Cooperating Teachers’ Best Practices for Mentoring #1: Supporting Cooperating Teachers

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Introduction
This publication series was designed primarily for secondary agriscience teachers in school-based agricultural education programs (SBAE) who serve as cooperating teachers during the capstone student teaching experience. However, this series could also serve as a guide to those who support cooperating teachers in their role as effective mentors. This series provides a real-world approach to mentoring techniques for cooperating teachers to utilize frequently and consistently during the capstone experience. This initial article in the Best Practices for Mentoring series provides SBAE cooperating teachers with a basic understanding of their role as cooperating teachers and mentors, as well as introduces the three major areas of focus for these best practices. This publication also provides an overview of the Best Practices for Mentoring series in Appendix A.

Role of Cooperating Teachers
The cooperating teacher plays an important role in the student teacher’s capstone experience. Cooperating teachers are in-service teachers who have agreed to host student teachers in their classrooms for their student teaching internship. These professionals have clinical education training and a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and they have proven to be effective in the classroom. Over 30 years ago, student teacher placement and the role of the cooperating teacher were recognized as two of the most influential factors in the quality of a student teaching experience (Norris et al., 1990). As a role model, the cooperating teacher can positively influence the student teacher’s self-efficacy during the internship, as well as their decision to enter the profession (Edgar et al., 2011; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Rocca, 2005). Teachers who enter the classroom with a higher self-efficacy have been shown to experience less teacher burnout and are more likely to remain in the classroom (Swan et al., 2011).

Mentoring
Despite the important role that mentor teachers play in the development of the future generation of teachers, research has demonstrated that few teachers receive training or preparation for mentoring (Hall et al., 2008; Tang & Choi, 2007). All too often, it is assumed that if a teacher is an effective practitioner, they can impart their skills and knowledge to another as a mentor. Mentoring is not an inborn ability. However, the skills essential to effective mentorship can be learned and developed over time (Hennisen et al., 2011). In addition, ongoing problems with the preparation of educators is related to the wide range and lack of consistency in teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010). One of the specific areas in teacher preparation that has extensive variability is within the clinical area of teacher preparation, including early field experiences and student teaching internships (Hart, 2020). When schools...
and universities work collaboratively while supporting
the student teacher, each are stretching beyond the role of
their individual institution, while aiding in the professional
growth and development of student teachers (Sarnoff &
Ellerbrock, 2020).

A list of 17 best practices for mentoring, based on previous
literature and vetted by a panel of experts, was constructed
in 2018 (Barry, 2019) and field tested for reliability (Alem-
dag & Simsek, 2017; Russell & Russel, 2011). These best
practices fall under three major areas of mentoring: social
support, professional support, and role modeling. This
publication series will elaborate on each of the major areas
individually, provide a real-world approach to implement-
ing these practices as cooperating teachers, and serve as a
guide for those who support cooperating teachers in their
roles as mentors (Appendix A).

Cooperating Teacher Program at
UF

Initiated December 2018, the SBAE cooperating teacher
program at the University of Florida consists of six compo-
nents: (1) onboarding meeting, (2) a pre-internship work-
shop with their student teacher, (3) biweekly emails with
infographics, (4) monthly zoom meetings, (5) a cooperating
teacher manual, and (6) a cooperating teacher website.

Onboarding Meeting

During the initial onboarding meeting, conducted the fall
prior to the internship experience, cooperating teachers
are introduced to their role as mentors. They are provided
with the Cooperating Teacher Handbook and given a brief
synopsis of the different ways they could support their
student teacher. Additionally, they are provided with a
list of required items to bring to the workshop later that
semester. These items include a calendar of important
dates and activities that may occur during the internship,
a year-at-a-glance plan for the student teachers to know
what topics they will be asked to teach, and any additional
material that may help their student teachers better prepare
their lessons or themselves for their internship.

Workshop

During the pre-internship workshop, cooperating teachers
are provided trainings on the best practices, with an em-
phasis put on supporting their student teacher by utilizing
these best practices. Cooperating teachers are encouraged
to implement the best practices of mentoring to help build
the self-efficacy of the student teacher. The cooperating
teachers are also introduced to the cooperating teacher
manual and website as tools to support them in their role.
They are introduced to experienced cooperating teacher/stu-
dent teacher pairs who have successfully navigated the
internship experience by utilizing regular feedback and
frequent uninterrupted reflection time. Additionally, the
cooperating teachers are given time with their student
teachers to plan for the upcoming internship experience.
Cooperating teachers are asked to provide their student
teachers with guidance on unit plans and lesson planning,
as well as a calendar of important dates and activities that
the student teacher should know.

Biweekly Emails and Infographics

Once the internship experience has begun, biweekly emails
are sent to the cooperating teachers to provide positive
feedback from the Cooperating Teacher Support Program
Leader. The email provides reminders of upcoming dates,
a link to the corresponding biweekly website page that
includes additional materials, and an infographic that
describes a specific best practice for cooperating teacher
implementation.

Zoom Meetings

During the internship experience, cooperating teachers are
couraged to attend three to four monthly zoom meetings
with the Cooperating Teacher Support Program Leader.
These meetings provide the cooperating teachers with an
opportunity to discuss positives, challenges, and solutions
related to their experiences among their peers and the
program leader.
Cooperating Teacher Manual
The cooperating teacher manual provides cooperating teachers with a quick guide to their role as mentors. The manual lays out the responsibilities for their role, as well as those of the student teachers and university supervisors. The manual also provides supporting documents for the mentoring best practices, how to observe their student teachers, effective feedback tips, and mentoring language stems. Additionally, the required forms and examples of completed forms are provided in the manual.

UFCooperatingTeachersSupport.com
This website-based resource tool was designed to promote and foster positive mentorship from cooperating teachers. The individual pages of the website include Home, Contact, Weekly Guides, Your Role, Giving Feedback, Forms, Resources, and Blog. Additionally, related research and helpful resource links were provided throughout the website that highlight positive mentoring practices. This resource can be found at https://www.ufcooperatingteacherssupport.com/.

References


Appendix A: Best Practices for Mentoring: Cooperating Teacher Series

Cooperating Teachers’ Best Practices for Mentoring #1: Supporting Cooperating Teachers

An overview of the role of cooperating teachers as mentors for student teachers during their capstone experience. This publication is intended for SBAE cooperating teachers and those who support cooperating teachers in their role as mentors.

Cooperating Teachers’ Best Practices for Mentoring #2: Social Support

An overview of the best practices for mentoring with a focus on social support is provided, utilizing specific practices for school-based agricultural education programs.

Cooperating Teachers’ Best Practices for Mentoring #3: Professional Support

An overview of the best practices for mentoring with a focus on professional support is provided, utilizing specific practices for school-based agricultural education programs.

Cooperating Teachers’ Best Practices for Mentoring #4: Role Modeling

An overview of the best practices for mentoring with a focus on role modeling is provided, utilizing specific practices for school-based agricultural education programs.


