

## Barriers and Benefits to the Student Teacher-Cooperating Teacher Relationship

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### Introduction and Theoretical Framework

In agricultural education, it is known that the cooperating teacher is the most important aspect to student teaching success (Deeds, Flowers, & Arrington, 1991; Edwards & Briers, 2001; Garton & Cano, 1996; Harlin, Edwards, & Briers, 2002; Norris, Larke, & Briers, 1990). Therefore, the relationship the student teacher and the cooperating teacher ensue could be the catalyst for a successful or problematic student teaching experience.

The theoretical framework lies in the social constructivist theory. This theory emphasizes “the social contexts of learning” (Santrock, 2004, p. 314). Because student teaching is a learning experience for the student teacher, the cooperating teacher is an important social aspect to that student teacher’s learning. Identifying positive characteristics of the relationship can assist teacher educators in replicating those aspects with future student teachers. Also, being proactive and determining what could be problematic (barriers) should be identified as well. Therefore, what are benefits and barriers to the student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship?

### Methods

The purpose of the study was to determine what benefits and barriers exist to the student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship, as perceived by student teachers and cooperating teachers at two land grant universities. The following objectives were constructed:

1. Identify the perceived benefits of serving as a cooperating teacher, as reported by the cooperating teacher.
2. Identify the perceived benefits of having a cooperating teacher, as reported by the student teacher.
3. Identify the perceived barriers of having a successful student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship, as reported by both student teachers and cooperating teachers.

This study was descriptive in design. The population consisted of student teachers ( $n = 31$ ) and their cooperating teachers ( $n = 31$ ) at two land-grant universities in 2004. The instruments were hand-delivered by university supervisors, resulting in a 100% response rate from student teachers and 93.3% for cooperating teachers. The Mentoring Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ) developed by Greiman (2002) was utilized. One part of the instrument asked two open-ended questions. Student teachers were asked, “What was the most important benefit of having a cooperating teacher?” Cooperating teachers were asked, “What was the most important benefit of mentoring a student teacher?” Both student teachers and cooperating teachers were asked, “What was the biggest barrier to having a more successful student teacher-cooperating teacher experience?” The questions were validated by a panel of experts. To

address reliability, the results were themed by two separate coders. The themes matched 94% between the two coders. The coders collaborated to arrive at a final list of themes.

### Findings

Cooperating teachers identified a variety of benefits to serving as a cooperating teacher. The most frequent responses included “gaining new ideas and teaching techniques” ( $n = 14$ , 48.28%), “giving back to the profession” ( $n = 10$ , 34.48%), and “motivation” ( $n = 6$ , 20.69%). Student teachers identified several benefits of having a cooperating teacher. “Someone to get information and advice from” ( $n = 23$ , 74.19%) and “someone to give supervision and support” ( $n = 5$ , 16.13%) were the most frequent responses of student teachers.

Cooperating teachers and student teachers identified many barriers to a successful student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship. “Differing personalities and teaching styles” was the most frequent response of both cooperating teachers ( $n = 6$ , 20.69%) and student teachers ( $n = 7$ , 22.58%). “Lack of communication” was the next highest response rate for cooperating teachers ( $n = 3$ , 10.34%), as well for student teachers ( $n = 7$ , 22.58%).

### Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Both participants in the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship are benefited. For the cooperating teacher, the most recognized benefit is learning new teaching techniques and perspectives from the student teacher. The frequent response of “giving back to the profession” suggests that there is also a service related component to serving as a cooperating teacher. Teacher educators should capitalize on this benefit in securing future cooperating teachers. Student teachers recognize the advice and information gained from the cooperating teacher as the most important benefit of having a cooperating teacher; therefore, teacher educators should continue to treat cooperating teachers as a valuable part of the teacher education team. The most common barrier identified by both cooperating and student teachers was “differing personalities and teaching styles.” This finding indicates that student teachers and cooperating teachers seek similarities in a successful relationship and that differences may serve as barriers. Teacher educators should be aware of these differences and be proactive in preventing them through trainings, personality or teaching style assessments, or other relationship building activities.

### References

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