contacted, 74 responded yielding an 84 percent return rate; however, because two institutions did not offer student teaching, only 72 questionnaires were used in tabulations. Thus, in determining the percentage of institutions responding per category, an N of 72 was used. The total number of students certified by the institutions responding was 1,365, which was the number used to calculate the percentage of students in this sample who were affected by the response in each category.

Results

This study indicated that nationally, a wide range of management procedures was used to educate vocational agriculture teachers. For example, the length of the student teaching period varied from six weeks to 18 weeks. The number of hours the student was expected (not necessarily required) to spend teaching high school students varied from a low of 20 hours to a high of 360 hours. Likewise, a wide range occurred with respect to the number of times (one to ten) the student teacher was visited during the student teaching period.

The following are indicative of procedures and requirements used most often in the management of student teaching and of the experiences in which most student teachers are involved:

1. Fifty-three percent of the institutions have two or fewer full-time teacher educators on staff; however, half of the student teachers are trained at institutions with three to five staff members.

2. Seventy-eight percent of the institutions educate 15 or fewer student teachers per term which involves 62 percent of the student teachers.
3. Sixty-one percent of the institutions assign student teachers to cooperating centers for at least nine weeks which involves 55 percent of the student teachers (see Table 1).
4. Ninety-two percent of the institutions conduct student teaching as one, full-time continuous period, which involves 96 percent of the student teachers.
5. Seventy-one percent of the institutions schedule student teaching either for the duration of the term or toward the end of the term. These two situations involve 72 percent of the student teachers.
6. Sixty-three percent of the institutions expect the student teacher to accumulate 200 or less hours of teaching high school students, which involves 66 percent of the student teachers (see Table 1).
7. Slightly more than half (51.5 percent) of the institutions expect the student teacher to accumulate a specified number of hours teaching adults/young farmers. However, over half (56 percent) of the student teachers are not expected to accumulate any specified number of hours teaching adults/young farmers (see Table 1).
8. Sixty-six percent of the institutions place one student teacher per cooperating center, which involves 58 percent of the student teachers (see Table 2).
9. Seventy-five percent of the institutions make at least three visits to the student teacher, which involves 71 percent of the student teachers (see Table 2).
10. Eighty-two percent of the institutions spend at least half of a school day during a typical supervising visit, which involves 56 percent of the student teachers.
11. Eighty-four percent of the institutions allow the supervising/cooperating teacher as much or more influence as the agricultural education staff in determining the final student teaching grade, which involves 76 percent of the student teachers (see Table 2).

Conclusions

According to the data reported in this study, several conclusions can be identified:

Table 1
STUDENT TEACHING PERIOD LENGTH
IN WEEKS AND HOURS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING

Response			Institutions Responding		Students Involved	
Weeks ^(a) of student teaching	Hours of ^(b) high school Instruction	Hours of ^(c) adult in- struction	No.	%	No.	%
15 - 18			9	12.5	143	10.5
13 - 14			3	4.0	41	3.0
11 - 12			10	14.0	150	11.0
9 - 10			22	30.5	409	30.0
6 - 8			26	36.0	601	44.0
Total			70	97.0	1344	98.5
	100 or less		20	28.0	437	32.0
	101 - 200		25	35.0	464	34.0
	more than 200		9	12.0	109	8.0
	no specified requirements		13	18.0	246	18.0
	no response		5	7.0	109	8.0
	Total		72	100.0	1365	100.0
		0	11	15.5	205	15.0
		5 or less	12	17.0	246	18.0
		5 - 10	8	11.0	164	12.0
		more than 10	6	8.0	150	11.0
		no specified requirements	17	23.0	259	19.0
		no response	14	20.0	300	22.0
		Total	68	94.5	1324	97.0

(a) Mean = 10.24 weeks; one institution reported 10.5, another reported 12-15.

(b) Mean not determined due to excessive reporting in ranges; e.g., 20-360.

(c) Mean not determined due to excessive reporting in ranges, e.g., 40-60; two institutions reported "optional," one reported "varies."

Table 2

STUDENT TEACHER MANAGEMENT RELATIVE TO NUMBER OF STUDENT
TEACHERS PER CENTER, NUMBER OF VISITS, AND CONTRIBUTORS TO GRADE

Response			Institutions Responding		Students Involved	
No. of (a) Student Teachers/ Centers	No. of (b) Visits	Contri- (c) butors to Grades	No.	%	No.	%
1			48	66	792	58
1 - 2			10	14	231	17
2			13	18	328	24
Other			1	2	14	1
Total			72	100	1365	100
	Less than 3		18	25	396	29
	3 or more		54	75	969	71
	Total		72	100	1365	100
		Equal in- fluence	34	48	573	42
		Staff has more	8	11 ^(d)	219	16
		Teacher has more	26	36 ^(e)	464	34
		No response	4	5	109	8
		Total	72	100	1365	100

(a) Range = 1 - 3.

(b) Range = 1 - 10.

(c) Refers to contributions by supervising/cooperating teacher and university staff to student teaching final grade.

(d) Two institutions responded "100%."

(e) One institution responded "100%."

1. Overall, agricultural teacher education programs are meeting or exceeding the ten-week length of student teaching recommended in the *Standards for Quality Vocational Programs in Agricultural/Agribusiness Education* (1977). The mean has increased since 1973 from 9.6 to 10.4 weeks.
2. Staff visits during student teaching appear to be a priority in many institutions. Even though the length of student teaching ranged from six to 18 weeks, three-fourths of the institutions visit at least three times. The range for visits, 1-10, generally seems to relate to the length of the student teaching period. Furthermore, three visits are designated as desirable in the *Standards for Quality Vocational Agricultural/Agribusiness Education* (1977).
3. A number of institutions responding apparently believe that the supervising/cooperating teacher should have a direct influence on the student teaching final grade. This could often be justified since the supervising/cooperating teacher observes the student teacher's progress on a daily basis, not just during several periodic visits.
4. Sixty-six percent of the institutions place one student teacher per cooperating center. Many respondents also indicated that a 1 to 1 ratio of student teacher to supervising/cooperating teacher is maintained. The use of single teacher vocational agriculture departments as cooperating centers may partially account for the 66 percent figure not being higher.
5. One-fourth of the responding institutions either had "no specific requirements" or "no response" when asked to identify the number of hours the student teacher is expected (not necessarily required) to accumulate teaching high school students. Therefore, it can be concluded that more than one-fourth of the student teachers are not expected to attain a specified number of hours doing what he/she will be primarily responsible for as a vocational agriculture teacher.
6. More than half of the institutions responding lacked a specified figure for the number of hours the student teacher should spend teaching adults/young farmers. Furthermore, more than half of the student teachers are affected. Apparently, many student teachers are not gaining practical experience in teaching adults/young farmers even though they may be faced with that responsibility very early in their career. This is particularly important in light of the fact that adult education was identified as a "Challenge for the Future in Agricultural Education" at the 1980 National Agricultural Education Seminar in Kansas City (1980).

The data presented in this study would indicate that the management of student teaching varies widely among the responding teacher training institutions. The study indicates that a broad range of procedures and requirements are used in managing student teachers. This study does not indicate which procedures are best; however, a data base is provided upon which subsequent studies can build. It is recommended that the following research questions be considered:

1. How does satisfaction during the first year of teaching relate to variables such as length of the student teaching period, number of visits by staff during student teaching, and number of hours of classroom experience gained?
2. Do placement percentages relate to how student teaching is managed among different institutions which train vocational agriculture teachers?
3. What are the philosophical foundations underlying the current requirements and procedures being used to manage student teaching?
4. What priorities should be established for those experiences in which student teachers should participate?
5. Should the national standards for providing student teaching be changed, and if so, what should the new standards be?

References

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