

**IDENTIFYING DESIRABLE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION COOPERATING  
CENTER CHARACTERISTICS:**

**COOPERATING AND FIRST-YEAR TEACHER PERCEPTIONS**

by

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**Identifying Desirable Agricultural Education Cooperating Center Characteristics:**

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**ABSTRACT**

Student teaching is arguably the most beneficial aspect of teacher preparation programs. The student teaching experience is shaped by several key components. One of the most important, yet least well defined component is the cooperating center at which a student teacher will gain his or her experiences. Very little research has been published regarding the characteristics of good cooperating centers for agricultural education. This study was designed to create a list of the key elements of cooperating centers for agricultural education student teachers.

Qualitative research was conducted within the population of cooperating teachers and first-year teachers of agricultural education employed in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Two nominal groups were conducted on October 15, 1998, each having ten participants. One group was comprised of ten cooperating teachers and the other of ten first-year agricultural education teachers. The responses from these participants were used to create a prioritized list of the characteristics of cooperating centers that they felt were most important for a successful student teaching experience.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher preparation programs have been educating future teachers since before student teaching became a part of the programs. Cooperating centers form the backbone of the student teaching experience, yet few studies have been conducted as to what characteristics a cooperating center should possess.

### **Background**

Student teaching is arguably the most beneficial aspect of teacher preparation programs as it strives to provide realistic experiences. The practice of student teaching dates back at least to 1890, and has undergone many changes over time in an effort to produce high quality, effective teachers (Strebel, 1935). From the start, researchers have examined the student teaching process to see what experiences are most beneficial to the production of well-trained educators. Even today there is much talk about the benefits of student teaching and how the practice can be improved to meet the needs of today's teachers. However, little has been done to determine what the key characteristics of a cooperating center for student teaching are, or what they should be. The focus of this study is on the characteristics of a successful cooperating center for student teaching in agricultural education.

Student teaching, as the main experiential component of teacher preparation programs in the United States, has common objectives from university to university. Faculty members in every teacher preparation program strive to provide their students

with the experiences they need to become effective teachers. The practice of student teaching affords preservice teachers the opportunity to experiment, to assimilate previous experiences into a working philosophy of teaching, and to gain a necessary sense of self-confidence (Tittle, 1974).

Cruickshank and Armaline (1986) said that everyone agrees that student teaching is the most useful part of teacher education programs; however, many do not agree on the finer points of this experience. The literature provides no clear answers to questions such as how long the student teaching assignment should last, how many classes a student teacher should be in charge of, how soon after the beginning of student teaching the student should be teaching a class on his or her own, and what roles the university supervisor and cooperating teacher should play.

There are also varying opinions as to who should serve as a cooperating teacher. How much education and experience should an in-service teacher have before being assigned a student teacher? Strebel (1935) said that cooperating teachers and university supervisors should be extensively qualified in academic experience, proficient in the business of supervision, and have a breadth of experience. What constitutes extensive qualification in academics, or a breadth of experience? Should cooperating teachers be required to hold master's degrees, or would ten years of teaching experience qualify a teacher to supervise a student teacher? The cooperating teacher has a profound effect on the success of the teaching experience for the pre-service teacher, and the selection of this person should be thoughtful.



### **Rationale**

Though student teaching has been studied many times, and in many different ways, little research has been done to determine the role of the cooperating center. As the location where the student teacher forms his or her beliefs about the qualities of effective teachers and teaching strategies that will effect the way in which he or she teaches for years to come, the cooperating center is one of the most important aspects of this experience, as well as one of the least clearly defined. Determining the key characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by cooperating teachers as well as first-year agricultural teachers who have recently completed student teaching may help to define this important aspect of the overall experience of student teaching.

A cooperating center can be thought of as a secondary school that offers student teachers a place to try, first hand, the teaching methods learned in teacher education programs. The student teacher is under the direct supervision of a cooperating teacher who has some level of experience in teaching and who is willing to provide a role model for first-year teachers. The specific characteristics of a cooperating center can and should vary from program to program and each center should be chosen based on the center's potential benefits to an individual student teacher and teacher education program. As the name implies, the teachers at cooperating centers work along with teacher education faculty members at universities to provide student teachers with the theoretical and practical framework necessary for them to become effective teachers.

Currently there is no standard on which to judge cooperating centers in agricultural education. Teacher educators typically use an individualized approach to determining possible cooperating centers and the final decision on student placement is made based on factors such as location, program availability, and long standing agreements between past cooperating centers and university faculty. These factors do not always allow for the best possible placement of student teachers. Identifying what the desirable characteristics are for cooperating centers for agricultural education will take most of the guesswork out of placing student teachers in beneficial cooperating centers. Using a list of desirable characteristics to rank possible cooperating centers for agricultural education would ensure the placement of student teachers in cooperating centers that would best prepare the student for his or her career as a teacher.

### **Problem**

Cooperating centers vary greatly in program and facility quality, as well as in the professional characteristics of the teacher. Cooperating centers may not be selected based on defensible, measurable criteria. No current research could be found to define the desirable characteristics of a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers.

### **Purpose**

This study was designed to provide a prioritized list of the desired, measurable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers.

### **Objectives**

Nominal groups were conducted on October 15, 1998 at Virginia Tech during the annual Agricultural Education Society (AES) FFA Leadership Conference with the intent of meeting the following objectives:

- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by experienced cooperating teachers.
- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by first-year teachers who had completed student teaching the previous school year.

### **Delimitation/ Limitations**

This study was delimited to agricultural education cooperating centers within the Commonwealth of Virginia, which were represented at the Agricultural Education Society (AES) FFA Leadership Conference. Therefore the characteristics were limited to

those expressed by experienced cooperating teachers and first-year teachers of agricultural education who volunteered to participate in this study.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Teacher education programs have been a part of the university curriculum for many years. That student teaching should be a part of every teacher education program is generally accepted in the education community (Schultz, 1959). Camp and Fry (1998) said, “almost without exception, student teachers describe their student teaching experiences as the most valuable part of their college education.”(p 2).

### **History of Student Teaching**

Student teaching has gone through many changes since its beginnings. Formal teacher preparation began at Godshead College in England in 1439, and the first United States Normal School opened in 1823. This school, developed by Samuel Hill, was a three-year seminary school in Concord, Vermont (Anderson, Major, and Mitchell, 1992).

Normal schools had on-campus “laboratory” schools for the purpose of student teaching. Formalized professional experiences did not begin until 1890, and this beginning was plagued with opposition from many academics (Strebel, 1935). It was not until the practice of educating secondary teachers at the university level became an accepted practice that teacher education programs turned to public schools for a place to send student teachers for clinical experiences (Strebel, 1935). Since this time, universities have routinely sent student teachers to public schools for exposure to teaching in primary and secondary school settings. Public schools were chosen as the site

for this pre-professional experience for a number of reasons. First, the cost of establishing on-campus training schools was enormous. Also, there was a need for a more extensive student teaching program than the normal school could provide. The large number of teachers needing to be trained coupled with their demands for more typical teaching situations made the campus schools impractical. Public schools were the most sensible alternative (Strebel, 1935).

### **Objectives of Student Teaching**

Student teaching typically takes place during the final semester of study for pre-service teachers (Koziol, Minnick, & Sherman, 1996). The majority of teacher educators view student teaching as the time when pre-service teachers are able to test educational theories they have learned throughout their education (Sears, Marshall, & Wilborn, 1994). Huling (1998) stated that “ the goal of the teacher preparation program is to provide the teacher candidate with the experiences necessary to build the complex schema required to be an effective classroom facilitator of teaching and learning.” (p 3). Nearly everyone agrees that student teaching is the most vital aspect of teacher education; thus the objectives of the student teaching experience are similar from program to program, though the means of achieving those objectives may vary (Cruickshank and Armaline, 1986).

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) (1986) published a study that identified five common purposes of student teaching:

- To provide students with the opportunity to relate the knowledge, attitudes and skills gained during their education to real life situations by performing teaching duties.
- To afford students the opportunity to develop entry-level competence in the field of teaching.
- To allow students to apply and test learning theories and teaching strategies in real world situations.
- To allow students the chance to explore career options within the field of teaching.
- To give students the opportunity to observe professional and ethical behaviors (Association of Teacher Educators, 1986).

### **The Experience of Student Teaching**

Traditionally, student teachers taught only an hour or two per day, and were in regular university classes for the remainder of the day (Henderson, 1937). This practice was changed following World War II when student teachers were given a professional semester, typically during their senior year. During this semester, student teachers were released from their other duties at the university for a period ranging from four to eighteen weeks to participate in day-long student teaching activities (Edelfelt, 1969). The wide variation in length was, and still is, a topic of many debates. Strebel (1935) said that the length of the student teaching experience should depend upon the individual student's needs, and that no two students would require the same length of time. Additionally, no

two student teachers will have the same rate of progress during the professional semester. Student teachers should display a mastery of certain phases of teaching before they are trusted with the supervision of a class (Strebel, 1935). Anderson, Major, and Mitchell (1992) advised that student teachers should be given three or four classes to teach a day, and should begin teaching as soon as the cooperating teacher feels they are ready, not based on a set schedule provided by the university. In addition to the teaching responsibilities of student teachers, they should also be given time to observe other classes, and visit with school staffing other than the cooperating teacher.

A study reported in 1970 by Steiner concluded that student teachers should have exposure to other classroom situations and teachers, arranged by the cooperating teacher, for the purpose of discussing methodology, psychology, and philosophy (Steiner, 1970). As time permits, student teachers should also participate in teacher conferences and workshops (Anderson, Major, and Mitchell, 1992). Student teachers should be given similar responsibilities within the school that full time teachers are given. Some examples include: attending Parent Teacher Association meetings, committee meetings of the staff, and supervising extracurricular activities such as chaperoning social events (Steiner, 1970). Past studies into the practice of student teaching reveal much of this same attitude. Strebel (1935) said that student teaching should allow for individual growth and acceptance of increased responsibility at the pace of the individual student teacher, and should allow practice in all aspects of teaching and of a teacher's work.



According to a study completed by Camp and Bailey (1998), not all student teaching programs allow for the student teacher to take on the full responsibilities of the cooperating teacher. Of the teacher education programs that required the student teacher to take on a full-load of teaching, less than half had a minimum number of hours of classroom teaching required for the student teacher. An even smaller number of teacher education programs had a minimum requirement for non-teaching experience.

### **Supervision of Student Teaching**

The direct supervisors of a student teacher are the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. Both play vital roles in the overall experience of student teaching. The university supervisor is responsible for making sure the student teacher is prepared before beginning the assignment. According to Anderson, Major and Mitchell (1992), some of the attributes that university supervisors should display are dedication, a caring nature, empathy, tact, adaptability, a healthy sense of humor, and a positive attitude and outlook. These broad character traits should also be combined with a minimum of three years of experience teaching in the public schools. Academic training in various instructional methods, analysis of teaching behaviors and supervision of teacher education students are also important abilities for university supervisors. University supervisors should show demonstrated knowledge of the principles, purposes, and responsibilities of the student teaching experience. The ability to identify appropriate cooperating schools and teachers, a working knowledge of current research in education as it pertains to student teaching and teacher education, and an ability to contribute to the

overall experience by adding to the knowledge gained by the student by participating in related research and sharing the results of that research as it relates to student teaching are necessary to the university supervisor's role (Association of Teacher Educators, 1986).

This high degree of expectations for university supervisors extends to cooperating teachers as well. Strebel (1935) said that the supervisors should not only aid in the day-to-day experiences of student teachers, but also in the understanding of those experiences. If the knowledge gained from the experience is not processed and assimilated, then it is not of any value to the student teacher. Strebel (1935) also said that cooperating teachers should hold a master's degree, have at least three years of teaching experience, and should not carry a full course load in addition to supervisory duties. The responsibility of determining when a student teacher is ready to begin a slow takeover of the teaching duties is left up to the cooperating teacher. He or she decides when the student is ready to begin teaching the class, approves the lesson plans, and determines how much supervision the student requires. The cooperating teacher also determines how fast to add to the responsibilities of the student teacher (Anderson, Major, and Mitchell, 1992).

Typically, university teacher education administrators make final decisions regarding placement of student teachers with cooperating teachers, often with little emphasis placed on the characteristics of the students or cooperating teachers. Often this placement is made with little or no input from the university supervisor who should know the strengths and weaknesses of the students (Anderson, Major, & Mitchell, 1992). Cooperating teachers are expected to keep current on new teaching techniques as well as

remain up to date with relevant professional organizations. Continuing professional development is important to all teachers and vital to the role of cooperating teachers. Anderson, et al. (1992) explained the kind of guidance needed by student teachers from their cooperating teachers by saying that student teachers need cooperating teachers who will allow them to make mistakes and learn from them realizing that student teachers are starting with no experiences from which to draw expectations.

The cooperating teacher plays a vital role in the beginning of a student teacher's career. A student teaching intern and his or her cooperating teacher need to establish a good rapport, in order for the student teacher to realize the most possible gain from the clinical experience (Schwebel, 1992). The feedback that a student teacher receives from his or her supervisory committee is the primary reference he or she has by which to learn. Getting little or no feedback from the cooperating teacher is detrimental to the entire student teaching experience. The student teacher is made to guess how the cooperating teacher feels about the intern's abilities, thus making learning from the process difficult (Schwebel, 1992). At the same time, only negative feedback from the cooperating teacher can easily make a promising student teacher shy away from the entire profession due to a lack of confidence about his or her abilities. Constructive criticism should include both the good and the bad so that the student teacher learns the most he or she possibly can from the experience.

The university supervisor's role in the education of the student teacher is typically not as involved as the role of the cooperating teacher. Commonly, university supervisors

will make announced visits to the cooperating school to observe the progress of the student teacher. He or she will make notes about the classroom environment, the lesson plan, and the delivery of the lesson. Typically following the observation, the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher will have a conference to discuss the day. Student teachers will often change the way they teach when they are being observed. This does not allow a student teacher to get the most benefit from the feedback the university supervisor offers, and this practice should be avoided (Schwebel, 1992). The observations made by the university supervisor are often sources of valuable constructive criticism for the student teacher. From time to time, problems arise between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher that can not be resolved without the help of the university supervisor. Often a few suggestions made by the university supervisor can resolve communication issues between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher, but if further action is called for then the university supervisor steps in to control the situation (Schwebel, 1992).

### **The Student Teaching Experience**

Current pre-requisites for students desiring to begin student teaching are much as they were when the student teaching system was first devised. An early study on the subject found two general prerequisites for student teachers: general scholarship requirements and satisfactory completion of certain courses such as methods of teaching, curriculum, classroom management, and methods of evaluation (Henderson, 1937). These same requirements must also be met by today's student teachers prior to the beginning of their professional semester.

Meeting scholarship standards are not the only sources of difficulty for prospective student teachers. Ambiguity exists as to what each student can expect from his or her individual experience. Schwebel (1992) conducted a study that looked at the journal entries of several student teachers to determine the varying stages a student teacher passes through on the way to becoming a full time teacher.

The first stage is often the most overwhelming stage for student teachers. They are thrust into a new environment and must absorb as much information as possible in a short amount of time. As the student teacher attempts to learn the materials and methods of teaching used by the cooperating teacher, he or she must get to know the students. (Schwebel, 1992). During this exhausting period, the student teacher must form a bond with the cooperating teacher so that the two can work together in the weeks to come peacefully rather than antagonistically.

The second stage begins when the class starts to see the student teacher as a member of the teaching team at the school. The student teacher begins to take part in the daily activities of the class, rather than the simple observation that has controlled most of his or her earlier time (Schwebel, 1992).

The third stage begins when the cooperating teacher determines that the student teacher is ready to begin taking over some of the responsibilities of teaching the class. This stage will begin at different times for each student teacher, and will be most

beneficial only when the student teacher is ready for the increase in responsibility.

Clearly this stage is often the most difficult, and the most important time in the student teacher's training. This stage allows the student teacher to try some of his or her personal ideas and methods, and to assimilate all of the knowledge gained from courses completed, to see if it will all come together. This is also the period when the cooperating teacher is vital to the continual education of the student teacher. Feedback is critical. During this stage, the feedback given to the student teacher by the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher will shape the confidence of the first-year teacher (Schwebel, 1992).

The fourth stage of development for the student teacher is when he or she finally begins to feel like a teacher. Here the student teacher begins to see himself or herself as a teacher rather than a student and prepared for the separation from the cooperating teacher. (Schwebel, 1992).

Regardless of the processes or stages through which the student teacher passes, the time of learning for the student teacher is just beginning. The end of student teaching marks only the beginning of continual learning that all teachers must accept. Teaching is not a stagnate profession, it is ever changing. Student teachers must be thrust into the work of teaching knowing that the learning will never end, until the time for him or her to teach is passed.

### **Evaluation of Student Teaching**

Both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor make evaluations of the student teacher's progress. There are usually several formative assessments made by both with the purpose of advising the student teacher, not grading him or her. Through observations, both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor will make suggestions on how the student teacher can improve. The aim of both supervisors is to help promote growth by the student teacher toward the ultimate goal of becoming a full time teacher. Summative evaluations are made at the completion of the student teaching assignment and typically result in an assigned grade that is an indicator of how well prepared the student teacher is to begin teaching on his or her own (Schwebel, 1992).

A number of evaluation factors common to most student teaching programs were identified by Schwebel (1992). The first is clarity. This indicates the objectives are clear and understandable to the students, the content is well organized, and important points are stressed and summarized. The second factor is the on-task behavior of the students. This factor measures the percentage of time students are involved in learning compared to the time spent discussing other subjects. The third factor is how well the student teacher takes the constructive criticism given by supervisors and learns from it. The fourth factor identified by Schwebel (1992) is whether the class climate appears to be task oriented, or meant for learning, as opposed to entertainment. Next is the evaluation of the warm and supportive environment of the classroom. If the class is not supportive, then the students will resist learning. The sixth evaluation instrument measures the flexibility of the

student teacher to change in the classroom environment. The student teacher must be able to adapt to situational demands. Also, the student teacher must be enthusiastic. This factor is believed to be important to the motivation of students and to their tendency to concentrate on learning. The last factor identified by Schwebel (1992) is the level of expectation the student teacher has of his or her students. Higher levels of expectations by teachers is believed to result in higher achievement by the students, therefore, student teachers must be able to determine the ability of their students so that they can constantly challenge them without frustrating them. These eight factors combine to form the basis for evaluation of the professional semester. The evaluation considers observations made by the university supervisor, as well as comments from the cooperating teacher.

### **Summary**

No references were found which identified characteristics of cooperating centers therefore this literature review was limited to the related areas of student teaching and its supervision. The research on teacher preparation programs shows an ambiguity in the way these programs are conducted from institution to institution. There needs to be some research to show what student teachers need to gain from the field experience to produce well educated and well prepared teachers to fill the need in today's schools. These guidelines need to take into account that the school environment is ever changing, and in-service teachers need to continue their training past the point of student teaching. Professional development and continued education are necessary to uphold the high standard this country has of its educators. Universities agree that continuing education is



important to teachers, however, they can not agree on the best way to conduct the most crucial aspect of teacher preparation, the cooperating center selection.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Purpose**

This study was designed to provide a prioritized list of the desired, measurable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers.

### **Objectives**

Nominal groups were conducted on October 15, 1998 at Virginia Tech during the annual Agricultural Education Society (AES) FFA Leadership Conference with the intent of meeting the following objectives:

- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by experienced cooperating teachers.
- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by first-year teachers who had completed student teaching the previous school year.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study was limited to agricultural education cooperating teachers in Virginia and all first-year teachers who recently completed student teaching

requirements in agricultural education in Virginia, and who were in attendance at the Agricultural Education Society-FFA annual Leadership Conference held at Virginia Tech's Blacksburg Campus on October 15, 1998. No restrictions to cooperating teachers, such as gender, race, age, or years of experience were applied to further limit the population from which the sample was drawn. The sample for this study was a purposeful sample drawn from those cooperating teachers and first-year teachers who agreed to participate in this study. Each of the nominal groups was comprised of ten participants, a facilitator, and a transcriber. One group was comprised of cooperating teachers from current cooperating centers for agricultural education in Virginia. The other group was comprised of first-year agricultural education teachers who had completed their student teaching requirement within the past year.

### **Human Subjects Clearance**

In accordance with University policy (Research Division, 1993), an application for exemption to conduct research involving human participants was submitted prior to the conduction of the nominal group sessions. The application was approved.

### **Data Collection**

Two nominal group data collection sessions, one comprised of cooperating teachers and one of first-year agriculture teachers who had completed student teaching the previous year, were completed as the data collection means for this study. Both the

cooperating teacher and first-year agriculture teacher sessions were conducted on October 15, 1998 during the Agricultural Education Society-FFA Leadership Conference held at Virginia Tech Blacksburg, VA. Each nominal group was conducted according to the guidelines set forth by Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1986) as described below. Copies of Informed Consent forms given to participants as well as facilitators are given in Appendix A of this thesis. In addition to the facilitator who instructed the participants and guided the discussion, a transcriber was also assigned to each group to help ensure that the comments given by participants were recorded in the words used by the participants.

Each nominal group was conducted using the following format: after introducing the facilitator and the transcriber, each participant was welcomed to the session and informed of the purpose for the session. Following the welcoming statement, each participant was given a pen or pencil and a worksheet (Appendix B) with the nominal question typed at the top. The question was then read aloud by the facilitator and the participants were instructed to write brief ideas or suggestions in response to the nominal question. The facilitator requested that the participants work silently until they had no further suggestions or comments to make. To avoid potentially biasing the responses, the facilitator answered no questions regarding the nominal question prior to the brainstorming session.

Once all participants had finished writing comments, each was asked to verbally give one of their responses at a time to the group. The transcriber then recorded this

response on a flip chart for all participants to read. Each participant was asked for one idea at a time in a round-robin approach. The entire list of responses is available in Appendix C of this thesis. During the round-robin recording of ideas, no idea was discussed or elaborated on. The responses were given until each participant had exhausted his or her entire list so that every different idea was represented on the flip chart for all participants to read.

After all of the ideas were recorded on the flip chart, each idea was discussed in turn, for each item listed on the flip chart, the participants were asked for clarification and any questions about the idea were discussed as to allow each participant to have the same understanding of what was meant by each idea posted on the chart. Following the discussion phase, each participant was given index cards for use in voting on the ideas. Index cards were used for various reasons, they allowed for independent judgments, mathematical expressions of importance by rank, and using the mean value of independent judgments as the group's decision. The technique described by Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1986) goes on to include discussion of the voting outcomes, as well as a second voting session. However, for the purpose of this study, the final stage was the first voting round.

### **Data Analysis**

Each nominal group produced a list of all suggestions presented to the group, as well as a ranked list of the suggestions considered, by the participants, to be the most important of all those given. (Appendix D)

## **RESULTS**

### **Purpose**

This study was designed to provide a prioritized list of the desired, measurable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers.

### **Objectives**

Nominal groups were conducted on October 15, 1998 at Virginia Tech during the annual Agricultural Education Society (AES) FFA Leadership Conference with the intent of meeting the following objectives:

- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by experienced cooperating teachers.
- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by first-year teachers who had completed student teaching the previous school year.

### **Overview of Nominal Groups**

Each of the nominal groups was comprised of ten participants, a facilitator, and a transcriber. One group was comprised of cooperating teachers from current cooperating centers for agricultural education in Virginia. The other group was comprised of first-year agriculture teachers who had completed their student teaching requirement within the past year. The demographics for each group are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 4.1.

Demographics of Cooperating Teachers

Total Number of Participants	10
Number of Male participants	7
Number of Female Participants	3
Mean Number of Student Teachers	6
Number of Participants Completing Cooperating Teacher Workshop	10
Mean Years Since Completing Cooperating Teacher Workshop	2

Table 4.2.

Demographics of First Year Teachers

Total Number of Participants	10
Number of Male Participants	5
Number of Female Participants	5

Participants were asked to serve in the nominal groups during registration for the leadership conference. Basic requirements for participation in the nominal groups were that each participant is either a current or past cooperating teacher in agricultural education or a current first year teacher in the field of agricultural education who had just completed student teaching. Cooperating teachers must have had at least one student teacher work under them. Each had to be currently teaching in the field of agricultural education at a Virginia public school that was approved by the Agricultural Education Program at Virginia Tech as a cooperating center. First year teachers must have completed their student teaching requirement within the past year, and be currently teaching in the field of agriculture at a Virginia public school. None of the participants was given any information regarding the nominal groups prior to commencement of each session, and both groups were conducted simultaneously. Ten cooperating teachers and ten first-year teachers were purposefully selected from all attendees at the convention meeting the basic requirements.

Responses from each nominal group were recorded separately as a ranked list of opinions (Appendix D). The list of opinions was determined by the use of the round-robin nominal group technique discussed in chapter three. The nominal question was, “What would you say are the desirable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education? These characteristics should deal with all aspects of the cooperating center, such as: facilities, resources, courses, community, school, activities, experiences open to student teachers, and personnel student teachers interact with.”



Participants were open and willing to discuss their opinions using their own experiences as examples.

### **Nominal Group Results: Cooperating Teachers**

The cooperating teachers all had several years of experience as cooperating teachers in the field of agricultural education. They each had personal experiences on which to base their suggestions to the nominal question. Overall, the cooperating teachers wanted their student teachers to have a broad range of experiences, in the best environment possible, even if it were not the most realistic environment. The group decided that the most important aspect a cooperating center for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia should possess is an adequate laboratory with up-to-date and high-quality equipment. They also felt that student teachers should be given the opportunity to work with judging teams, especially in the capacity of coach. The list of the fifteen most important characteristics that should be displayed by a cooperating center for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as perceived by experienced cooperating teachers of agricultural education is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Desirable Characteristics of Cooperating Centers for Agricultural Education, as perceived by Experienced Cooperating Teachers in Virginia (ranked from most to least important):

- 
1. Adequate laboratories; up-to-date and high-quality
  2. Opportunity to coach and/or work with a judging team.
  3. Cooperating teachers with teaching experience.
  4. Adequate funding and/or ingenuity to run a program on a budget.
  5. Cooperating teacher is an active member of professional organizations.
  6. Active FFA Chapter that is part of the program focus, not the entire program focus.
  7. Cooperating teacher should show pride in his/her program.
  8. Well-balanced courses with computer based, or standards of learning based instruction.
  9. Still teaches traditional basic skills as well as new technology.
  10. Advisory group made up of community members.
  11. SAE activities.
  12. Adult education programs.
  13. Student teachers are encouraged to attend professional meetings.
  14. Diverse community activities available to student teachers allowing the student teacher to understand the community involvement.
  15. Student teacher should be exposed to different teaching styles, so one student should have multiple cooperating teachers.
-

### **Nominal Group Results: First-Year Agriculture Teachers**

The group of first year agriculture teachers was more difficult to get to participate. At first, they seemed generally unsure of their new careers, and felt that they did not have enough experience to speak authoritatively on the desirable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education. Most expressed concern that their experience with agricultural education in high schools was too limited. However, once the nominal group was in session, the participants of this group were more than able to achieve a list of desirable characteristics for cooperating centers for agricultural education (Appendix D). The most difficult aspect of this group was keeping the participants on track as they expressed their opinions to the group. Several of the original ideas presented dealt more with the student teaching program requirements than with the characteristic of the cooperating center itself. However, this problem was resolved prior to ranking the list of desirable characteristics. Table 4 contains the top rated desirable characteristics of a cooperating center for agricultural education as perceived by first-year teachers of agricultural education in Virginia.

Table 4:

Desirable Characteristics of Cooperating Centers for Agricultural Education, as perceived by First-Year Teachers of Agricultural Education in Virginia (ranked from most to least important):

---

1. Cooperating teacher should be an experienced teacher who is willing to work with the student teacher.
2. The cooperating center should not be state-of-the-art, student teachers need to be exposed to the reality rather than the possibility.
3. A cooperating teacher with ingenuity enough to operate a program on a tight budget.
4. Student teachers should be treated as real teachers by giving them as much work, as they would encounter in a similar teaching environment. Completing paperwork for AES, ordering supplies, filling out grade book, etc.
5. A cooperating center with discipline problems so that the student teacher will have that experience before deciding to teach.
6. Provide structure and direction to what the student teacher should teach, rather than allowing them to teach what they want to.
7. Have the principal do a realistic evaluation of the student teacher.
8. Have a copy of the standards of learning handbook on site and instruct the student teacher on its proper use.
9. The cooperating center administration should be well organized.
10. Cooperating teacher should offer advice, yet allow the student teacher to experiment.
11. Exposure to a similar program in which the student teacher intends to work, with appropriate focus on FFA, agri-science, etc.

12. Student teachers should have the opportunity to teach a “chalkboard” lesson rather than always having access to PowerPoint.
  13. Student teacher should plan a field trip from beginning to end, including paperwork, approval, funding, etc.
  14. Cooperating teacher should allow the student teacher to make mistakes.
  15. Cooperating teachers should be interviewed to determine their teaching style prior to placement of a student teacher.
-

## **CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Note: This chapter is written in the form of a manuscript for submission to the

*Journal of Agricultural Education.*)

### **DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COOPERATING CENTER**

#### **Abstract**

Student teaching is arguably the most beneficial aspect of teacher preparation programs. One of the most important, although least well defined aspects of student teaching is the cooperating center at which a student teacher will gain his or her experience. Little research has been completed to study the characteristics of good cooperating centers for agricultural education. This study was designed to identify the key characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia as perceived by both veteran cooperating teachers and first-year student teachers who had completed student teaching during the previous school year. Two nominal groups were conducted, each having ten participants. One group was comprised of ten experienced cooperating teachers and the other of ten first-year agriculture teachers who had completed student teaching within the past year. The responses from these participants were used to create a list of the characteristics of cooperating centers that they felt were most important for a successful student teaching experience.

The practice of student teaching dates back to 1890, and has undergone many changes over time in an effort to produce high quality, effective teachers (Strebel, 1935). From the very beginnings of student teaching as a process, studies have been conducted to see what experiences are most beneficial to the production of well-trained educators. Even today there is much talk about the benefits of student teaching and how the practice can be improved to meet the needs of today's teachers. However, little has been done to determine what the key characteristics of a cooperating center for student teaching are, or what they should be. The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of a successful cooperating center for student teaching in agricultural education should be.

Student teaching, as the main experiential component of teacher preparation programs in the United States, has common objectives from university to university. Every teacher preparation program strives to provide its students with the experiences they need to become effective teachers. The practice of student teaching affords pre-service teachers the opportunity to experiment, to assimilate previous experiences into a working philosophy of teaching, and to gain a necessary sense of self-confidence (Tittle, 1974). The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) noted five common purposes of student teaching:

- To provide students with the opportunity to relate the knowledge, attitudes and skills gained during their education to real life situations by performing teaching duties.
- To afford students the opportunity to develop entry-level competence in the field of teaching.

- To allow students to apply and test learning theories and teaching strategies in real world situations.
- To allow students the chance to explore career options within the field of teaching.
- To give students the opportunity to observe professional and ethical behaviors (Association of Teacher Educators, 1986).

Raymond Schultz (1959) noted that there is general agreement that student teaching should be a part of teacher education programs, but found that there is no agreement on the finer points of this experience. The literature provides no clear answers to questions such as how long the student teaching assignment should last, how many classes a student teacher should be in charge of, how soon after the beginning of student teaching the student should be teaching a class on his or her own, and what roles the university supervisor and cooperating teacher should play. Strebel (1935) said that student teaching should allow for individual growth and acceptance of increased responsibility at the pace of the individual student teacher, and should allow practice in all aspects of teaching and of a teacher's work. Anderson, Major, and Mitchell (1992) advised that student teachers should be given three or four classes to teach a day, and should begin teaching as soon as the cooperating teacher feels they are ready, not based on a set schedule provided by the University. In addition to the teaching responsibilities of student teachers, they should also be given time to observe other classes, and visit with school staff members in addition to the cooperating teacher.



Opinions also differ as to who should serve as a cooperating teacher. How much and what kinds of education and experience a teacher should have before being assigned a student teacher has never been established in the research literature. Strebel (1935) said that cooperating teachers should be thoroughly qualified academically, well trained in supervision techniques, and have a range of practice and understanding. The author left open a number of questions, such as:

- What constitutes thorough qualification in academics?
- What constitutes a range of practice and understanding?
- Should cooperating teachers be required to hold master's degrees?
- How many years of teaching experience are necessary before a teacher is allowed to supervise a student teacher?

In a classic work on the student teaching experience, Strebel (1935) said supervisors should not only aid in the day-to-day experiences of student teachers, but also in the understanding of those experiences. If the knowledge gained from the experience is not processed, and assimilated then it has no value to the student teacher. Strebel (1935) also said that cooperating teachers should hold a master's degree, have three years of teaching experience, and should not carry a full course load in addition to supervisory duties. The responsibility of determining when a student teacher is ready to begin a slow takeover of the teaching duties is left up to the cooperating teacher. He or she decides when the student is ready to begin teaching the class, approves the lesson plans, and how

much supervision the student requires. The cooperating teacher also determines how fast responsibilities are added to the student teacher (Anderson, Major, and Mitchell, 1992).

The cooperating teacher has a profound effect on the success of the teaching experience for the pre-service teacher, and the selection of this person should be thoughtful. The ATE noted that the cooperating teachers as well as the university supervisor are vital to the quality and success of the student teaching experience (Association of Teacher Educators, 1986). To get the most benefit from the student teaching experience the student and the cooperating teacher must be able to communicate and work cooperatively (Schwebel, 1992).

Research on the topic of teacher preparation programs shows a disturbing ambiguity in the way these programs are conducted across institutions (Camp & Bailey, 1998). There needs to be some basic guidelines to show what student teachers need to gain from the field experience in order to produce well educated and well prepared teachers to fill the need in today's schools. These guidelines need to take into account that the school environment is ever changing, and in-service teachers need to continue their training past the point of student teaching. Professional development and continued education are necessary to uphold the high standard this country has of its educators. Universities agree that continuing education is important to teachers, however, they can not agree on the best way to conduct the most crucial aspect of teacher preparation, the student teaching field experience (Cruickshank & Armaline, 1986).

Cooperating centers vary greatly in program and facility quality, as well as in the professional characteristics of the teacher. No current research could be found to define the desirable characteristics of a cooperating center for agricultural education. This study was designed to provide a prioritized list of the desired, measurable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers. Nominal groups were conducted on October 15, 1998 at Virginia Tech during the annual Agricultural Education Society (AES) FFA Leadership Conference with the intent of meeting the following objectives:

- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by experienced cooperating teachers.
- To develop a current list of desirable, measurable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education as perceived by first-year teachers who had completed student teaching the previous school year.

### **Methodology**

The population of this study was limited to agricultural education cooperating teachers in Virginia, and first-year agricultural education teachers in Virginia who had completed student teaching the previous spring. The sample for this study was a purposeful sample consisting of those cooperating teachers and first-year teachers in attendance at the annual Agricultural Education Society-FFA Leadership Conference held at Virginia Tech on October 15, 1998.

Two nominal group technique (NGT) sessions, one comprised of cooperating teachers and one of first-year agriculture teachers, were completed as the data collection means for this study. Each NGT session was conducted according to the guidelines set forth by Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1986). Each nominal group produced a ranked list of the desirable characteristics of agricultural education cooperating centers, as perceived by the participants.

## **Results**

### **Nominal Group Responses: Cooperating Teachers**

The cooperating teachers had from two to twelve years experience teaching in the field of agricultural education. They each had personal experiences on which to base their suggestions to the nominal question. Overall, the cooperating teachers want their student teachers to have a broad range of experiences, in the best environment possible, if not the most realistic environment. The group decided that the most important aspect a cooperating center for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia should possess is adequate laboratories with up-to-date and high-quality equipment. They also felt that student teachers should be given the opportunity to work with judging teams, especially in the capacity of coach. The list of the ten most important characteristics which should be displayed by a cooperating center for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia are listed in table 1 ranked in order from most to least important.

Table 1.

Desirable Characteristics of Cooperating Centers for Agricultural Education, as perceived by Experienced Cooperating Teachers in Virginia (ranked from most to least important):

---

1. Adequate laboratories; up-to-date and high-quality equipment.
  2. Opportunity to coach and/or work with a judging team.
  3. Cooperating teachers with teaching experience.
  4. Adequate funding and/or ingenuity to run a program on a budget.
  5. Cooperating teacher is an active member of professional organizations.
  6. Active FFA Chapter that is part of the program focus, not the entire program focus.
  7. Cooperating teacher should show pride in his/her program.
  8. Well-balanced courses with computer based, or standards of learning based instruction.
  9. Still teaches traditional basic skills as well as new technology.
  10. Advisory group made up of community members.
-

### **Nominal Group Responses: First-Year Agriculture Teachers**

The first year agriculture teachers at first seemed unsure of their new careers, and felt that they did not have enough experience to speak authoritatively on the desirable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education. Most expressed concern that their experience with agricultural education in public schools was too limited.

However, once the nominal group was in session, the participants of this group were able to achieve a list of desirable characteristics for cooperating centers for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The most difficult aspect of this group was keeping the participants on track as they expressed their opinions to the group. Several of the original ideas presented dealt more with the student teaching program requirements than with the characteristic of the cooperating center itself. However, this problem was resolved prior to ranking the list of desirable characteristics so that the ranked list shown in Table 2 reflects the desirable characteristics of cooperating centers as perceived by first-year agricultural education teachers in Virginia.

Table 2:

Desirable Characteristics of Cooperating Centers for Agricultural Education, as perceived by First-Year Teachers in Virginia (ranked from most to least important):

- 
1. Cooperating teacher should be an experienced teacher who is willing to work with the student teacher.
  2. The cooperating center should not be state-of-the-art, student teachers need to be exposed to the reality rather than the possibility.
  3. A cooperating teacher with ingenuity enough to operate a program on a tight budget.
  4. Student teachers should be treated as real teachers by giving them as much work as they would encounter in a similar teaching environment. Completing paperwork for AES, ordering supplies, filling out grade book, etc.
  5. A cooperating center with discipline problems so that the student teacher will have that experience before deciding to teach.
  6. Provide structure and direction to what the student teacher should teach, rather than allowing them to teach what they want to.
  7. Have the principal do a realistic evaluation of the student teacher.
  8. Have a copy of the standards of learning handbook on site and instruct the student teacher on its proper use.
  9. The Cooperating center administration should be well organized.
  10. Cooperating teacher should offer advice, yet allow the student teacher to experiment.
-

## Discussion

Both nominal groups expressed ideas about the desirable characteristics of cooperating centers for agricultural education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Several of the ideas were repeated in both groups, and a few were directly opposite of the opinion expressed in the other group. Both groups felt strongly that the cooperating teacher should have experience as an agricultural education teacher, though neither group expressed that experience in definable terms. There remains a need for research to be completed which defines experience for cooperating teachers.

The cooperating teachers wanted centers to be state of the art, while the first-year teachers said that this did not expose the student teachers to the reality, thus leaving them unprepared for what they could encounter later as teachers. Cooperating teachers wanted the student teachers to have classes with average or above-average students, while the student teachers expressed a desire for cooperating centers with discipline problems so that they would be prepared to handle these situations on their own. Both groups agreed that the opportunity to work with appropriate student organizations was an important characteristic, as well as exposure to professional organizations. Both groups mentioned budget issues in their lists, however the tones of the two groups were different. The cooperating teachers wanted the student teacher to have an adequate budget that was well thought out and accessible. The first-year teachers wanted to have a cooperating teacher who was experienced at dealing with a tight budget so that they could have that experience to draw from later when they became full-time teachers. Both groups agreed



that regardless of the actual budget availability, the cooperating teacher should have the ingenuity to run his or her program on a fixed budget.

Overall, both nominal groups presented similar suggestions. The cooperating teachers wanted cooperating centers that would get the student teacher involved in all aspects of teaching agricultural education, as well as in the community. The student teachers expressed a strong desire to be treated as any other teacher so that they would have a realistic idea of what their careers would be like. Both groups were realistic enough to realize that no cooperating center would prepare the student teacher for every conceivable situation; however, the cooperating teachers tended to lean toward protecting the student teachers from the harsher problems associated with teaching, while the student teachers wanted to be prepared for as much as possible.

### **Recommendations**

University administrators are faced with the responsibility of determining acceptable cooperating centers for their student teachers. Currently each university and program within the university uses its own set of criteria for choosing cooperating centers. Table 3 shows a list of characteristics a cooperating center for Agricultural Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia should possess. Table 3 compares the ranked responses of cooperating teachers and first-year teachers of agricultural education. This list should be used as a method of evaluating the appropriateness of a potential cooperating center. Teacher educators should use this list to determine which

characteristics are essential, and which cooperating centers are acceptable for their own programs.

Table 3

A comparison of Desirable Characteristics of Cooperating Centers for Agricultural Education, as perceived by Experienced Cooperating Teachers and First-Year Teachers of Agricultural Education in Virginia (ranked from most to least important)

Cooperating Teachers	First-Year Teachers
1. Adequate laboratories; up-to-date and high-quality equipment	2. Cooperating center should not be state-of-the-art, student teachers need to be exposed to the reality rather than the possibility
2. Opportunity to coach and/or work with a judging team	
3. Cooperating teachers with teaching experience	1. Cooperating teacher should be an experienced teacher who is willing to work with the student teacher
4. Adequate funding and/or ingenuity to run a program on a budget	3. A cooperating teacher with ingenuity enough to operate a program on a tight budget
5. Cooperating teacher is an active member of professional organizations	
6. Active FFA Chapter that is part of the program focus, not the entire program focus	11. Exposure to a similar program in which the student teacher intends to work with appropriate focuses on FFA, agri-science, etc.
7. Cooperating teacher should show pride in his/her program	
8. Well-balanced courses with computer based, or Standards of Learning based instruction	8. Have a copy of the Standards of Learning handbook on site and instruct the student teacher on its proper use
9. Still teaches traditional basic skills as well as new technology	12. Student teacher should have the opportunity to teach a “chalkboard” lesson rather than always having access to PowerPoint
10. Advisory group made up of community members	
11. SAE activities	
12. Adult education programs	
13. Student teachers are encouraged to attend professional meetings	
14. Diverse community activities available to student teachers allowing the student teacher to understand the community involvement	
15. Student teacher should be exposed to different teaching styles, so one student should have multiple cooperating teachers	15. Cooperating teachers should be interviewed to determine their teaching style prior to placement of a student teacher
	4. Student teachers should be treated as real teachers by giving them as much work, as they would encounter in a similar teaching environment. Completing paperwork for AES, ordering supplies, filling out grade book, etc.
	5. A cooperating center with discipline problems so that the student teacher will have that experience before deciding to teach.
	6. Provide structure and direction to what the student teacher should teach, rather than allowing them to teach what they want to
	7. Have the principal do a realistic evaluation of the student teacher
	9. The cooperating center administration should be well organized
	10. Cooperating teacher should offer advice, yet allow the student teacher to experiment
	13. Student teacher should plan a field trip from beginning to end, including paperwork, approval, funding, etc.
	14. Cooperating teacher should allow the student teacher to make mistakes

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**APPENDIX A: FORMS GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS AND  
FACILITATORS**

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University**

**Informed Consent for Participants  
of Investigative Projects**

Title of Project: Identifying Desirable Agricultural Education Cooperating Center

Characteristics: Cooperating and First-year Teacher Perceptions

Investigator(s): Rebecca L. Barnes, and William G. Camp

**I. The Purpose of this Research/ Project**

This research is being conducted as the data collection for a thesis being prepared by Rebecca Barnes as a requirement for completion of Master of Science in Agricultural education. The thesis topic is on Cooperating Centers for Student Teachers in Agricultural education.

This study was designed for one purpose: To provide a prioritized list of the desired, measurable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education student teachers. As no research exists that clarifies the important characteristics of a successful

cooperating center, only individual having recent experience with these centers will be able to provide a realistic description of the characteristics present, as well as those needed.

## **II. Procedures**

This research will be solely conducted during the AES/FFA annual convention at Virginia Tech in the fall of 1998. You will participate in one nominal group session lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. In this nominal group, you will be placed in a group of your peers. Each participant in the will generate a list of ideas pertaining to a nominal question which will be provided to you at the commencement of the session. Following the generation of ideas and suggestions, each group member will share each of the ideas he or she generated with the other group members in a round-robin type discussion. Following the presentation of ideas, each idea will be discussed and clarified as necessary.

## **III. Risks**

There are no risks to you, the participant, associated with participation in this research.

## **IV. Benefits of this Project**

Benefits of this project will include the improvement of the selection process for cooperating centers for student teaching in agricultural education. This will benefit future student teachers as well as strengthen teacher preparation programs and the teachers they educate.



**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Anonymity of all participants will be kept by the use of the nominal group technique.

Ideas presented to the group will not be identifiable with any individual following the completion of the nominal group session. No names will be recorded, or used in reporting the results. These sessions will not be audio or video taped.

**VI. Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participation in this nominal group.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Each participant is free to withdraw at any time without risk of penalty.

**VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Agricultural education.

**IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- Follow the instructions of the facilitator.
- Be considerate to fellow participants, by respecting and protecting their anonymity.

#### **X. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

---

Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Rebecca Barnes

Investigator

(540)961-5626

Phone

Dr. W.G. Camp

Faculty Advisor

(540)231-8188

Phone

H.T. Hurd

(540)231-5281

Chair, IRB

Phone

Research Division

**APPENDIX B: WORKSHEET GIVEN TO NOMINAL GROUP**

**PARTICIPANTS**

**Nominal Question:**

What would you say are the desirable characteristics for a cooperating center for agricultural education? These characteristics should deal with all aspects of the cooperating center, such as: facilities, resources, courses, community, school, activities, experiences open to student teachers, and personnel student teachers interact with.

**APPENDIX C: COMBINED LIST OF RESPONSES FROM BOTH NOMINAL  
GROUP SESSIONS**

1. Different teaching styles (student teacher with multiple mentors)
2. Make sure that student teacher completely plans a field trip
3. Availability of busses and drivers
4. Have principal do realistic evaluations of student teacher
5. Cooperating teacher shows pride/ownership of program
6. Have a copy of the Standards of Learning book on sight and show student teacher how to use it (apply numbers to lesson plans)
7. Active FFA as part of the program, not the whole program
8. Treat student teacher as a real teacher, give them as much work as in teaching position (paperwork to go to AES, ordering supplies, filling out grade book), emphasis on “behind the scenes” duties of agriculture teachers
9. Cooperating teacher is an active member of professional organization
10. Similar program of activities that you hope to work with (a lot of FFA focus, agriscience)
11. Student teachers are encouraged to attend professional meetings
12. Cooperating teacher with an imagination (be able to do things on a shoe sting budget)
13. Adequate laboratories that are up to date and high quality
14. Give structure/direction to what the student teacher should teach (not “teach what you want to”)

15. Well Balanced courses with Competency Based or Standards of Learning based instruction
16. Still teaches traditional basic skills as well as new technology
17. Go to cooperating center that provides discipline problems so that the student teacher will get a “worst case scenario” before deciding to teach
18. Lots of program options
19. Master/experienced cooperating teacher who is willing to work with the student teacher
20. Active FFA chapter
21. Cooperating teacher who will give advice yet allow the student teacher to experiment
22. Interested personnel (in students, program, student teachers, etc)
23. Cooperating teacher who lets student teacher make mistakes
24. Good accessible budget
25. Cooperating teacher should be interviewed to determine his/her teaching style prior to placement of a student teacher
26. Appropriate supporting facilities
27. Not state of the art facilities
28. Different grade levels in school
29. Allow the student teacher to teach a “chalk-board” lesson without the aid of computers, etc.
30. Moderate student to teacher ratio
31. A well organized administration
32. Compassionate cooperating teacher

33. Advisor group made up of community members
34. Diverse community activities for student teacher
35. Average or above average students (to boost image/morale) with a wide range or  
diverse student population
36. Adult programs
37. Community support/ Administrative support
38. Opportunity to understand community through diversity
39. SAE activities
40. Up to date hardware/appropriate software
41. Opportunity to work with/coach a judging team
42. Cooperating teachers with teaching experience
43. Money or ingenuity to run a program

**APPENDIX D: RANKED LIST OF RESPONSES FROM EACH NOMINAL  
GROUP**

**COOPERATING TEACHER RESPONSES**

Responses of Cooperating Teachers (ranked from most to least important):

1. Adequate laboratories; up to date and high quality
2. Opportunity to coach and/or work with a judging team.
3. Cooperating teachers with teaching experience.
4. Adequate funding and/or ingenuity to run a program on a budget.
5. Cooperating teacher is an active member of professional organizations.
6. Active FFA Chapter that is part of the program focus, not the entire program focus.
7. Cooperating teacher should show pride in his/her program.
2. Well-balanced courses with computer based, or standards of learning based instruction.
3. Still teaches traditional basic skills as well as new technology.
4. Advisory group made up of community members.
5. SAE activities.
6. Adult education programs.
7. Student teachers are encouraged to attend professional meetings.
8. Diverse community activities available to student teachers allowing the student teacher to understand the community involvement.
9. Student teacher should be exposed to different teaching styles, so one student should have multiple cooperating teachers.

## **STUDENT TEACHER RESPONSES**

Responses of First Year Teachers (ranked from most to least important):

1. Cooperating teacher should be an experienced teacher who is willing to work with the student teacher.
2. The cooperating center should not be state-of-the-art, student teachers need to be exposed to the reality rather than the possibility.
3. A cooperating teacher with ingenuity enough to operate a program on a tight budget.
4. Student teachers should be treated as real teachers by giving them as much work as they would encounter in a similar teaching environment. Completing paperwork for AES, ordering supplies, filling out grade book, etc.
5. A cooperating center with discipline problems so that the student teacher will have that experience before deciding to teach.
6. Provide structure and direction to what the student teacher should teach, rather than allowing them to teach what they want to.
7. Have the principal do a realistic evaluation of the student teacher.
8. Have a copy of the standards of learning handbook on site and instruct the student teacher on its proper use.
9. The Cooperating center administration should be well organized.
10. Cooperating teacher should offer advice, yet allow the student teacher to experiment.
11. Exposure to a similar program to that in which the student teacher intends to work with appropriate focus on FFA, agri-science, etc.



12. Student teachers should have the opportunity to teach a “chalkboard” lesson rather than always having access to PowerPoint.
13. Student teacher should plan a field trip from beginning to end, including paperwork, approval, funding, etc.
14. Cooperating teacher should allow the student teacher to make mistakes.
15. Cooperating teachers should be interviewed to determine their teaching style prior to placement of a student teacher.

**VITA**

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**Professional Experience**

1999- Associate Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources Crop and

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May 1997 BS Crop and Soil Environmental Science, Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
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