

Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #1: Supporting Cooperating Teachers¹

Heather R. Nesbitt and Debra M. Barry²

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

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2. Heather R. Nesbitt, graduate assistant, and Debra M. Barry, assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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 (Alemdag & 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 implementing 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 components: (1) onboarding meeting, (2) a pre-internship workshop 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 emphasis 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/student 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.

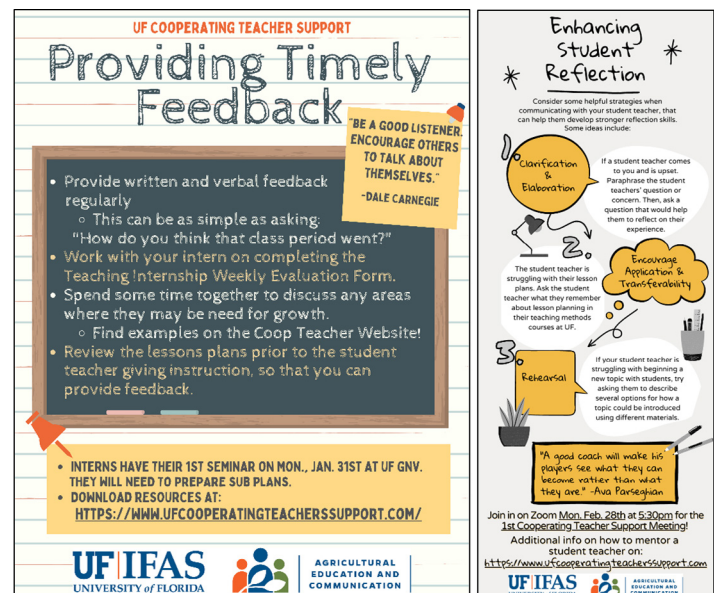


Figure 1. Infographic examples.
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Zoom Meetings

During the internship experience, cooperating teachers are encouraged 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*, *Re-sources*, 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.ufcooperatingteachersupport.com/>.



Welcome to the UF Cooperating Teacher Resource Site

During the internship experience, the AEC Department at the University of Florida wants to support you and give you the tools you need to help make your role and experience as positive and impactful as it can be. UF AEC Cooperating Teachers will receive an email with an infographic and links to this resource and support website. Resources are there to help support the mentoring of student teachers who are in their capstone experience before entering their career as agricultural educators. Thank you for all that you do for our program and future educators!

Figure 2. UFCooperatingTeachersSupport.com
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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.