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PERCEPTIONS OF COOPERATING TEACHERS CONCERNING THE  
STUDENT TEACHING FIELD EXPERIENCE

Dawn Paulson

142 Pages

December 2014

This study explored the views of cooperating teachers on (a) their work with student teachers and university supervisors, and (b) ways to improve the student teaching process. In a mixed-methods sequential explanatory study, 153 cooperating teachers answered closed-and open-ended questions using an electronic survey; then a subset of 12 participated in follow-up interviews. All participants taught at rural or semi-rural middle schools and high schools in Central Illinois; all had experience with student teachers from a mid-sized institution in that area.

Major findings of the study included cooperating teachers' lack of preparation for the semester, cooperating teachers' beliefs in a need for better selection of student teachers, their desire for feedback, roles they feel they should play (role model, mentor, judge, etc.), and their desire for power and respect. Recommendations include suggestions for university policy regarding candidates, university supervisors, and student teaching.

PERCEPTIONS OF COOPERATING TEACHERS CONCERNING  
THE STUDENT TEACHING FIELD EXPERIENCE

DAWN PAULSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

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2014

PERCEPTIONS OF COOPERATING TEACHERS CONCERNING  
THE STUDENT TEACHING FIELD EXPERIENCE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

With the advent of No Child Left Behind (2001), public school teachers were asked to meet increasingly high standards. For example, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Unit Standard One (2008) states:

Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other school professionals know and demonstrate the content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students to learn. Assessments indicate that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards. (p. 16)

This is just one of the six standards that teachers are expected to meet. In order to meet these expectations, teacher education programs must offer instruction in the necessary content knowledge, lesson planning, and a variety of teaching strategies. However, the extremely important task of providing teacher candidates with an environment where they can discover how to create meaningful learning experiences for students as well as grow and develop as educators is left in the hands of the cooperating teacher during clinical experiences.

According to Darling-Hammond and Berry (1999), it is imperative that teachers are better prepared for a new age of teaching. In an ideal placement, teacher candidates would be supported by a cooperating teacher who models, co-plans, gives feedback, and provides frequent opportunities to practice and reflect while allowing the student teacher to assume more and more responsibility (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). A

study by Briers and Edwards (2001) documented the importance of the relationship that develops between the teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher. According to teacher candidates, the clinical field experience, and the mentoring provided by cooperating teachers are valuable components of teacher preparation programs (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Clarke, 2001).

According to Clarke (2001) and Kasperbauer and Roberts (2007), cooperating teachers are often the most influential factor in the development of novice teachers, as they have the most contact and communication; therefore, it is important to develop a better understanding of cooperating teachers' involvement in teacher education. Yet few research studies have examined the work of the cooperating teacher. Clarke (2001) states, "Given the central role that co-operating teachers play in the practicum setting, it is curious that their work languishes as a research area" (p. 237). More research examining the important work of the cooperating teacher is needed (Baum, Powers-Costello, VanScoy, Miller, & James, 2011; Caruso, 1998; Dooley, Dangel, & Farran, 2011; Glickman & Bey, 1990; Knowles & Cole, 1995; Zeichner, 1992).

In particular, we need to study the perspective of cooperating teachers. They are the backbone of the field experience, and yet we have limited information regarding their perspective of the mentoring process. We need to hear more from cooperating teachers about their perceptions of the relationships with the student teacher and the university supervisor as well as what cooperating teachers would like from these relationships.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As indicated above, cooperating teachers greatly influence teacher candidates. Knowledgeable and well-supported teachers get their initial on-the-job training from

cooperating teachers. Feiman-Nemser and Parker's 1993 comparison of two mentoring programs validates the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship in conjunction with the clinical field experience. Hence, part of any teacher development and improvement plan must consider input from the cooperating teachers. Unfortunately, we have not heard often enough the cooperating teachers' perspective concerning the mentoring process that they are continually asked to facilitate during their teaching career.

Throughout the research, it is the voice of the teacher candidate that is heard most often. According to Brookhart and Fremman (1992); Kasperbauer and Roberts (2007); and Koerner, Rust, and Baumgartner (2002), existing research tends to focus on the characteristics of cooperating teachers or their relationships with teacher candidates mainly from the perspective of the candidates. According to Koeppen and Davison-Jenkins (2007), there is little current research concerning the perceptions of cooperating teachers relating to the field experiences that they so often participate in throughout their teaching careers. Are we missing an important piece of the puzzle when we do not take time to examine the cooperating teacher's perspective? It is time that we hear from the cooperating teachers and allow them the opportunity to express their viewpoints about the process of mentoring teacher candidates

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current research was to glean a better understanding of the cooperating teachers' viewpoint in the development of the student teacher and provide information about what the cooperating teacher feels needs to transpire to develop a better learning environment for both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. This research explored the perceptions of the cooperating teacher during the student teaching

field experience. By examining the perceptions of the cooperating teacher during the field experience and then sharing the information learned with all concerned in the preparation of future teachers, we can greatly enhance the quality of our future educators. This study examined the perspective of the cooperating teachers as they work with student teachers during the clinical field experience in the hope of providing a more effective mentoring process and better quality in the advancement of the teaching profession.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding the ways they are prepared for the mentoring of student teachers?
2. According to cooperating teachers, what factors help or hinder them when working with student teachers?
3. What roles do cooperating teachers prefer to play?
4. What type of preparation and support do cooperating teachers believe they would benefit from in relation to their work with student teachers?

### **Significance of the Study**

As supervisors working with cooperating teachers, it is important that we address cooperating teachers' concerns and needs. Without research, their voice would not be heard. The needs of the cooperating teachers can easily be overlooked by the school administration, which has a multitude of issues to tend to in the course of a day, as well as the university personnel, who are in the position of first and foremost finding a school placement for the teacher candidates in their charge. With these pressing demands, often the priority is to meet the logistical and financial criteria of the placement instead of giving consideration to the quality of the placement. However, failure to ask the

cooperating teachers about their perceptions of the field experience could lead to unnecessary problems in finding quality placements for future teachers. The study provides a significant contribution to the field of teacher education by providing a foundation for continuing research on cooperating teacher experiences.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions apply throughout this study. The first four definition are taken from the book *Supervising Student Teachers: The Professional Way* published in 2010 by Marvin Henry and Ann Weber and the final two definitions are taken from the article *Teacher to Mentor: Become a Successful Cooperating Teacher* published by Ingrid Johnson in 2011.

*Student teaching* refers to a full-time clinical field experience that takes place in the public school system varying from one semester to a year in length. Upon satisfactory completion, teacher candidates receive their teaching certification.

*Teacher candidate* refers to a student in an undergraduate education program at a college or university who is preparing to teach (NCATE, 2008).

*Cooperating teacher* refers to a public school teacher who has been asked to assist a teacher candidate in learning how to teach before the teacher candidate has earned a teaching certificate.

*University supervisor* refers to an employee of the university who works with both the teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher to oversee the field experience.

*Mentor* refers to a trusted counselor or guide.

*Mentoring* refers to coaching a person, both personally and professionally.



### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

Participation in this study was limited to cooperating teachers who mentor student teachers from a mid-sized institution in central Illinois. The schools used for this study were rural and semi-rural schools in the same area as the mid-sized institution. In addition, the study was limited to cooperating teachers in middle schools and high schools. All of the cooperating teachers had experiences working with student teachers from the above-mentioned mid-sized university; however, some cooperating teachers had experiences working with student teachers from other universities. Because the study involved participants from only one region and only middle schools and high schools, it has limited generalizability.

Furthermore, the study used a survey design involving both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Survey research is limited in that it shows the perceptions of only the person being surveyed and is not corroborated by perceptions obtained from others (Creswell, 2008).

Finally, analyses of open-ended questions are subject to categorization bias on the part of the researcher. In order to reduce such bias, these analyses were peer reviewed by another faculty member. There also could be design flaws in the survey or a bias in questions. In order to reduce these sources of bias, the investigator consulted specialists in research design and survey construction.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature suggests that teacher preparation is extremely important to the success of our future teachers, that student teaching plays a major role in this preparation, and that the cooperating teacher is vital to the development of the effectiveness of the teacher candidate. A study by Dooley, Dangel, and Farran (2011) examined topics published in highly regarded journals of teacher education between January 2006 and December 2009, and they concluded that given the current push to integrate teacher education into a clinical model, research on issues related to supervision of mentoring and cooperating teachers is needed. Koeppen and Davison-Jenkins (2007) and Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg (2010) point out that teacher education programs rely heavily on cooperating teachers in preparing future generations of teachers, but there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the views of cooperating teachers. This still holds true in 2012. The present study performed an extensive search of past literature using library databases such as ERIC with search terms such as perspective, teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and mentor and found over 50 articles written on the mentoring of student teachers from the perspective of the student teacher and university supervisor. However, only a few articles represent the viewpoint of the cooperating teacher on the topic of mentoring a student teacher.

As shown below, teacher candidates value the cooperating teacher but also report several unresolved issues, such as conflict between the university and the cooperating teacher, lack of independence, and fear of the cooperating teacher as evaluator. Cooperating teachers' perceptions shed light on some of these concerns as well as other concerns such as lack of preparation and support for the role of mentor. However, research reveals gaps in our knowledge of what cooperating teachers want and need.

### **The Impact of the Teacher Candidate/ Cooperating Teacher Relationship**

Teacher preparation has been cited as the most important factor relevant to a prospective teacher's future success (Clarke, 2001; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; and Sanders, Dowson, & Sinclair, 2005). Many teachers feel that the most important component of teacher education is the student teaching experience (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990, as cited in Bartell, 2005). Bartell (2005) and Feiman-Nemser (2001) state that a good beginning field experience shapes teacher candidates' practice in many positive ways and gives them clear insight into high quality teaching.

Anderson (2007), as well as Kasperbauer and Roberts (2007), found that student teachers perceived their cooperating teachers to have a significant influence on their development as a teacher. According to Chesley and Jordan (2012) and Clarke (2001), many teacher candidates consider time spent in the field and the guidance they receive from the cooperating teacher as the most important part of their clinical experience. Baker and Milner (2006) point out the influence the mentor can have on the student teacher: "My cooperating teacher was one of the most influential adults I've had in my life" (p. 68). Student teachers consider the personal characteristics of the cooperating

teacher to be six times more important than supervisors or cooperating teachers believe (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). Basic expectations for cooperating teachers are to nurture the growth of the beginning teacher, learn how to observe the student teacher in the classroom, and develop a sense of trust (Duquette, 1994; Sherrill, 1999). Caires and Almedida (2007) surveyed 224 student teachers in Portugal, and those who gave positive comments about their cooperating teachers used terms such as thoughtful, supportive, trustworthy, and open. The most valued features of the cooperating teachers were their interaction with their teacher candidates, respect, and support. According to Freking (2006), training of veteran teachers in the mentoring process is often lacking, yet student teachers continually state they value the support and guidance they receive while learning to teach. Sadler (2006) interviewed 13 student teachers to better understand how they navigated the student teaching field experience and found that the student teachers often felt overwhelmed and believed their education had not provided them with adequate preparation. Some students described their relationship with the cooperating teacher as a safety net. Phelps and Benson (2012) and Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) agree that cooperating teachers act as a safety net for teacher candidates during the field experience. In summary, teacher candidates value the cooperating teacher as a guide, mentor, and safety net.

Not all teacher candidates, however, provided positive comments about their cooperating teachers. Many candidates report a disconnect between the strategies that teacher candidates have learned at the university and those modeled by the cooperating teacher (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Smith, 2007). According to Sinclair, Munns, and Woodward (2005), many cooperating teachers encourage their student teachers to

ignore what they were taught during their teacher education courses because their "real learning" takes place during their student teaching practicum (p. 210). Another possible problem occurs with the cooperating teacher's use of modeling versus encouraging development of the student teacher's own style (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012).

### **The Roles of the Cooperating Teacher**

Traditionally, the cooperating teacher's role has been to model good teaching. A 2010 study conducted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) states that modeling, goal setting, observing teaching, organizing, and practicing teaching strategies are the key components to learning to teach. Often an ideal placement is considered one in which the cooperating teacher models, co-plans, provides opportunities for practice and reflection, and provides feedback while the student teacher assumes increasing responsibility (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; He & Levin, 2008; Henry & Weber 2010). Teacher candidates comment that they pattern their behaviors after the model provided by their cooperating teacher (Anderson, 2007; Caires & Almedida, 2007). According to Weasmer and Woods (2003), it is essential for student teachers to have good models to imitate.

One possible problem with this patterning is that cooperating teachers have an inordinate amount of influence on teacher candidates, and many candidates will teach as their cooperating teacher does because that is all they know (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; National Research Council, 2001; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). However, according to Schulz (2005), teaching should not be a series of routines, habitual technical acts to be learned, perfected, and repeated year after year. Rather, good teaching is a complex,

intellectual, creative, decision-making activity. Teachers should be thoughtful, reflective, inquiring, self-directed, and active participants in decision-making. Schultz proposes abandoning the traditional training model in which pre-service teachers demonstrate the methods already learned and replacing this model with an educative practicum that helps teacher candidates understand the teacher's role, develop the capacity to learn from future experiences, and accomplish the purpose of helping students learn. In addition, it has been suggested that teacher candidates need more opportunities to explore, try out new ideas, and make adjustments accordingly (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Carroll, 2012; Ganesh & Matteson, 2010; Welsh & Devlin, 2006). Fantozzi (2012) suggests that modeling best practices for student teachers gives them methods to use in their classroom but it doesn't create future teachers who can evaluate practice based on their understanding of how students learn. Watching what teachers do is not sufficient for learning why they do it (Danielson, (2007).

Gardiner (2009) interviewed and observed eight cooperating teachers and found that cooperating teachers play two distinct roles: teacher and mentor. From this study it was concluded that the mentoring development provided to the cooperating teachers was insufficient. Cooperating teachers need more support during the transition from classroom teacher to mentor teacher.

According to Beck and Kosnik (2000), many teacher candidates report a high degree of tension in relating to their cooperating teachers because they are concerned about their final evaluation. Anderson (2007) agrees, stating that cooperating teachers must assess and provide final evaluations of student teachers before they can receive their teaching certificate. The written evaluation at the end of the practicum can "make or

break a career” (p. 2). In a study of 35 teacher candidates, Kuechle, Holzhauer, Lin, Brulle, and Morrison (2010) also noted that many candidates expressed anxiety about their evaluations. Likewise, interviews of several teacher candidates by Fantozzi (2012) reveal that the most important thing was a good evaluation and this often caused anxiety. Smith (2007) agrees, stating that student teachers fear advocating for ideas that differ from their cooperating teachers’ ideas, so they keep their frustrations and opinions to themselves. Due to the concerns associated with high-stakes evaluation for the purpose of licensing, Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggests that the evaluation process should be considered as an administrative function.

To summarize the research, student teachers are uncomfortable because the cooperating teacher’s strategies do not connect with the university’s teaching, because the cooperating teacher fails to develop independent thinking in their mentees, and because the same teacher who mentors them will eventually judge them. It is important to examine the cooperating teacher’s view of these possible conflicts.

### **The Cooperating Teacher’s Perspective on Evaluation**

Cooperating teachers expressed several concerns about evaluation of student teachers. They were concerned that student teachers were inadequately prepared and selected. Cooperating teachers also pointed out conflicts between the roles of judge and coach as well as conflicts between cooperating teachers’ expectations and those of the university supervisor.

### **Teacher Candidates Preparation Level**

A major concern of cooperating teachers is the lack of preparation of teacher candidates prior to the student teaching experience. According to Chesley and Jordan

(2012), university teacher education programs have not provided student teachers with adequate preparation in content pedagogy or research-based strategies. This lack of preparation often leads to cooperating teachers spending an inordinate amount of time instructing the student teacher in the necessary content knowledge for teaching.

### **Role Conflicts in Evaluation**

Responsibility for the evaluation of the teacher candidate can also be a point of confusion. Sinclair, Dowson, and Thistleton-Martin (2006) suggest that cooperating teachers want the university supervisor to evaluate the teacher candidate, at least when the candidate is failing. Sinclair et al. found that cooperating teachers often worried about their assessment of the teacher candidates, and they were especially anxious if they had to assess a weak teacher candidate and face the possibility of assigning an unsatisfactory grade. The cooperating teachers shared that they felt relief when the university supervisor took charge when the teacher candidate was incapable of a completing a successful practicum experience. When student teachers struggle, the consensus was that cooperating teachers needed assistance in evaluation and providing feedback in the more difficult situations.

### **Conflicting Expectations**

In addition to role conflict, another possible reason for cooperating teacher discomfort with the role of evaluator is a lack of agreement between the cooperating teacher and the supervisor concerning expectations for the teacher candidates (Hastings, 2004). Cooperating teachers complain that often if they fail a teacher candidate, the university supervisor sends the teacher candidate to another cooperating teacher so the candidate will pass. This creates negative feelings toward the supervisor.



A study by Beck and Kosnik (2000) of 20 cooperating teachers revealed considerable confusion about expectations. Beck and Kosnik state that the lack of clarity and agreement regarding the role of cooperating teachers is a “pressing practical problem” (p. 209). Researchers agree that cooperating teachers are unclear about what needs to be taught (Anderson, 2007; Baum, Powers-Costello, VanScoy, Miller, & James, 2011; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001). Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair (2005) report a cooperating teacher statement: “To be honest, I don’t know what I should be observing” (p. 727). Hastings (2004) quotes another cooperating teacher as saying, “Help! I just—I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing. What have I done wrong? Have I not been giving her enough feedback?” (p. 139).

### **Other Perspectives and Concerns**

According to Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001), other possible problems that cooperating teachers face besides working with weak student teachers and uncertainty about university expectations were re-teaching their own students that the student teacher taught, criticisms from the student teacher, and personality conflicts. Hamilton (2010) stated that the cooperating teacher’s first obligation is to the academic growth of their own students. Goodfellow (2000) added that when student teachers lack initiative or fail to take responsibility for students’ learning, cooperating teachers feel frustrated and tension develops between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. As LaBoskey and Richert (2002) note compatible placements are more conducive to professional growth and development.

## **Preparation of Cooperating Teachers**

One way to reach agreement on expectations is for the supervisor to act as a liaison between the university and the cooperating teacher, providing much needed preparation.

### **University Supervisor's Role in Preparing the Cooperating Teacher**

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001), it is important that universities prepare cooperating teachers because they must guide teacher candidates through the complexities of teaching. Baum, Powers-Costello, VanScoy, Miller, and James (2011) state, "The university supervisor contributes significantly to the teacher education program. Although they play a vital role, supervisors have often been neglected by the programs they serve and by the research on teacher education" (p. 38). Gardiner (2009) and Koerner (1992) suggested that cooperating teachers are often not prepared to mentor teacher candidates.

There is a need for universities to examine what roles university educators can play in the preparation of cooperating teachers for this task. Preparation may include academic coursework as well as preparation specifically related to mentoring teacher candidates. It is important to determine how well prepared cooperating teachers feel to meet their mentoring responsibilities. It may be time for teacher education programs to be more selective in their choice of cooperating teachers (Landt, 2014). As several researchers, (Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012) noted cooperating teachers are often assigned by a school's principal or volunteer to serve as a teacher mentor. The traditional model of student teaching has not changed systematically since the 1920s (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). There is a wide variability in the experience and

the capability of the cooperating teachers. In Killian and Wilkins' 2009 research study of 13 cooperating teacher' student teacher pairs, they found that experience does not make the cooperating teacher highly effective but inexperience is associated with less effective cooperating teachers. Danielson (2007) noted that expertise is not the same thing as experience. Not all experienced teachers are experts; however, experience is needed for the acquisition of expertise. The development of expertise requires conscious effort by teachers.

### **Types of Preparation Cooperating Teachers Received**

In terms of academic preparation, Clarke (2001) found that cooperating teachers were almost twice as likely to hold a master's degree compared to non-supervising teachers while Killian and Wilkins (2009) found that out of the 13 cooperating teachers in their study all had completed a master's degree. The revelation that cooperating teachers are more likely than other teachers to hold a master's degree indicates a commitment to professional and intellectual development, a desirable quality for teachers working with pre-service teachers. It is not clear whether such academic preparation affects the cooperating teacher's desire for workshops or other preparation that is specifically related to the field experience.

In a 2001 survey, 47% of respondents reported participating in formal preparation for their roles as mentors, while 14% indicated they had received no professional development to help them mentor student teachers (Clarke, 2001). These numbers may seem low, but Clarke indicates that experienced cooperating teachers did not see the need for formal coursework in preparation for their role. However, for many cooperating teachers, coursework or some type of preparation is considered valuable. According to

Horton and Harvey (1979), Koster, Korthagen and Wubbels (1998), and Kent (2001), university supervisors should provide in-service meetings for cooperating teachers to educate them about the mentoring process. By working with the cooperating teacher, the supervisor is preparing the classroom teacher to become a member of the teacher education team. Hastings (2004) and Smith (2007) indicate that such workshops prepare cooperating teachers to facilitate planning, explore practices different from their own, engage in discussions that explore teaching ideas, explore questions and uncertainties about teaching, and assist novice teachers. Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett, and Dunn (2007) indicated that professional development is also important in improving the cooperating teacher–teacher candidate relationship.

Schultz (2005) suggests that university supervisors move from the role of trainer to that of mentor and work collaboratively with cooperating teachers. The university needs to more actively bridge the university/school divide, engaging in continuous conversations with the cooperating teachers in a joint effort to prepare new teachers. Feiman-Nemser (2001) observed that supervisors need to work closely with cooperating teachers and student teachers, and when they do not, there is no sharing of expertise. Horton and Harvey (1979), Post (2007), and Smith (2007) also believe that university supervisors can assist cooperating teachers in the various approaches to planning and teaching. However, it is vital to acknowledge the importance of the university supervisor in this complex triad. When cooperating teachers were asked who had a major influence on their supervisory practices with the student teacher they stated that it was the university supervisor (Killian & Wilkins, 2009).

According to Bennett (2002), cooperating teachers want to be included in the preparation and planning of the student teaching program. Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) also found that cooperating teachers would like to participate in the design of the student teaching program as well as collaborate on the creation of the familiar student teaching handbook.

To summarize, many cooperating teachers hold a master's degree, but fewer than half report participating in any formal training for their role of mentors to teacher candidates. Research does not indicate how much and what type of preparation the cooperating teachers want. The answer to this question may vary according to the teacher's prior preparation and experience.

### **Support for Cooperating Teachers**

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001) it is important that universities not only prepare cooperating teachers but also support them during the field experience. Although research lacks detail about what cooperating teachers want in terms of preparation, cooperating teachers have stated that they want ongoing support from the university supervisor (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Gardiner, 2009; Sadler, 2006). "Providing supportive, enriched, and flexible settings in which people can learn from one another is essential" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 33). Cooperating teachers need to be supported so they are more able to handle the emotional aspects of the role of cooperating teacher (Grove, Strudler, & Odell, 2004; Hastings, 2004). Likewise, in order to provide consistent support, university supervisors need to be aware of cooperating teachers' beliefs (Grove, Strudler, & Odell, 2004; He & Levin, 2008).

### **Better Communication**

Clarke (2001) states that cooperating teachers value periodic meetings during the field experience. He further suggests increasing the frequency and duration of school visits by university supervisors, holding more in-services, and communicating systematically with the cooperating teachers; all of these supportive interactions are essential to the development of an effective clinical experience. Koerner, Rust and Baumgartner (2002) indicate that cooperating teachers value supervisors as their link to the university as well as a mentor. Schools and universities need to recognize that both parties are responsible for improving teacher preparation and this can be achieved through collaborative partnerships (McFadden & Sheerer, 2006). Not surprisingly, Clarke (2001) found that 70% of the cooperating teachers interviewed indicated they had on-site meetings with a supervisor. Such meetings are often administrative in nature and take very little time, but they can provide cooperating teachers information about supervision of teacher candidates.

### **Feedback**

Another type of support that cooperating teachers find useful is feedback (Clarke, 2001). When asked about receiving feedback concerning their practice as a cooperating teacher, 85% desired feedback. When questioned about how they should receive feedback, 26% requested a survey response from their student teachers, 21% asked for a post-practicum meeting with the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor, and 18% requested a meeting between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor.

The type and amount of support cooperating teachers want from the supervisor may depend on the cooperating teacher's prior preparation and experience (Baum,

Powers-Costello, VanScoy, Miller, & James, 2011). Supervisors found it difficult to address all the cooperating teachers' needs and interests due to their various experiences working with student teachers. Kent (2001) suggests that new cooperating teachers in particular would benefit from receiving support about the supervision process from an experienced mentor. To date, little research has analyzed separately the wishes of different groups of cooperating teachers. More such research is needed to analyze these groups separately.

In summary, cooperating teachers value support from the university supervisors, specifically frequent visits, in-service, better communication, and feedback. However, cooperating teachers' needs may vary according to their academic preparation and experience.

### **Benefits of Mentoring a Student Teacher**

Few cooperating teachers receive monetary reimbursement or even release time for the mentoring of a student teacher, and yet cooperating teachers often remark that they find the mentoring process beneficial to them. Landt's 2004 research of 18 cooperating teachers supported the idea that educators can grow professionally while fulfilling the role of cooperating teacher. While cooperating teachers model good teaching, they often reflect on the teaching decisions they make throughout the course of a day. Clarifying one's own teaching to a student teacher prompts improvement. Increased reflection, increased time to plan, and being valued as a mentor provide the cooperating teachers with feelings of self-efficacy (Brink, Grisham, Laguardia, Granby, & Peck, 2001). Benefits noted by Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) were improvement of one's own teaching and the learning of new ideas. Cooperating teachers also reported

they were better organized and more aware of their own practice (Hamilton, 2010).

Grove, Odell and Strudler (2004) define this mutually beneficial sharing of knowledge as “reciprocal mentoring” (p. 90).

### **Summary**

Teacher candidates value the cooperating teacher as guide, mentor, and safety net. However, many teacher candidates report tension due to discomfort with trying out strategies that are different from the cooperating teacher’s, lack of freedom to do independent thinking, and fear of the cooperating teacher’s evaluation. Some cooperating teachers themselves feel discomfort with the role of judge; some complain of lack of agreement about expectations; some complain of unclear expectations. Research does not show how widespread these concerns are or what changes the cooperating teachers would like to see.

In terms of preparation, many cooperating teachers hold a master’s degree, but fewer than half report participating in any formal training for their role as mentor to teacher candidates. How much preparation cooperating teachers want may well depend on their background. However, in indicating how much and what type of preparation cooperating teachers want, research does not differentiate among subgroups. Cooperating teachers value support from the university supervisor, specifically frequent visits, systematic communication, and feedback. Hamilton (2010) noted that the perception of cooperating teachers is that the university supervisor is there to assist and evaluate the student teacher and the cooperating teachers believe they have limited options.

According to Post (2007), the task to help cooperating teachers mentor more effectively falls on the shoulders of the university supervisors. Here again, cooperating



teachers' needs may vary according to their prior preparation and experience. Even though cooperating teachers experienced frustration with the many problems associated with mentoring a student teacher, Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) found the collaboration mutually benefitting.

Clarke (2001) and Cole (2000) find it interesting that despite all the work and responsibility placed on cooperating teachers, research is incomplete concerning their role in the mentoring of teacher candidates. Hastings (2004) states that "the noticeable silence in the literature is indicative of the fact that administrators and researchers have not truly recognized the contribution of cooperating teachers to the pre-service experience or the emotional demands it makes on them" (p. 146). It is essential that we hear more from the cooperating teachers themselves and their perceptions of the teacher education programs and roles they play in the collaborative process (Bennett, 2002).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding mentoring teacher candidates, including the support and training they received and still need while mentoring teacher candidates during their clinical field experience. In order to achieve this purpose, social constructivism was used as a theoretical lens to guide data collection and analysis. Tracey and Morrow (2006) attribute the philosophical theory of social constructivism to Vygotsky (1978). Social constructivism assumes that society and any cultural organization tends to socialize its members and construct knowledge. According to Kegan (1982, 1994), "humans engage in everyday world making; that is, we individually construct meaning about the world through our understanding of the events and relationships that make up our everyday lives" (as cited in Fantozzi, 2012, p. 147).

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was applied in order to achieve the study's purpose as detailed above. The study was conducted in two phases. Phase I involved the use of a survey design. In this phase, cooperating teachers were asked about their perspectives of the student teaching experience using a survey comprised of both closed-ended and open-ended items. The analysis of the survey data generated themes that were explored more deeply during Phase II of the study. In Phase II, cooperating teachers were interviewed. The objective of the interviews was to probe cooperative teacher perspectives further in order to generate more in-depth responses regarding their

perceptions regarding the clinical field experience. In this chapter, descriptions of the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study are presented.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed four questions.

1. What are the cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding the ways they are prepared for the mentoring of student teachers?
2. According to cooperating teachers, what factors help or hinder them when working with student teachers?
3. What roles do cooperating teachers prefer to play?
4. What type of preparation and support do cooperating teachers believe they would benefit from in relation to their work with student teachers?

### **Research Procedures**

In order to address the four research questions, a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used for data collection and analysis. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) emphasized the use of the sequential model for novice researchers wishing to use both approaches but not wanting to get into the difficulties of using the approaches simultaneously. The authors state that in the Quan/Qual sequence the investigator starts with the quantitative study and then proceeds to the qualitative study. More specifically, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) describe a sequential mixed-methods design as a study in which the researcher first conducts the quantitative phase of the study and collects and analyzes the quantitative data, then follows it up with a qualitative phase which builds on the first phase, quantitative. In other words, the study is conducted in two separate phases using quantitative and qualitative research strategies.

It is important to note that Creswell (2009) advocates mixed-method research as “more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either the quantitative or qualitative research” (p. 4).

In the current study, a cross-sectional survey design was used in Phase I. According to Wiersma (2000), “Surveys are used to measure attitudes, opinions, or achievement—any number of variables in natural settings” (p. 157). Creswell (2008) lists the two basic types of research surveys: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Creswell states that cross-sectional surveys are used to collect data about current attitudes, opinions, or beliefs. They are excellent to use to evaluate a program or identify the needs of the survey participants. The cross-sectional survey used in this study was administered online and was comprised of two portions: a quantitative portion with 21 closed-ended questions and a qualitative portion with two open-ended questions. (For the survey questions, see Appendix A.)

Phase II of the study consisted of the use of a phenomenological approach. According to Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002), a phenomenological approach focuses on exploring how human beings make sense of their experience. This requires methodically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon, how they describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. According to Merriam (1998), understanding the concerns from the participants’ perspective and not the researcher’s is sometimes referred to as the *emic* or insider’s perspective and is part of the qualitative approach to research. A semi-structured interview protocol was employed to further explore cooperating teacher

perceptions of the clinical field experience. Responses to the survey items as well as the number of student teachers they had mentored were used as criteria to select cooperating teachers for the interviews. (For a list of the interview questions, see Appendix B.)

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), an important consideration in the procedures of a mixed methods design is the level of interaction between the quantitative and the qualitative strands. In this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, the strands were implemented in two distinct phases. In Phase I of the study, the survey quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed, and then in Phase II the qualitative data, the interviews, were collected and analyzed. When the implementation and analysis occurs in this sequence it is called sequential timing.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain that there are two variants of the explanatory design: the more common approach, the prototypical, where the priority is on Phase I or the less common approach, the participant-selection variant, where the priority is placed on Phase II. This explanatory sequential study utilized the less common approach, the participant-selection variant. The initial quantitative survey data was used to identify and purposefully select the best participants to interview.

A challenge to using the explanatory sequential design is that it takes a great deal of time to implement the two phases (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The present study from beginning to end took approximately 2 years. The survey and interview questions used for this study were piloted before being put into operation.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The cooperating teachers who participated in this study typically mentor student teachers enrolled at a Midwestern university that has a large teacher education program.

In addition to placing elementary and special education majors, the program places about 300 student teachers per year for middle school and high school teaching positions.

University supervisors choose cooperating teachers according to the following criteria: location of the cooperating teachers' school district in a geographical area that does not compete with that of another university, willingness to serve, a specialty that matches the teacher candidate's, and if possible a master's degree. The same criteria were applied for selecting participants for this study, as the researcher involved happens to teach at the said Midwestern university and has a close relationship with teachers in many area school districts.

The cooperating teachers who participated in this study were employed at small- to medium-sized rural and small-town middle/high schools. School enrollment sizes range from 74 to 1,564 students with a mean of 482.84. A convenience sample of approximately 394 cooperating teachers were selected from the many cooperating teachers in East Central Illinois who the past five years had been mentoring the university's student teachers who were preparing to teach in grades 6-12. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants on the basis of their proximity, ease of access, and willingness to participate (Urdan, 2005). Of these 394 teachers, 38 had retired or otherwise could not be reached. Of the remaining 356, a total of 153 (43%) agreed to participate in the study. According to Nulty (2008), this would be an acceptable response rate as the overall response rate for online surveys is approximately 30%.

Phase II of the study consisted of interviews of 12 cooperating teachers. Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that qualitative interviews are a tool of research, an important method used to discover more about people's feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Of the

153 respondents who took the survey, 52 respondents indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. From these available respondents, 12 cooperating teachers were chosen for interviews. Eleven interviewees were chosen because their responses to the open-ended survey questions addressed one or more major themes found in current literature and in Phase 1 of this study. These themes included preparation of student teachers; training of cooperating teachers; support for cooperating teachers; communication among the university supervisor, the cooperating teacher, and the student teacher; control by the cooperating teacher; and supervision by the university supervisor. The twelfth interviewee was chosen as an outlier because of his somewhat controversial views of the student teaching program.

### **Ethical Issues**

Once participants were identified, the researcher gave them a recruitment letter (see Appendix C) informing them of the purpose of the study, asking them to complete a survey, and advising them that they could skip over any of the questions or choose not to participate. Participants were also assured that any information they provided during this study would be used only for the purpose of improving the teacher candidate mentoring experience for cooperating teachers and would not affect their future participation in the teacher education program.

All who took part in the study signed an Informed Consent letter (see Appendix C) according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures and policy. Following guidelines of the IRB, participant confidentiality was maintained at all times throughout the study.

## **Data Collection Logistics**

### **Data Collection Techniques**

With the assistance of the student teaching department where the researcher was employed, school districts within a 70-mile radius were identified. As a common courtesy, principals of each school were contacted for their approval of the research. Email addresses of the identified cooperating teachers who had mentored a student teacher within the last five years were found through websites and with the help of each school's office manager. A single-stage sampling procedure was used. Creswell (2009) defines a single-stage sampling procedure as one where, "The researcher has access to names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly" (p. 148). Each cooperating teacher was emailed an introductory letter along with the survey. (For a sample of the introductory letter, see Appendix C.)

The cooperating teacher surveys were administered using an online survey tool, Select Survey. To ensure that any one cooperating teacher did not take the survey twice, follow-up or reminder emails were not sent out. Overall, the online surveys were conducted over a 4-month period.

In Phase II of the study, 12 cooperating teachers were interviewed using both a semi-structured and unstructured format. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), most qualitative research includes both a semistructured and unstructured format to direct the conversation, though the balance of each format will vary. In this study, to gather more specific information, a semi-structured format was used. While using this format, the interviewer guided the discussion by asking specific interview questions. At times, the unstructured format was included when the interviewer suggested the subject for



discussion and the interviewee answered any way they wished. For the semistructured portion of the interview, the same 11 questions were asked of each cooperating teacher interviewed. It should be noted that the first question on the list was an ice-breaker.

Throughout the study, an interview protocol was followed. Creswell (2009) suggests that an interview protocol include the following components: a heading, the questions, probes, recording of responses, and a thank-you statement. (For a sample of the interview protocol, see Appendix D.)

The 12 interviews took approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The shortest interview was 25 minutes and the longest interview was 75 minutes. The feminist approach described by Rubin and Rubin (1995) was apparent during the interview process. With the feminist approach, both the questions asked, and the way they are asked, contribute to learning about others. Understanding is obtained from what the conversational partners say and from the relationship developed between the researcher and the interviewee. The interviewer should not dominate the discussion, and the interviewer must realize it is not possible to be completely neutral. The interviewers must consider their own beliefs and interests as they try to understand answers to questions. The interview should not hurt the interviewee but actually leave the interviewees feeling somewhat better for having talked with the interviewer. It is important to give the interviewee a voice. It is important to give the interviewee a voice (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each interview in the study was audiotaped, handwritten notes were taken, and then the interviews were transcribed and read.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

For quantitative analysis, all data were entered into a statistical analysis software package, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), for later analysis. Statistical analyses were conducted using descriptive analyses such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Salkind (2008) states that “Descriptive statistics are used to organize and describe the characteristics of a data collection” (p. 8). A codebook was developed to assist in the analysis of the data. Vogt (2005) describes a codebook as a list of variables and how they have been coded so they can be read and manipulated by the computer.

After the interviews were transcribed and read through, the transcriptions were uploaded into the Nvivo software program and coded. Using Nvivo, the qualitative data were organized, coded, and analyzed for themes. Coding is a term used to assign a shorthand designation to the data so that it can be easily retrieved at a later date (Merriam, 1998), while Creswell (2009) describes it as the process of organizing material into chunks before bringing meaning to the information. When describing the various types of data analysis, Creswell (2009) states that “phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements” (p. 184). Also, Rubin and Rubin (1998) suggest that objects and events are understood by different people differently and those perceptions are the realities that should be focused on. This interpretive approach examines the interviewees’ views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced. After coding the data, concept maps were created to represent the various themes. Results were summarized in paragraph form.

### **Researcher Positionality**

According to Creswell (2009) good qualitative research contains comments by the researcher about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, gender, culture, history, or socioeconomic background. The role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values.

According to Greene (2014), all qualitative researchers are influenced by our position and experience as a researcher in relation to our participants. Positions are relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and participants (Merriam, 1998).

To complete my career goal to become a teacher, I was mentored by a cooperating teacher during student teaching. At a later date in my career, I became a cooperating teacher who mentored numerous teacher candidates during a practicum field experience. [Though I have never mentored a student teacher for a semester, I am essentially a member of the cooperating teacher group.] In my current role as an assistant professor for a Midwest university, I supervise teacher candidates during the practicum experience. Thus even though I have never supervised a student teacher for the semester field experience, I am also essentially a member of the university supervisor group. While supervising teacher candidates during practicum, I also work closely with cooperating teachers. In summary, I hold prior knowledge and understanding of all groups involved in the study: the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. This pre-existing knowledge of the context of the research with regard to participants provided me the ability to ask meaningful questions.

During my doctoral studies, I completed a qualitative research study that informed this particular study. That qualitative study looked at the teaching dispositions that

effective teachers possessed. From this particular study, I learned that my interviewees had experienced difficult student teachers, which led me to want to discover more about what cooperating teachers think about the student teaching process.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p. 90), “trustworthiness” is a global qualitative concept introduced by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 as a substitute for many of the design and measurement quality issues. In addition, the authors state that credibility is considered the most important component in establishing trustworthiness of the qualitative results.

In this particular study, several practices were implemented to establish trustworthiness. Peer debriefing was utilized to explore aspects of the study that might have been obscured or lost. In order to reduce such bias, the analyses were peer reviewed by a professor from the university where the researcher is employed. Through this peer debriefing, biases were exposed and interpretations were clarified. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) peer debriefing is a form of “internal validity” (p. 91).) Creswell (2009) concurs with Tashakkori and Teddlie and adds that the peer reviewer asks questions about the qualitative study and provides additional insights.

Because analyses of open-ended questions are subject to categorization bias on the part of the researcher, another faculty member cross-checked codes which is called intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2008) the Nvivo program was used to assist in coding the themes.

Next, prolonged engagement in the field made it possible for the researcher to learn the “culture” and be more mindful of the multiple perspectives of the research

participants. The use of thick description in the reporting of the data provides evidence for the interpretations and conclusions from the qualitative investigations. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p. 92), this is considered close to “external” validity of inferences and conclusions specifically in qualitative research. Researcher bias about my job as a university supervisor was considered in this study.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) state that a merged framework that includes elements of quantitative and qualitative is desirable, and Creswell (2008) concludes that the many phases of the research process of the mixed-methods study relates to its legitimation. I was the co-principal investigator, since my dissertation committee was involved with assisting me with data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved the use of an online survey to gather opinions regarding the student teaching experience from the viewpoint of cooperating teachers who had mentored a student teacher within the last 5 years. Phase 1 reported cooperating teachers' responses to 21 closed-ended and 2 open-ended questions. A total of 153 cooperating teachers responded to the survey. Phase II of the study, which was entirely qualitative in nature, involved interviews of 12 cooperating teachers, a small subset of the 153 participants who responded to the online survey. The interview responses gave insight into the cooperating teachers' reasoning regarding the clinical experience. This chapter presents the results of the two phases of the study.

#### **Phase One: Research Question One**

What are the cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding the ways they are prepared for the mentoring of student teachers?

The first research question explored cooperating teachers' demographic information (gender, grade level taught, background, education, experience) and specific preparation for working with student teachers.

#### **Demographic Information**

As previously indicated, 153 cooperating teachers responded to the survey. Out of the 153 participants, 55 (36.2%) were males, and 97 (63.8%) were females; one participant did not respond, as shown in Table 1. When asked what grade level they

taught or had taught previously, the majority, 71 (47.0%), had taught at the high school level, while 38 (25.2%) respondents indicated that they had taught only in the middle school, and 42 (27.8%) reported that they had taught in both middle and high school. Two respondents did not identify the grade level they taught. An examination of the teacher educational backgrounds shows that 48 (31.4%) of the respondents currently held only a bachelor's degree, 100 (65.4%) currently held a master's degree, 2 (1.3%) had earned a specialist's degree, and 3 (2.0%) respondents had earned a doctorate. Thus, more than two-thirds of the respondents had completed at least one advanced degree.

Table 1

*Cooperating Teachers' (CTs) Demographic Information*

Demographic Information	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	55	36.2
Female	97	63.8
<b>Grade Level Taught</b>		
Middle	38	25.2
High	71	47.0
Both	42	27.8
<b>Educational Background</b>		
Bachelor's	48	31.4
Master's	100	65.4
Specialist	2	1.3
Doctorate	3	2.0
<b>Number of Years Experience</b>		
Less than 5	1	0.7
5-10	35	22.9
11-15	37	24.2
16+	80	52.3
<b>Number of Student Teachers Mentored</b>		
1-2	57	37.3
3-5	40	26.1
6+	50	36.6

*Note.* N = 153. Where numbers total less than 153, not all participants responded.

The data also show that out of 153 cooperating teachers, 35 (22.9%) had taught between 5-10 years, 37 (24.2%) had taught 11-15 years, and 80 (52.3%) had taught 16 or more years, as shown in Table 1. A total of 57 (37.3%) respondents noted that they had mentored 1-2 student teachers, 40 (26.1 %) respondents reported they had had 3-5 student teachers, while 56 (36.6%) said they had supervised 6 or more student teachers.

### **Preparation to Mentor Student Teachers**

In describing their preparation, cooperating teachers could select any or all of the following: University course, Handbook, TPAC training, Orientation session, Workshop, Other, and None. As shown in Table 2, only 10 respondents (6.5%) had participated in a university course that prepared them for working with student teachers. In response to the choice of a handbook, 110 respondents (71.9%) had received a handbook to use when working with a student teacher. No one had received TPAC training. (At the time that this survey was given, this was training about the new edTPA program.) It was obvious that the cooperating teachers surveyed had received little to no information about this new student teaching program. Forty-five (29.4%) of the respondents said they had participated in an orientation session, while 9 respondents (5.9%) had taken part in a workshop. Seven respondents (4.6%) had had other preparation, while 10 (6.5%) reported no preparation. Thus most of the respondents reported that they had not had a course, fewer than one third had had an orientation session, and only about two-thirds had received a handbook.



Table 2

*Frequency Distribution for Cooperating Teachers' Preparation to Mentor Student Teachers*

	<u>Number (Percent Responding)</u>			
	Yes	%	No	%
University course	10	6.5	143	93.5
Handbook	110	71.9	43	28.1
TPAC training	0	0	153	100.0
Orientation Session	45	29.4	108	70.6
Workshop	9	5.9	144	94.1
Other	7	4.6	146	95.4
None	10	6.5	143	93.5

*Note.* Columns do not total 100% because respondents could indicate more than one alternative.

The analysis of the data showed that over two-thirds of the cooperating teachers (69.0%) had at least one advanced degree. Over half (52.0%) had taught 16 or more years, and almost two-thirds (63.0%) had mentored three or more student teachers. Thus, they had a considerable amount of experience working with student teachers. However, the respondents' main source of information about the university's expectations of them was a handbook, and some did not even get that.

### **Phase One: Research Question Two**

According to cooperating teachers, what factors help or hinder them when working with student teachers?

Cooperating teachers were asked to rate how much they valued six kinds of interaction with, or support from, the university supervisor: (a) frequent supervisor visits, (b) prior information about the student teacher, (c) guidelines about expectations for the

student teacher, (d) guidelines about expectations for the cooperating teacher, (e) feedback about the cooperating teacher's supervision, and (f) request for input on program design. Respondents used a Likert scale with the following alternatives: Extremely valuable, Somewhat valuable, Not valuable, Somewhat detrimental, and Extremely detrimental.

### **Help That Cooperating Teachers Value**

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they valued frequent university supervisor visits to their classroom to meet with or observe the student teacher. Of the 151 cooperating teachers who responded, 63 (41.7%) of those who answered that question said frequent visits by the university supervisor were extremely valuable, 74 (49.0%) said they were somewhat valuable, and 13 (8.6 %) said they were somewhat detrimental or not valuable, as shown in Table 3. In the same vein, when asked about the value they placed on information about the student teacher prior to mentoring him or her during the field experience, 84 (55.6%) of the 151 cooperating teachers felt this was extremely valuable, 62 (41.1%) respondents felt it was somewhat valuable, and 5 (3.3%) respondents felt it was not valuable.

Regarding how cooperating teachers valued detailed guidelines about the university expectations of the student teacher, 115 (76.7%) of the respondents indicated that this information was extremely valuable, and 35 (23.3%) said it was somewhat valuable. In addition, 113 (74.8%) of the cooperating teachers said they found guidelines about university expectations of the cooperating teacher to be extremely valuable, 37 (24.5%) said the guidelines were somewhat valuable, and one (.7%) said they were not valuable. Also, 91(61.5%) of the cooperating teachers indicated they felt it was

extremely valuable to receive feedback about their work with the student teacher; 45 (30.4%) respondents stated it was somewhat valuable, 10 (6.8%) stated it was not valuable and 2 (1.4%) felt it would be somewhat detrimental. Finally, 79 (52.7%) of the cooperating teachers found it extremely valuable to be asked for input on the student teaching program, 66 (44.0%) said it was somewhat valuable, and 5 (3.3%) did not find it valuable.

Table 3

*Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Interactions with the University Supervisor*

	Extremely valuable	Somewhat valuable	Not valuable	Somewhat detrimental	Extremely detrimental	N
Frequent supervisor visits to my classroom to meet or observe the student teacher	41.7	49.0	8.6	.7	0	151
Information about student teacher prior to field experience	55.6	41.1	3.3	0	0	151
Detailed guidelines about university expectations of the student teacher	76.7	23.3	0	0	0	150
Detailed guidelines about the university expectations of the cooperating teacher	74.8	24.5	.7	0	0	151
Feedback about my supervision of the student teacher during the field experience	61.5	30.4	6.8	1.4	0	148
Request for my input on the student teaching program	52.7	44.0	3.3	0	0	150

*Note.* (Percentages given) are based on the total number of responses to each question. (Not all participants answered every question.)

All in all, the results show that a large majority of the cooperating teachers indicated that they wanted frequent visits and preliminary information from the university supervisor. They also noted that they desired detailed guidelines about expectations not only for the student teacher but also for themselves as cooperating teachers. Most of the cooperating teachers said they wanted feedback about their work with the student teacher. Finally, most said they wanted to be asked for input on the design of the student teaching program. Respondents made clear that the university was not meeting these wishes.

### **Hindrances That Cooperating Teachers Face**

In addition to the closed-ended questions, cooperating teachers were asked an open-ended question to identify challenges they may have faced before or during the student teaching field experience. Of the 153 surveyed, 120 responded to this open-ended question. Teacher responses were grouped into seven themes: Lack of pre-semester meeting with student teacher, Lack of planning time, Giving up control, Poor quality of student teacher dispositions, Lack of preparedness for teaching, Issues with the university supervisor, and Lack of training for cooperating teachers.

**Lack of pre-semester meeting with student teacher.** The data indicate that most cooperating teachers had not met with the prospective student teacher before the placement was made, so they did not have veto power. As one cooperating teacher said, "I do not want to take a weak candidate." Also, there could be a mismatch in personality and styles of teaching, resulting in an uncomfortable learning environment. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that without a pre-semester meeting, they cannot develop a plan based on the individual student teacher's needs. As one person wrote, "Each student teacher requires a personalized approach."

**Lack of planning time.** An issue that causes cooperating teachers concern during the semester is a lack of time to plan with the student teacher, talk to the university supervisor about the student teacher, or hold a three-way conference to collaborate about expectations or concerns. One cooperating teacher commented:

Due to the many demands on teachers and the budget cuts, teachers are expected to do more with less time available to get our duties completed therefore, there is less time to have one-on-one conversations with student teachers.

**Giving up control.** A major theme that resonated throughout the responses to the open-ended questions was the issue of giving up control of their classroom. Many cooperating teachers grapple with this reality.

Allowing the student teachers to develop their own style of teaching can be uncomfortable and difficult for the cooperating teacher. Many teachers think the way they teach is the best style, so as one cooperating teacher stated, “Allowing the student teacher to develop their own classroom management style is a [challenge]. . . .”

One cooperating teacher stated, “I have a certain way I teach content. It is difficult for me to let go of the control.” Another added, “I am very protective of my students.” Although reluctance to give up control was based partly on emotions, such as proprietary feelings or protectiveness, the reluctance also had a basis in rational concerns: the cooperating teacher’s accountability and the student teacher’s weaknesses.

One problem area described by cooperating teachers was transitioning from cooperating teacher to student teacher and back to teacher again. Giving up control and taking it back seemed to provide many challenges for cooperating teachers. As one cooperating teacher stated, “The cooperating teacher has to give up control of his or her classroom to some extent, to someone who is inexperienced and then be able to gain

control back when the student teacher is gone.” Some said the transition can be difficult for students, when the student teacher uses different methods of teaching.

Also, cooperating teachers struggled with balancing the needs of the student teacher with their own students’ needs, since cooperating teachers are ultimately accountable for their students’ academic success. As one cooperating teacher stated, “Giving up the classroom is difficult when it appears the students are not getting as much from the student teacher as they do from you.”

With the advent of high stakes testing connected to teacher evaluations, cooperating teachers may reconsider whether giving up control of their classroom is a smart idea. One cooperating teacher said, “As high stakes testing gets linked to our evaluations, it is scary to allow someone else to prepare your students.”

**Poor quality of student teacher dispositions.** Another major concern for cooperating teachers was poor student teacher dispositions, including an unwillingness to do the extras, a know-it-all attitude, and a lack of professionalism. The responses indicate that many student teachers are unwilling to do extras such as doing additional work in planning and grading, participating in parent/teacher conferences, and attending extracurricular activities.

Cooperating teachers observed that many student teachers approach the experience with a “know it all” attitude that is not conducive to development in the profession of teaching. One cooperating teacher said, “Many times they also believe they *know* what they are doing and it’s almost as if they don’t even care to implement changes suggested because they cannot possibly be doing it incorrectly.”

Another dispositional concern was lack of professional behavior. One cooperating teacher compiled a list of poor student teaching behaviors that the cooperating teacher had encountered: failure to meet deadlines, lost student work, lack of preparation, sarcasm, poor acceptance of constructive criticism. Several other cooperating teachers identified lack of work ethic as a major issue.

**Lack of preparedness for teaching.** Cooperating teachers also had issues concerning a lack of preparedness for student teaching: inability to develop curriculum; insufficient content knowledge; weak skills at teaching, classroom management, and organization; all due to lack of experience. It was apparent to the respondents that the practicum experience was not thorough enough. One cooperating teacher discussed this lack of preparation: “I cannot risk my classroom of learners at the expense of an unprepared student teacher.”

Many cooperating teachers commented on how student teachers apparently do not understand that teachers are required to follow the school’s curriculum to meet Common Core State Standards. One cooperating teacher commented, “Most student teachers want to teach only what they have seen performed in their methods classes....”

Lack of content knowledge was a major concern by most cooperating teachers. One cooperating teacher noted that the student teacher may not have enough knowledge of the specific discipline to effectively instruct the students. Another agreed:

Some student teachers do not have enough content background to comfortably lead lessons. This adds to the overall load by first requiring the student teacher to learn the content and then plan lessons. This causes the student teachers to have difficulty keeping up and demonstrating confidence in the classroom. It is difficult to let the student teacher learn from their mistakes without causing your students to suffer. It is hard to not correct the student teacher’s incorrect information in front of the class.

Another major concern along with lack of content knowledge is the lack of teaching skills often demonstrated by student teachers. One cooperating teacher commented, “I feel like I am teaching basics that should have been learned in education classes, such as lesson plans, time management, organization . . . and assessment.” Another commented, “I would like to see student teachers more prepared in how to break down concepts . . . [and] explain terms . . . in such a manner that they are understood by all students.”

Some cooperating teachers noted that student teachers were not sufficiently prepared in the area of classroom management, organizational skills, time management skills, and experience working in a classroom. One cooperating teacher commented, “Some practicums only allow [teacher candidates] to observe.”

**Issues with the university supervisor.** Other cooperating teachers reported a host of issues with the university supervisor including: Failure to communicate expectations for the cooperating teacher, Failure to communicate expectations for student teachers, Lack of collaborative relationship among all three peers, and Lack of training for cooperating teachers.

Many of the cooperating teachers commented that lack of communication was a major issue as far as they were concerned. One cooperating teacher put it this way, “Communication is key throughout the field experience, and this begins prior to the start day of student teaching.” They were particularly troubled with the lack of information they received concerning the expectations for them as a cooperating teacher.

Another issue was the lack of information regarding the expectations for the student teacher, such as number of allowed absences and responsibility for independent



lesson planning. In addition, one cooperating teacher mentioned that sometimes the information provided about the student teacher prior to the experience can be misleading. She added that often the subject areas that she taught were not in the comfort zone of the student teacher, probably due to a lack of communication. Another cooperating teacher pointed out, “Open, honest communication between the three parties involved is key.”

Additionally, some cooperating teachers felt that the university supervisor did not respect their judgment. If the university took the side of the student teacher, this was often perceived by some cooperating teachers as not valuing their judgment. One cooperating teacher shared her own personal situation:

With the unfit student teacher, it took several serious warnings to the university supervisor before she truly recognized . . . how concerned I was. She kept encouraging me to stick with her. I cannot do that at the expense of my students. It wasn't until the final week that the advisor understood . . . .

One cooperating teacher pointed out a different circumstance, “The supervisors are giving positive feedback that outweighs the constructive criticism that the cooperating teacher provides on a daily basis.” As one cooperating teacher noted, “There tends to also be a reticence to give truly constructive criticism.”

Cooperating teachers also complained that university supervisors often did not consider the student teacher's time and workload. Many expressed their dismay at the amount of time the student teacher spent outside of the classroom for workshops, seminars, job fairs, and so forth. Cooperating teachers were also concerned that student teachers were required to do too many outside assignment when they should be focusing on their classroom responsibilities.

To be able to provide more support for the cooperating teacher, it is important that the university supervisor develops a collegial relationship with the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers often stated that they felt anchorless when mentoring student teachers, and they would like to have a working relationship with the university supervisor. Also, one cooperating teacher suggested that it is important for the university supervisor to get to know their student teacher. Overall, as one cooperating teacher put it, “When communication is lacking it creates problems. . . . Visible support would be quite helpful for the cooperating teacher.”

Many cooperating teachers pointed out that they lacked training on “how to be a cooperating teacher or how to evaluate a student teacher.” Other cooperating teachers remarked on a lack of clear expectations for themselves and for their student teachers. In the absence of training, cooperating teachers face several gaps in knowledge and skills. Due to the fact that teaching a student teacher is more like teaching one’s peers than teaching students in a classroom, the cooperating teachers indicated that mentoring a student teacher involves different skills.

Three concerns were “how fast to bring them along,” “how much input [to] have on designing lessons,” and “when and how to give up control of the classroom.” Cooperating teachers also lamented that they do not know the expectations of the university regarding evaluation of the student teacher. Providing meaningful feedback appeared to be a related challenge. Cooperating teachers were concerned about squashing the student teacher’s confidence when they gave constructive criticism. Dealing with a difficult or weak student teacher often causes cooperating teachers much anxiety. As one cooperating teacher noted, “If a student teacher is not well suited to the

profession, it is difficult to relay that information.”

In short, agreeing to accept a student teacher is a difficult decision because if the teacher candidate does a poor job, this can be detrimental to the progress of the cooperating teacher’s students. Because teacher evaluations and school funding depend more and more on student progress, it can be risky for a cooperating teacher to take a student teacher. Many cooperating teachers feel a sense of responsibility for their classes and complain about the lack of opportunity to interview and possibly veto the prospective student teacher. The cooperating teachers feel that many student teachers lack preparation, lack sufficient content knowledge, and are unprofessional in several areas. In addition, the student teachers’ “know it all” attitude and not being open to constructive criticism from their cooperating teacher can make mentoring a student teacher difficult. The data suggest that many cooperating teachers do not feel sufficiently informed about university expectations of them as cooperating teachers. Also, they often expressed the lack of good communication and support from the university supervisor.

### **Phase One: Research Question Three**

What roles do cooperating teachers prefer to play?

As part of the survey, cooperating teachers were asked how comfortable they were in each of the following situations: (a) the student teacher trying strategies that the cooperating teacher does not use (encouraging independent thinking by the student teacher), (b) the cooperating teacher evaluating the student teacher, (c) the university supervisor evaluating the cooperating teacher and (d) the university supervisor reassigning a student teacher who is having difficulties.

To rate how comfortable they were in each of the above four situations, cooperating teachers used a Likert scale with the following response options: Extremely comfortable, Somewhat comfortable, Neutral, Somewhat uncomfortable, and Extremely uncomfortable. Cooperating teacher responses appear in Table 4.

Table 4

*Cooperating Teacher Comfort Level with Situations that Occur During the Student Teaching Experience*

	Extremely comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Neutral	Somewhat uncomfortable	Extremely uncomfortable	N
Student teacher trying new strategies that I myself do not use	67.3	30.7	2.0	0	0	150
Evaluating my student teacher	70.0	28.7	.7	.7	0	150
Being evaluated in my role as a cooperating teacher by the university supervisor	55.7	28.9	9.4	3.4	2.7	149
Reassignment of a student teacher who is having difficulty in their placement	28.4	31.8	24.4	13.5	2.0	148

Regarding the student teacher trying strategies that the cooperating teacher does not use, 101 (67.3%) of the cooperating teachers said they were extremely comfortable with this happening in the classroom, 46 (30.7%) said they were somewhat comfortable with this, and 3 (2.0%) said they were neutral. When asked how comfortable they felt evaluating their student teacher, 105 (70.0%) said extremely comfortable, 43 (28.7) said somewhat comfortable, one (.7) respondent was neutral, and one (.7) somewhat uncomfortable. On the issue of how comfortable they felt being evaluated by the

university supervisor in their role as a cooperating teacher, 83 (55.7%) said they were extremely comfortable, 43 (28.9%) said somewhat comfortable, 14 (9.4%) were neutral, 5 (3.4%) said somewhat uncomfortable and 4 (2.7%) said extremely uncomfortable. Finally, when asked how comfortable they felt with the reassignment of a student teacher who is having difficulty in their placement, 42 (28.4%) said they were extremely comfortable, 47 (31.8%) respondents said somewhat comfortable, 36 (24.3%) respondents were neutral, 20 (13.5%) somewhat uncomfortable, and 3 (2.0%) extremely uncomfortable.

In summary, nearly all of the cooperating teachers expressed comfort with the student teacher trying something new. Almost all the cooperating teachers expressed comfort with their role as evaluator. Being evaluated was somewhat less comfortable for the respondents than evaluating the student teacher, where they were more in control. Reassignment of a student teacher who was having difficulties evoked a relatively high percentage of responses in the “neutral” and “uncomfortable” categories.

In addition to gauging the cooperating teachers’ comfort levels with various situations, the survey items also asked the cooperating teachers to indicate their views regarding whether they saw the university supervisor as an authority figure, a colleague, or “other.” Of the 150 who responded, the majority (132, or 88%) saw the university supervisor as a “colleague,” while 9 (6.0%) respondents indicated “authority figure,” and another 9 respondents (6.0%) chose “other.”

Of the nine cooperating teachers who responded that they saw the university supervisor as “other,” six saw the university supervisor as both an authority figure and a colleague, and three commented that the university supervisor is a program administrator

with no actual authority. One of the nine added that the university supervisor does not listen to the cooperating teacher even though the cooperating teacher has seen more lessons taught by the student teacher.

Even though the above responses showed that most cooperating teachers saw themselves as colleagues, responses to an additional question showed some uncertainty about whether they would like to be asked for input on the design of the student teaching program. Out of the 150 cooperating teachers who responded to this question, 72 (48.0%, or almost half) said maybe; 52 (34.7%) said yes; and 26 (17.3 %) said no.

When asked who should make the final determination of whether the student teacher should pass student teaching or not, over two-thirds (69.9%) of the cooperating teachers said they (the cooperating teachers) should determine whether the student teacher receives a passing grade. Similarly, 114 (74.5%) said the university supervisor should determine the outcome. The findings suggest that the majority of cooperating teacher thought both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor should decide the fate of the student teacher. Only 16 (10.5%) thought a state evaluator should have the final say, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Frequency Distribution About Who Should Make the Final Determination Whether or Not a Student Teacher Passes*

	Number & Percent Responding				
	Yes	%	No	%	N
Cooperating teacher	107	69.9	46	30.1	153
University supervisor	114	74.5	39	25.5	153
State evaluator	16	10.5	137	89.5	153

In summary, nearly all (98.0%) of the cooperating teachers stated that they were comfortable with the student teacher trying new strategies. This suggests that the teachers encouraged independence among their student teachers. Also, the majority (98.0%) of the cooperating teachers seemed equally comfortable evaluating their student teacher.

A slightly smaller majority (85.0%) were comfortable with having the university supervisor evaluate the way they mentor their student teacher. It should be noted that 15.0% of those surveyed said they were neutral, somewhat uncomfortable, or extremely uncomfortable with these situations.

Even fewer were comfortable with reassignment of a student teacher who was having difficulty. A little over half (60.0%) were comfortable with this possibility, while 24.0% were neutral, and 15.0% were somewhat or very uncomfortable.

Again, a majority of the cooperating teachers (88.0%) consider the university supervisor a colleague. However, when asked if they would like to give input on the design of the student teaching experience, just over a third (35.0%) said yes while nearly half (48.0%) said maybe. This hesitation indicates the concerns many cooperating teachers have about being part of the planning process. While they value being asked for their ideas, many have concerns about being part of the actual planning process.

When asked who should determine whether the student teacher passes or fails student teaching, the cooperating teachers overwhelmingly supported the idea that they should have a say in this decision (70.0%) along with the university supervisor (75.0%). It was apparent that the cooperating teachers preferred that the decision not be made by a state evaluator who reviews materials but is never in the student teacher's classroom.

### Phase One: Research Question Four

What type of preparation and support do cooperating teachers believe they would benefit from in relation to their work with student teachers?

When asked how often they wanted the university supervisor to visit, contact them, and observe their classrooms, 73 (48.7%) said monthly, 64 (42.7%) said every 2 weeks, 7 (4.7%) said less than once a month and 6 (4.0%) said weekly. Thus, nearly all respondents were satisfied with the observation being monthly or every 2 weeks, as shown in Table 6.

Also, when asked how often they would prefer the university supervisor to check in with them, 74 (49.3%) said they wanted check-ins every 2 weeks, 39 (26.0%) wanted monthly check-ins, 34 (22.7%) wanted weekly and 3 (2.0%) wanted less than once a month. Thus nearly half of the respondents wanted the supervisor to check in every 2 weeks, while the other half was almost evenly split between weekly and monthly check-ins by the supervisor.

Table 6

#### *Desired Frequency of Contact with University Supervisor*

	Weekly	Every 2 weeks	Monthly	Less than once a month	N
How often do you prefer the university supervisor to observe in your room?	4.0	42.7	48.7	4.7	150
How often would you prefer the university supervisor to check in with you about your student teacher?	22.7	49.3	26.0	2.0	150



In summary, a majority of the respondents said they would prefer the university supervisor to observe the student teacher either every 2 weeks (42.7%) or monthly (48.7%). In contrast to observations, cooperating teachers wanted the university supervisor to check in with them often. Nearly half (49.3%) wanted check-ins every 2 weeks.

In addition to responding to closed-ended items, cooperating teachers were asked an open-ended question about what the university supervisor could do to enhance the cooperating teacher's experience. Of the 153 cooperating teachers who took the survey, 120 responded to this question. Cooperating teacher responses were coded into six themes: Clear Pre-semester Statement of University Expectations and Guidelines, Better Communication from the University Supervisor, Increased Support for Decisions Regarding Student Progress, Increased Feedback on how the Cooperating Teacher is Doing, Collaboration of the Three Stakeholders as a Team, and Supervision in the University Supervisor's Specialty.

### **Clear Pre-semester Statement of University Expectations and Guidelines**

The data indicate that cooperating teachers would like to meet in person with the university supervisor and student teacher before the semester begins. One cooperating teacher recommended that the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor "have a sit-down meeting . . . . , [with] both parties giving suggestions on how this can be a positive experience."

At this preliminary stage, cooperating teachers want to get the university supervisor's contact information. They also would like to receive written statements about university expectations of them (due dates for submitting observation reports and

evaluations, etc.) and of the student teacher (specifics on lesson plans, tests, etc.). Other cooperating teachers added, “It would also be helpful to know what they are being taught to do” and—“if this experience is directly linked to a class—what are the classroom expectations.”

To better understand these expectations and guidelines, many cooperating teachers suggested that they would benefit from training. This training would also help them to prepare for issues that might arise while mentoring a student teacher. One cooperating teacher stated, “Slow down and explain the process rather than hurry in and hurry out the door on site visits.”

### **Better Communication from the University Supervisor**

Cooperating teachers would like to see better and more frequent communication from the university supervisor, and they suggested multiple methods for communicating, such as in person and by email. One recommendation that many cooperating teachers proposed was for the university supervisor to provide more feedback to the cooperating teacher about how he or she is doing. In addition, university supervisors need to communicate more often to get the cooperating teacher’s feedback about the student teacher’s progress and the cooperating teacher’s views on that progress. One cooperating teacher stated: “It is never easy to just step out into the hall to have a serious conversation, especially if the kid is struggling.” Some suggestions for improving communication between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher were the following: visit 5-6 times per semester, more frequent check-ins, have mini-meetings, discuss concerns through e-mail, and have bi-weekly meetings. One cooperating teacher suggested, “Visit more frequently. . . discuss the progress of the student, give specific

areas of skill remediation, and listen to the cooperating teacher when a weak student is performing at a marginal level.”

The data suggest that cooperating teachers would also appreciate more support from the university supervisor throughout the student teaching program. One important form of support that was mentioned quite frequently was support for the cooperating teacher’s views concerning the progress of the student teacher—trusting the cooperating teacher and supporting her decisions and not undermining her with the student teacher. One cooperating teacher suggested, “When a supervisor makes a plan but then follows it up with a statement of, ‘Do what works for you,’ it give the student teacher the opportunity to disregard the plan.”

### **Collaboration of the Three Stakeholders as a Team**

One cooperating teacher said, it is important that the university supervisor is around, “giving the student teacher the opportunity to discuss situations that arise in the daily classroom . . . . This can help the student teacher better understand and deal with providing the best learning environment for students.”

Although cooperating teachers want more such conversations between student teachers and university supervisors, cooperating teachers would like to be included in these conversations. One cooperating teacher commented,

I would love to see more conversation between all three parties in order to truly reflect and . . . [improve] on a regular basis. That’s what we all should be doing as teachers, and modeling it sooner rather than later can only benefit the next generation of educators.

### **Supervision in the University Supervisor's Subject Specialty**

Some universities currently uses site-based supervising to save travel time and expense. However, several cooperating teachers suggested that the university supervisor observe student teachers who have the same subject specialty they do. Also, student teachers should work in the subject specialty they know best; for example, “[within the field of English], some student teachers may not have much experience in a particular area (journalism, speech, debate etc...).”

In summary, the cooperating teachers had a plethora of ideas to share on how the university could improve the student teaching field experience. The data suggest that cooperating teachers would like university supervisors to take a more active role in the guidance of the student teachers, providing more and better communication and more support for the student teacher as well as the cooperating teacher. In a nutshell, cooperating teachers were saying the university supervisor needs to put more time into the supervision of student teachers.

### **Phase Two: Interviews with Twelve Cooperating Teachers**

Phase II of the study, which was entirely qualitative in nature, involved interviews of 12 cooperating teachers, a small subset of the 153 participants who responded to the online survey. Although too few to permit statistical comparisons to the survey responses, the interview responses gave insight into the cooperating teachers' reasoning and suggested ideas for further research.

During the interviews, all participants willingly shared their perspectives of the clinical field experience. They all shared with the researcher that at one time or another they had experienced a difficult situation while mentoring a student teacher. Although

not unwilling to continue working with student teachers, they definitely wanted to talk about problems they had encountered in mentoring a student teacher, collaborating with a university supervisor, and the student teaching program in general. When questioned why they continued to mentor a student teacher when they had experienced so many problems, oftentimes they shared that someone had given them the opportunity to student teach, so they felt the obligation to do the same.

### **Portraits of the Interviewees**

A brief sketch of each cooperating teacher appears below. Note that pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' privacy. A summary of the information appears in Table 7. (The portraits are arranged in the order of the number of student teachers the cooperating teacher has worked with.)

Rikki Salzburger has a bachelor's and master's degree in special education and at the time of the interview was working toward a specialization license. She had worked for a behavioral health and addictions treatment facility before her first teaching job in 2004. She is a special education teacher who spent 2 years in a middle school and had been teaching for 7 years in a small high school. She commented that she found working with at-risk students "rewarding and some days you feel unappreciated." Although she was a veteran teacher, she had only worked with one student teacher, and the day after our interview she was going to meet with her second student teacher for the first time. Rikki was chosen for an interview because her comments reflected the importance of cooperating teachers giving up control of the classroom and the necessity of allowing student teachers to learn from their mistakes. Control issues were a major theme in this study, and her thoughts that we should allow student teachers to make mistakes was in

contrast to the other cooperating teachers who feel like student teachers are making too many mistakes.

Beth Englund has a bachelor's degree in journalism, a master's degree in English and at the time of this interview was a third of her way through her Ph.D in media technology. Prior to becoming a teacher she worked on a newspaper, so teaching is her second career. She was in her eighth year of teaching English at a large high school, and she had mentored two student teachers. Possibly due to her journalism background, Beth had no problem expressing her thoughts about the student teaching experience and teaching in general. Beth was chosen for an interview due to her insightful and in-depth remarks about the student teaching program. She also pointed out that a major problem is the fact that student teachers do not know how to handle constructive criticism. She feels like this is an outcome of our culture and an issue that should somehow be addressed by teacher educators.

Brad Englund has a bachelor's degree in mathematics with an education minor and had just completed his master's degree in mathematics education at the time of this interview. His future educational goal is to pursue a doctoral degree. He taught math at a large local middle school and had been teaching for 13 years. In that 13-year time frame, Brad had mentored two student teachers. During the course of our conversation, I found Brad to be knowledgeable and passionate about the teaching profession. He became fervent when we discussed the sad state of affairs that our educational system was mired in, and he often lamented the lack of content knowledge that he had witnessed in the future teachers that passed through his classroom doors. He spoke with air of authority; he was a man who knew his convictions and was willing to share his thoughts. Brad was

extremely concerned with the future of education and appeared to welcome the opportunity to share his thoughts about the student teaching program. Brad is the husband of Beth Englund, but was not chosen for an interview for that reason. He was chosen because of his strong and somewhat pessimistic views on the educational system.

Barbara King has a bachelor's degree in physical education and two master's degrees, one in curriculum and instruction and one in educational administration. At the time of this interview, one of her future goals was to become a principal. She was a high school physical education teacher in a small high school. She had been teaching for 15 years, and had mentored two student teachers from two different universities. Since Barbara had just completed her degree to become an administrator, she had considerable insight about the expectations of future educators. She is truly concerned with how teacher candidates are prepared to become educators and was eager to discuss this issue at great length. Barbara was chosen for an interview because she advocated for more and better communication between university supervisors and cooperating teachers, as well as more training. She also mentioned the issue of personality conflicts with student teachers.

Emily Sweet has a bachelor's degree in family and consumer science and 16 hours beyond a bachelor's degree, but at the time of the interview she did not have a teaching certificate; she had a provisional. Prior to teaching, she spent 20 years in the field as a cook and manager of a local restaurant; she also ran a home day care. She had been teaching family and consumer science in a small town high school for 9 years and had worked with three student teachers. Talking to Emily was difficult at first. Her responses to my questions were often one word, and she appeared apprehensive and cautious. As we talked, she finally loosened up a little bit and shared with me that she

herself had never been a student teacher. She had worked with three student teachers, but had never been a student teacher. Emily was chosen for an interview because she mentioned two areas identified by current research: the lack of content knowledge by student teachers and the lack of expectations for cooperating teachers.

Peter Paxton has a variety of educational degrees: a bachelor's degree in industrial technology education, a master's degree in divinity, and a math endorsement. At the time of the interview, he was taking classes to finish a master's degree in math education so he could teach dual-credit courses for the students in this small town high school. Peter was a high school math teacher in a small town and had been teaching 11 years. He mentored his first of five student teachers during his third year of teaching, and the five student teachers came from two different universities. Peter is very laid back and easygoing. When you meet Peter, you feel as though you have been friends for years. He willingly answered all my questions and really seemed to appreciate the opportunity to discuss his thoughts about the student teaching process. Peter was chosen for an interview because he expressed concern about the lack of content knowledge that he had observed with the student teachers he had mentored, and he mentioned that the student teachers he worked with did not have the necessary work ethic that is required of teachers.

Jillian Bergfeld has a bachelor's degree in business education and master's degree in technology. She was a farmer's wife helping to run the family farm when she decided to become a teacher. Jillian teaches business and technology classes at a large high school. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching for 15 years. During the past 7 years, she had mentored three student teachers. When I met her she was dressed professionally and appeared ready to get down to the business of the interview. As the



interview progressed, I could tell she had something on her mind. Her daughter had recently finished her student teaching and the outcome was less than stellar. Jillian had some real concerns about the student teaching program, and she relished the opportunity to discuss them with me. Jillian was chosen for an interview because she wrote with great conviction. She stated she firmly believed that cooperating teachers should decide if the student teacher passes or fails, and she felt the new portfolio being required of student teachers is too cumbersome.

LeAnn Runyon has two bachelor's degrees: one in English with teacher certification and one in journalism. She also holds a master's degree in education. Her original plan was to work for a newspaper or magazine, but she ended up teaching. At the time of this interview, LeAnn had been teaching English in a small high school for 28 years. For the past 18 years, she had worked with four student teachers. LeAnn was chosen for an interview because she stated that she felt the assessment of student teachers is a difficult process, and she included that she felt that cooperating teachers do not receive the support they need from the university supervisor. She shared that she had an uncomfortable student teaching experience when the student teacher was pulled from her placement without her knowledge.

Karla Perez has a bachelor's degree in foreign language and a master's degree in teaching. At the time of the interview, Karla had been teaching Spanish in a small-town middle school and high school for 13 years. For the past 6 years, she had worked with six student teachers. Karla shared that she was from Argentina and due to her background experience, she places a high value on education. She has high expectations for teachers and strong convictions about the work ethic of many student teachers. She freely

expressed her thoughts and opinions on the student teachers she has mentored. She is not a “do as I say” teacher; she is a “do as I do.” Karla was chosen for an interview because she felt that expectations for cooperating teachers and student teachers were unclear, and additional training in how to work with student teachers should be required. In addition, she believed that university supervisors’ expectations for student teachers were too low.

Wanda Nolan has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English as well as a doctorate in English from the University of Illinois. At the time of the interview, Wanda had been teaching English classes in a large high school; she had been working with teacher candidates since 1975. She speculated that she had probably had over 50 student teachers placed in her classroom. She explained that during the early years she mentored two student teachers a year, one each semester. She presumed that she had mentored student teachers from at least four universities. Wanda was willing to share her insights and wisdom acquired from years of teaching. She has been on the teaching scene for years and observant of many egregious actions by teachers, administrators, and politicians. Her disdain for the flagrant misuse of power was evident in her discourse on the subject of the preparation of student teachers. Wanda was chosen for an interview because she expressed the need for more support from university supervisors for cooperating teachers and she mentioned the need for teaching student teachers about curriculum development.

Shannon Kimball has a bachelor’s degree in zoology and a master’s degree in administration. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching life science and pre-biology classes at a large middle school for 13 years. She had worked with six student teachers during the past 7 years. According to her school district’s policy, teachers are

not allowed to have a student teacher until they are tenured. Through my conversations with Shannon, it was apparent that she enjoys the role of a mentor. She likes guiding new teachers and is willing to learn more about how to be a better mentor. Shannon was chosen for an interview because she mentioned the need for more and better communication between the cooperating teachers and the university supervisors, and she expressed the need for training of cooperating teachers.

The last interviewee, Karen Luce, has a bachelor's in geography and two master's degrees, one in special education and one in educational administration. At the time of this interview, she taught special education in a large high school and was also an adjunct professor at a local university. She was retiring after that year. In her 30-plus years of teaching special education, she had mentored more than six student teachers. She said that she had been working with teacher candidates since 1980. Karen was chosen to be interviewed due to her comments about the need for more frequent supervision of the student teacher by the university supervisor. She felt there is a genuine lack of content knowledge exhibited by the student teacher, and university supervisors are often unaware of this deficit due to infrequent visits. In addition, she proposed that university supervisors have more unannounced visits.

As Table 7 shows, the interviewees' length of work experience ranged from 2 to 39 years, with an average of 12.4 years. The number of student teachers they had mentored ranged from 1 to 50, with an average of 8; the interviewees were chosen for their variety in terms of experience working with student teachers (four had mentored 1-2 student teachers; four had mentored 3-5 student teachers; four had mentored 6 or more).

Table 7

*Demographic Information About Interviewees*

Name	Degree	Content	Years of Experience	Grade Level	# of Student Teachers
Rikki Salzburger	B.S. M.S.	Special Ed Special Ed	7 years	MLE & HS	1
Beth Englund	B.S. M.S.	Journalism English	8 years	H.S.	2
Brad Englund	B.S. M.S.	Math Math Ed	13 years	MLE	2
Barbara King	B.S. M.S. M.S.	Physical Ed C&I Ed. Admin.	15 years	H.S.	2
Emily Sweet	B.S. (no teaching certificate)	FCS	9 years	H.S.	3
Peter Paxton	B.S. M.S. Endorsement	Industrial Tech Divinity Math	11 years	H.S.	5
Jillian Bergfeld	B.S. M.S.	Business Ed Technology	15 years	H.S.	3
LeAnn Runyon	B.S. B.S. M.S.	English Journalism Teaching	28 years	H.S.	4
Karla Perez	B.S. M.S.	Foreign Lang. Teaching	13 years	MLE & HS	6
Wanda Nolan	B.S. M.S. Ph.D.	English English English	No response	H.S.	50
Shannon Kimball	B.S. M.S.	Zoology Ed. Admin.	13	H.S.	6
Karen Luce	B.S. M.S. M.S.	Geography Special Ed Ed. Admin	30+	H.S.	6

To summarize Table 7, all of the cooperating teachers had a bachelor's degree, and all but one had teaching certification in the area being taught. The remaining teacher had a provisional certificate in the subject she taught. Of the 12 interviewees, 11 had one master's degree, 2 had two master's degrees, and another had completed some coursework toward a master's. One was in the process of completing coursework toward a specialist degree. One had a doctorate and one had further hours towards a doctorate. Thus, all but one of the interviewees had the necessary preparation for teaching in their specialty, and all but one had at least one advanced degree.

### **Interview Responses**

Using the Nvivo software program, the researcher grouped interviewee responses into five themes: cooperating teachers' lack of preparation for the semester, cooperating teachers' desire for feedback, need for better selection of student teachers, roles cooperating teacher's should play, and cooperating teachers' desire for power and respect.

**Cooperating teachers' lack of preparation for the semester.** Although nearly all of the interviewees held at least one graduate degree, most noted that they had not had any specific preparation to work with student teachers. LeAnn, who had worked with five student teachers, stated, "I don't think I ever felt adequately prepared to [mentor a student teacher]."

Cooperating teachers complained about a lack of written materials. In this age of technology where information is immediately available at a person's fingertips, it is surprising to hear from many cooperating teachers that they were not provided with the necessary materials to help them mentor student teachers. The list of missing items reads

like a laundry list: no assignments, no syllabus, no list of expectations, no lesson plan sample, no written guidelines, and an inadequate evaluation tool. Others received materials but did not find them helpful.

Lack of training was a major issue for the cooperating teacher. Only two interviewees had been offered even a day of training for work with student teachers. The other 10 said they had been offered no preparation, not even a meeting with the university supervisor to explain guidelines. When asked about their preparation, Rikki and Beth said, “There wasn’t any.” Brad stated, “I don’t think there was any prep at all. I met with [the student teacher] the end of December, right before she came in January and that was all, really, the prep we had. There wasn’t anything official through the university.”

**Content of the training.** Cooperating teachers expressed the desire to receive training on how to mentor student teachers and address what student teachers need from them. Several interviewees said training on mentoring should include training on how to be transparent, to share their thinking with the student teacher so the student teacher is aware of everything going on in the classroom. Rikki said, “Actually [knowledge and] going out and applying my [knowledge] in the real world are two different things. It just gets more difficult and that’s something the student teachers need to see.”

Interviewees suggested that university supervisors need to teach the cooperating teachers ways to communicate with the student teacher. Brad mentioned the need to set specific goals for the student teacher. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of having training in the administration of a solid evaluation tool. Barbara stated,

[Cooperating teachers need] to understand how the tool is used, not as a “gotcha!” but as a “these are your weaknesses. This is where I want you to get better. You know this is how I’m going to lift you up and make you better.”

LeAnn stated, “I think it might be handy for us to know what red flags we should be looking for in the first few weeks. . . . If this [behavior] is going on, you need to call the [university supervisor] right away.” She added, “We have a huge responsibility, and we may need a little coaching on how to communicate to this college student . . . that he or she may fail.” LeAnn also mentioned she would like more information about the laws concerning supervising student teachers. “What’s our legal responsibility? If a [cooperating teacher] doesn’t pass them, [we] need to know, what am I responsible for? What if she decided to sue [me] because I ruined her teaching?”

All the interviewees mentioned that they would like training about the university’s expectations for them and for the student teacher as well as about procedures. Karla stated, “I would like to have one day, even an hour, class on what the expectations are and what to do and how to deal with difficult student teachers. I think that would help immensely.” This training should include (a) a description of the important components of the program and what needs to be accomplished during the 15 weeks of student teaching, (b) university expectations for the student teacher, and (c) a list of the procedures for the required paperwork and information on how to use the evaluation tools.

Most interviewees wanted information about the student teacher prior to the semester and even wanted to meet the student teacher. Brenda stated, “It would be beneficial to have some time with the student teacher before [the student teacher] got to the [placement site.]”

Many interviewees expressed a need for guidelines on when to allow the student teacher to take control of the class. LeAnn said, “I don’t know how many weeks [of full

teaching] I should give them.” Training in how to implement the gradual release of responsibility would be welcomed.

Interviewees wanted information on student teaching seminars and other university-required activities that would take them away from their classroom responsibilities. Brad commented, “Who knows what they do on those half days when they come to the [university] and they have the seminars.” Along with more information about the content of the seminars, Karla would like a calendar for the semester showing the schedule of the seminars.

It appears that many cooperating teachers are not happy about student teacher absences because they disrupt continuity and overburden the teachers. Peter commented “One thing that drives me crazy is [the student teacher] is gone for three days, or something like that, of the student teaching time.” Karen said, “Sometimes I felt the university [supervisor] was expecting so much in terms of [the] assignments, such as reflections and logs, and this was before edTPA.”

When asked how they were able to mentor a student teacher if they had not received any training, cooperating teachers gave a variety of answers: their own student teaching experience, their own teaching, their experience mentoring a student in the pre-student teaching practicum, guidance and support from colleagues, and even information from the student teacher. The cooperating teachers used these resources for lack of anything else, but they made it clear that they really needed proper informational materials and training.

**Cooperating teachers’ desire for feedback.** All interviewees wanted feedback on their work with student teachers. Their reasons included accountability, concerns



about their suitability to mentor, and desire for growth as cooperating teachers.

Three interviewees said feedback could hold cooperating teachers accountable. Wanda commented, “Maybe [cooperating teachers] wouldn’t be sitting in the lounge . . . . [Cooperating teachers] leave at 2 weeks and . . . . they’re not back in the classroom until the last week.” Beth agreed, stating, “I think sometimes people take student teachers because they want a break. . . . There may be motivations other than preparing the next generation of teachers to be excellent.” Shannon and Rikki suggested that if a cooperating teacher wants to work with a student teacher, the cooperating teacher should expect to receive feedback. Many of the interviewees added that getting feedback on their work with the student teacher would help them to grow professionally.

Some interviewees had concerns about their own suitability to be a cooperating teacher. LeAnn said, “I want to know if I’m doing a good job and whether or not I should be [mentoring student teachers], because if they’re going back to the [university] and saying ‘Man, she is so old and stuck in a rut,’ then maybe I shouldn’t be the one who they’re coming to.”

Interviewees disagreed on who should give them feedback, when it should be given, and in what form. Jillian, Karla, and LeAnn all thought the feedback about their work with the student teacher should come from the university supervisor. On the other hand, Barbara said the student teacher should be the one giving the feedback, but the feedback should go first to the university supervisor, who in turn would pass it on to the cooperating teacher.

Other interviewees would like to get feedback from both the university supervisor and the student teacher. Rikki stated, “I think it should come from [both] because

...they're [both] watching me.”

Several interviewees suggested receiving feedback during the semester so they could correct any issues that might be hindering their ability to connect with the student teacher. LeAnn commented:

If the student teacher is really having issues with me and goes to the supervisor, then I need to know . . . this is what we're hearing . . . , so maybe we can fix it. Like the student teacher who was transferred, had I known I could have said, “I am sorry...I hurt your feelings.”

By contrast, Jillian and Rikki suggested that the feedback should be given to them after the student teaching experience. Karen agreed, explaining, “The student teacher needs a letter of recommendation from the cooperating teacher, so that could be a little bit of a conflict of interest.”

Beth mentioned that she would like to have the cooperating teacher meet with the student teacher either alone or with the university supervisor present so all three could participate in the discussion. Beth stated, “I think [collaboration] goes back to the idea that no one teaches in isolation.” Wanda mentioned, “I don't think it should be a secretive type of thing where [the student teacher and the university supervisor] check it and give it to you as the [cooperating teacher]. I think it's something that should be shared.” By contrast, Rikki suggested that university supervisors need to meet with the student teacher alone. “The student teacher needs to feel comfortable sharing [information] without having to worry about getting in trouble from the cooperating teacher . . . .”

Some interviewees wanted written feedback from the student teacher, either in the form of a reflective piece with writing prompts such as, “This is what I didn't like or I didn't understand. . . .” or a survey with a rating scale.

**Need for better selection of student teachers.** Interviewees mentioned that they had had good experiences with most student teachers placed under their tutelage, but the difficult or weak student teacher stood out in their minds. Due to the challenges they faced when mentoring a difficult or weak student teacher, many interviewees said they had considered not working with a student teacher again. Weaknesses included lack of content knowledge, lack of knowledge about teaching pedagogy, and poor teacher dispositions.

One issue mentioned by cooperating teachers throughout the interviews was a student teacher's weak knowledge of content being taught to the students. Cooperating teachers not only have to teach the content first to the student teacher, they then worry that their students will suffer because the student teacher is not knowledgeable enough to be teaching the content. Brad gave an example: "[One student teacher] struggled with the math content. She did not have a conceptual understanding, which led to procedural incorrectness."

Another concern was student teachers' lack of knowledge about teaching methodology. Karla said two of her six student teachers

...didn't know how to write a lesson plan with an objective, even though I knew that those things were taught because I took those classes and I remember doing the lesson plans. [Sometimes] I just had to say, "Okay, you can just hand out the papers and then I'll just take over for today" . . . because I couldn't let the class have 20 minutes free time because the student teacher didn't prepare enough lessons.

Karen teaches students in a self-contained special education classroom. One time a student bit the student teacher. The student teacher was not prepared for an incident like this, although she should have been trained for such situations. Over the course of the

semester, it was apparent that the student teacher was not comfortable working with students with significant behavioral issues. “It was difficult to survive the eight weeks. Most of the time when a student teacher leaves, there is a party; there was no party. We were happy to see her go.”

Another selection issue is poor teacher dispositions. Some inappropriate behavior on the part of student teachers may be a misunderstanding about what a teacher is supposed to do. However, if these misunderstandings are not easily corrected, they suggest a problem with attitude or disposition. Lack of professionalism may include lack of initiative, late arrival, inappropriate dress, and inappropriate response to criticism.

Some student teachers treat teaching as an 8-3 job, and they don’t grade assignments in a timely manner. Brad mentioned, “I think student teachers come in with the perception that teaching is easy, and it is if you don’t do it well.” Beth mentioned that student teachers don’t reflect, and she also mentioned that they want to teach her lessons.

Karla stated,

One time [my student teacher] called me in the middle of first hour and she was supposed to be here at 7:30 am and so she got here close to second hour. So that was tough because . . . we are expected to be here when the students arrive in case they have questions or they need help. And so that was hard for me to get the student to understand, hey, punctuality is important. You know if you party all night you still have to come to work and show that you are prepared.

Cooperating teachers also expressed a concern with student teachers’ dressing inappropriately. Wanda mentioned, “One time I needed to talk to this girl because she was wearing something that was short.” Some student teachers are not willing or able to take constructive criticism. Beth stated,

Mistakes kind of paralyzed [my student teacher] . . . When I found an error on a handout or after the lesson, [the student teacher] would fall in on herself . . . She

would weep from time to time . . . . There were “talking down from the ledge” moments more often than I would say would be necessary.

LeAnn shared that she had a student teacher who had great difficulty taking constructive criticism and got very angry. “She lied. She accused me of doing things I didn’t do. She said I yelled at her. . . . She had not turned in some [assignments] when they were due, and she lost some things.” LeAnn was considering not passing her, so Le Ann thought “The student teacher did what she did to get out of a situation.” LeAnn said the student teacher was not doing a good job and [LeAnn] was holding her accountable.

**Roles cooperating teachers should play.** Cooperating teachers wear many hats while working with student teachers. Often they find it difficult to know when to take off one hat and put on another. The gradual release of responsibility is challenging, as is knowing when to move from controller, to encourager, to mentor, and then to evaluator. Their responses identified five roles cooperating teachers believe they should play: Reciprocal Learner, Mentor, Content Expert and Role Model, Encourager of Independence, and Evaluator.

A few interviewees mentioned that they would be helping the student teacher and in turn the student teacher would help them by sharing new ideas. Beth stated, “If we are not learning from [student teachers], then they are not learning from us. Shannon agreed, saying, “I always tell my [student teachers] I’m here as much to help you as you are to bring new ideas to me.”

Several cooperating teachers mentioned the importance of taking time to mentor and collaborate with the student teacher. Sharing resources and ideas and helping with planning and co-teaching are valuable ingredients of good mentoring. Emily mentioned,

“I always give [student teachers] lots of resources, and they always need help in organizing their [lesson and unit] plans.” Karen said, “It’s important that student teachers feel ownership of the class, and this is difficult to do if student teachers are using the cooperating teacher’s lesson plans and not their own.” Beth pointed out, “If [the student teacher] just teaches your lessons they’re learning absolutely nothing. . . . If we don’t encourage the [student teachers] to invent I think we’re doing them a huge disservice.”

Beth stated,

Cooperating teachers] need to pull themselves away from [the student teacher] and just be like, “I’m sorry but here’s the book, here’s the material, I’m not giving you my slides, I’m not giving you my handouts . . . . You come up with something first and then we’ll collaborate.”

Wanda and Emily felt that it was important that cooperating teachers be experts in their content area. Wanda stated, “[They need to] know their subject matter very well.”

Emily stated, “I think [student teachers] need a lot of direction in keeping [content] cohesive for the students and clear.” In addition, most cooperating teachers mentioned the importance of being role models, exhibiting solid ethics, high standards, effective classroom management, time management, good professional relationships, involvement in professional organizations and professional development, and a passion for teaching. .

In the above roles, cooperating teachers felt it important to demonstrate transparency with the student teacher during the day-to-day teaching. By thinking out loud about the process of making professional decisions, cooperating teachers provide the necessary guidance for the multifaceted issues facing teachers daily. Shannon gave an example: “The cooperating teacher says, ‘Hey, this unit or this assignment just didn’t do what I wanted it to do. Can we go through this protocol of steps to help me make it better?’”

In summary, interviewees suggested several important roles that cooperating teachers should model. Beth stated, “I think the student teacher should, if they really want to envision the teaching experience, see every possible venue in which you experience education.”

Cooperating teachers were asked whether they would consider allowing student teachers to use new strategies that they have not used in their classroom. All interviewees replied that they would allow the student teacher to use new strategies where appropriate. Cooperating teachers wholeheartedly agreed that the introduction of new strategies to their classroom was a positive feature of working with a student teacher. Karen added, “[Student teachers] bring new ideas on how to use technology, new websites, and different ways of approaching lesson activities. We need to be open enough to embrace some of their new ideas.”

Interviewees admit that one potential problem they have with encouraging student independence is a feeling of territoriality. Time and time again the interviewees commented that giving up ownership of the classroom to the student teacher was the most difficult part of being a cooperating teacher. Many teachers who would otherwise be excellent mentors of student teachers will decline because they do not want to give their classroom to the student teacher. As Peter said,

You have to dissociate yourself from your kids, which is hard because they’re [the cooperating teacher’s] kids. You need to let [the student teacher] take care of them for a while, and [the student teacher] might not [work with the students] the same way [the cooperating teacher] does.

Quite aside from feelings of territoriality, interviewees had rational concerns about allowing the student teacher to try new strategies.

Barbara saw the need to be informed about the strategy. She said, “If [the student teacher] can’t verbalize to me how [the strategy] is going to work or why they want to do it, then I don’t feel like [the student teacher] truly understands what they’re doing.”

Karen stated, “It is important that the strategy meet the needs of the students. There are some strategies that would be in conflict with a student’s disability, and I am thinking particularly of students with autism.” Rikki pointed out that she absolutely loves to see new strategies—“as long as they are not counter-productive. You know, bringing technology into the classroom is a great thing; too much technology, though, with kids that have learning disabilities [can be] overwhelming.”

Several interviewees were willing to grant approval for the use of a new strategy as long as the strategy had research supporting its use. Brad mentioned that student teachers tend to use strategies that are flashy instead of research based. He said, “It is all bells and whistles.” Many cooperating teachers were concerned that student teachers are looking for the cool activity, not the meaningful activity. They stressed that student teachers need to reflect on the purpose for using the strategy.

Several interviewees suggested that student teachers often approach the student teaching field experience with the idea they can teach any topic they choose. They appear to be totally unaware that general educators follow a predetermined curriculum plan. Wanda stated, “I like [new strategies] provided [they] fit within the educational level of the students [in the class]. I think new ideas are great as long as they’re relevant to the topic and the common core standards.”

In summary, most interviewees favored letting the student teacher try new strategies. Interviewees like learning from the student teacher and having the student



teacher learn from them. However, interviewees expressed concern that a strategy might be unclear, might not be research based, might not address accommodations, or might not be aligned with the school's curriculum.

Taking on the role of critic and evaluator can be difficult and gut-wrenching when the student teacher is struggling. Many cooperating teachers stated that they feel unprepared to handle this aspect of the student teaching process.

Karen mentioned, "It is difficult sometimes for a cooperating teacher to be open enough to allow a [student teacher] to make a mistake once in a while. They need to be able to make some mistakes while [the cooperating teacher] is there to offer some constructive criticism or guidance." Peter found communicating to the student teacher the mistakes they are making was difficult. He said, "When they're not doing something right, I struggle with telling [the student teacher] without attacking them."

If it is difficult to give constructive criticism during the semester, it is even harder to make final evaluations once the student teacher has finished. This is a difficult undertaking, sometimes due to the cooperating teacher's feelings of personal failure, sometimes due to extenuating circumstances.

Brad stated,

The last student teacher . . . probably should not have been a teacher. I'm usually pretty forthright and just come out and say that, but she had some extenuating circumstances. She had a newborn at home . . . and I remember thinking, "That little kid's got to have a chance." And the only chance that little kid's going to have is if mom gets a job. And that right or wrong became my concern because I kept thinking of my kids at home. She'd spent four years of her life going after this, and it was hard for me to put a quash on that.

He went on to say he knows he should have failed her but with everything going on in his life and in hers it was not worth the fight. Brad said, "I took the easy road out."

**Cooperating teachers' desire for power and respect.** Cooperating teachers had a number of issues with the university supervisor concerning respect for their judgment and the power to influence decisions. Brad, for example, mentioned that one time he had some concerns with a student teacher, but when he brought up his apprehension to the university supervisor she brushed him off. Brad said, "I just didn't talk to her again because I didn't envision that going anywhere."

Wanda also commented on lack of support. "The [student teacher] wanted to teach my AP seniors *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which is about sixth or seventh grade level. I tried to talk her out of [teaching that book] and she still wanted to do it. The university supervisor would not help me change her."

Unfortunately, some interviewees reported that the university supervisor not only had failed to consult with them and listen to their advice, but had not even informed them of reassignment or pass-fail decisions. What was extremely troublesome for LeAnn was the fact that she left work on Friday and when she returned on Monday her student teacher had been transferred. LeAnn said, "I was blindsided....That was hard, very hard." Not only was she told after the fact, it was her principal who told her about the situation. She said she was called to the principal's office, and it felt like she was being disciplined. LeAnn mentioned that after this incident she refused three student teachers; she told the university supervisor not to give her the difficult or needy ones.

Karen stated that "student teaching was something everybody passed." She told about a student who she felt did not have the skills to interact with children with disabilities. However, he was the grandson of an instructor in another department at the university, and she was told it would be politically inappropriate not to pass a 4.0 student

related to someone on staff.

Brad shared a situation that happened to him.

I had given my [student teacher] a couple of low marks and she came to me apologetically and said, “My EIU coordinator is just going to change those scores and raise them . . . . My student teacher] felt like that was wrong and I did too. I was fairly upset about it but decided not to raise a stink.

Peter shared that he experienced challenging issues with three of the five student teachers he worked with. One time Peter left the calculus class to the student teacher, only to learn that as soon as he left the room the student teacher told the class that when they got to college they needed to goof around more and have some drinks. Peter went on to say that he was pretty tough on the student teacher’s midterm evaluation. When he spoke with the university supervisor, the university supervisor supported Peter’s evaluation, but, as Peter pointed out, there was never a meeting with all three of them, so he did not know if the university supervisor supported him with the student teacher. When Peter spoke to the university supervisor about the incident, the university supervisor told him he could not talk about anything “specifically because of confidentiality.”

One potential source of confusion about the power and respect cooperating teachers should have was a misunderstanding about the university supervisor’s prior relationship with the student teacher and the supervisor’s content knowledge. Emily, for example, initially assumed the university supervisor would know the student teacher well; however, once she learned that many times the university supervisor does not know that person, she stated that the cooperating teacher should have the final say in whether the student teacher passes or fails the student teaching experience. Emily said, “It seems it should be somebody that knows them. I guess if that’s the case it should be [the

cooperating teacher.]” With this source of confusion removed, interviewees clearly felt they should have more respect and in some cases more power to contribute to decisions. Specifically, cooperating teachers want respect for their judgment in making decisions during the semester, respect for their ideas about the design of the student teaching program, power to veto a student teacher’s placement in their classroom, a vote on whether to reassign a struggling student teacher, and a vote on pass-fail decisions.

Cooperating teachers want respect for their judgment in making decisions such as when to allow a particular student teacher to take over the classroom, what proposed teaching strategies to veto, how to determine that a student teacher is struggling, and when to consult a university content specialist. Interviewees point out that they work with the student teacher daily, as opposed to observing the student teacher 4-5 times during the semester.

All interviewees wanted to have a voice in the design of the student teaching experience. Jillian suggested one reason for being included in the program design process: “I think that cooperating teachers would feel more positive about having more student teachers if they had some say in what’s expected.” Another reason cooperating teachers think the university should listen to them is implied by the wealth of suggestions they have provided. They clearly have unique knowledge that would improve the student teaching process. (Appendix E lists and explains the interviewees’ design suggestions.)

Interviewees want the power to refuse the placement of a particular student teacher in their classroom. They feel they should have this veto power because they are accountable to their own students, and the mismatch of personalities can create an uncomfortable learning environment for the semester. Furthermore, some have had

unfortunate experiences in the past working with weak student teachers, so they do not trust the university's elimination of weak candidates.

Interviewees want a vote on whether to reassign a struggling student teacher. Again, the cooperating teacher sees the student teacher five days a week and has more evidence on whether the student teacher is seriously struggling. In addition, cooperating teachers are best able to clear up any misunderstandings about their own expectations.

As a first step, Rikki suggested that the supervisor come in a lot more if there is a concern "to make sure it is fair." Rikki continued by stating,

I think it is the responsibility of the cooperating teacher to let the supervisor know there's a problem. The cooperating teacher should say to the university supervisor, "Hey, this is what I've witnessed," and I think the university supervisor needs to take a more active role in saying maybe this isn't a good fit or...observing the [classroom] environment that the student teacher is working in [before any decision is made]. I don't think keeping a student teacher in a placement . . . that is a bad fit is helping anybody."

**Pass or fail. Who decides?** All the interviewees wanted a vote in deciding whether to pass or fail the student teacher. Eight interviewees felt that decision should involve at least the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor; in some cases the interviewees suggested additional decision-makers. One of the interviewees thought the university supervisor should have the power to overrule the cooperating teacher's judgment since the supervisor is accountable for the final grade. However, even this cooperating teacher felt the university supervisor should consult with the cooperating teacher before making the final determination; otherwise, the cooperating teacher is not going to want to take student teachers.

Jillian thought the cooperating teacher should have the final decision.

The [cooperating teacher] is really given the chance to see the [student teacher's] growth potential. We all start out at something not feeling as confident as we are whenever we've competed something. I think [the cooperating teacher definitely sees if a student teacher is going to get it. When you make the decision to be a cooperating teacher, I think you need to know that the final decision is going to be yours.

Peter stated he too thought the cooperating teacher should make the final decision.

He went on to say, "The [cooperating teacher] is going to have the day-to-day experience with the [student teacher]. On the other hand, he recommended,

If there's going to be a failure, though, I think the [university supervisor] will hopefully have been involved in the conversation before that happens. I think if the [student teacher] is going to fail, the [cooperating teacher] needs a second opinion and the [university supervisor] would be the second opinion.

Wanda stated that she felt both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher should decide whether the student teacher passes or fails the semester. LeAnn added that if there is an issue the [university supervisor] should look at the [student teacher's] practicum experience.

Beth commented that "the supervisor was in the room maybe 4-5 times the entire semester," therefore, she thought, the cooperating teacher and university supervisor's decision should hold equal weight. Shannon said the cooperating teacher's evaluation should weigh even more than the university supervisor's evaluation.

Rikki brought up an additional concern: the possibility that a student teacher could be placed with a poor cooperating teacher and that a bad evaluation would not be fair to the student teacher.

Karen suggested that the pass-fail decision should be made by the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor and the student teaching department. Beth suggested

the use of a panel where the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor and a professor would question the student teacher and look at the portfolio.

None of the interviewees mentioned the possibility of a portfolio assessment. When informed about the new edTPA program (a portfolio, including a video made by the student teacher, that is assessed by an out-of-state evaluator), five of the interviewees said they had never heard of edTPA and the remaining seven knew very little about this new evaluation system. Barbara said it would be great if all three (cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and edTPA evaluator) evaluated the student teacher. Two evaluators could have bias and the third party could be unbiased. She was concerned, however, that the cultural differences of teachers in their respective states could impact the evaluations of teachers in Illinois.

On the other hand, Karla pointed out, “You can’t judge [on the basis of] one day of teaching.” Jillian too had reservations, agreeing that the evaluator is only seeing a snapshot, and adding that “if [the cooperating teacher] sees that the [student teacher] is putting effort into the [portfolio] and not the classroom, then there’s going to be a negative feeling.” Overall, interviewees did not support the new edTPA portfolio process.

In summary, cooperating teachers definitely wanted a vote on the pass-fail decision and suggested that the evaluation of the student teacher should be shared by the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. If necessary, another representative from the student teaching department or the edTPA portfolio process could be used as a tie-breaker.

Because cooperating teachers wanted more power and respect, they suggested ways to develop a more collegial relationship with the university supervisor. This

relationship should involve a good rapport built upon mutual respect and trust. The university supervisor can develop this positive relationship by offering a training course, spending more “face” time with the cooperating teacher, sharing responsibility, supporting their judgments, collaborating on decisions and showing appreciation.

### **Interpretation Phase**

According to Creswell (2009), in an explanatory sequential mixed methods study the quantitative data is collected and analyzed, followed by the collection and analysis of the qualitative data. In this next phase, “the interpretation phase,” the qualitative findings will help to elaborate or extend the quantitative results (p. 220). It is important to note that in this study, the interview questions and the survey questions do not correspond exactly. The interview questions are supposed to add more depth and insight to the responses from the survey questions.

The premise of the present study was that cooperating teachers are an integral component of the student teaching program but rarely are they consulted concerning the mentoring of student teachers. Phase 1 was a quantitative study, in the form of a survey, which examined cooperating teachers’ background and preparation to mentor a student teacher, their experience with the student teaching process, their role as a cooperating teacher, and their perspective on the student teaching experience. Descriptive statistics were used to examine factors associated with mentoring student teachers. Also included in the survey were two open-ended questions. One question asked the cooperating teachers about the challenges they have faced as a mentor of a student teacher, while the other open-ended question asked the cooperating teachers to consider what the university supervisor could do to provide a better student teaching experience for the cooperating



teacher. Phase II of the topical-cultural study used qualitative interviewing, which emphasizes the importance of giving the interviewee a voice (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Twelve interviewees, who had mentored a student teacher within the last five years, were asked the same specific 11 questions. Their ideas and understandings were learned about through the interviews, while the interpretation of the study is supported by reasoning and evidence. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), the interpretative approach recognizes that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standard from person to person. The overall text of a conversation and the importance of seeing meaning in context make up the interpretative process.

The researcher collected information in the form of 153 surveys from middle school and high school cooperating teachers who worked with a Midwestern university. From the 153 cooperating teachers who participated in the survey, 52 participants were willing to be interviewed by the researcher. Of the 52 possibilities, 12 cooperating teachers were chosen to be interviewed. The data are organized according to the themes that were found.

**Cooperating teachers' lack of preparation for the semester.** Respondents to the survey indicated that they had very little preparation to be a cooperating teacher. Most of the respondents reported that they had not had a course, fewer than one-third had had even one orientation session, and only about two-thirds had even received a handbook. Survey respondents said they valued receiving written guidelines about the university's expectations of the cooperating teacher (99%) and of the student teacher (100%). Respondents also wanted support during the semester in the form of frequent visits (91%) and check-ins (49%).

Responses to the open-ended survey questions showed a desire for guidelines (for example, a general rule about when the student teacher should assume control of the classroom), as well as for face-to-face training and support during the semester.

Interviewees' responses concurred with those from the survey. They too indicated they needed preparation about how to handle the role of a cooperating teacher. The interviewees stated the need for written guidelines about the university's expectations for them and for student teachers, and they also wanted this guidance in the form of training. Specifically, interviewees would like this training to consist of not only explanation of guidelines but also group discussions. In terms of support, interviewees said they wanted the university supervisors to make frequent visits and check-ins to address problems when they arose.

**Cooperating teachers' desire for feedback.** Survey respondents (92%) indicated they would value receiving feedback about their work with the student teacher. Respondents (85%) also indicated they would be comfortable with the university supervisor evaluating them in their role as a cooperating teacher. It appears that most cooperating teachers would like to know what mentoring skills need improvement.

The interviewees suggested formative feedback during the semester concerning their work with the student teacher, as well as an end-of-semester summative evaluation provided by the university supervisor and possibly by the student teacher. The interviewees provided several practical suggestions on how the evaluations could be conducted.

**Need for better selection of student teachers.** Survey respondents (97%) said they wanted to meet with the student teacher prior to the student teaching field

experience. A possible reason for meeting the student teacher prior to the semester is suggested by the responses to the open-ended question about challenges. Many cooperating teachers mentioned working with a struggling student teacher as a major concern. A mismatch of personalities could create an uncomfortable classroom environment, and this finding supports the prior research. Interviewees discussed the weak student teacher at length and said they wanted to meet student teachers in order to veto the student teachers they felt were not ready for the experience.

**Roles cooperating teachers should play.** When survey respondents were asked if they were comfortable evaluating the student teacher, 98% replied yes they were comfortable. This response indicates cooperating teachers are willing to evaluate the student teacher. Prior research shows that cooperating teachers are usually uncomfortable with evaluating the student teacher, so this finding disconfirms the research.

The interviewees in this study mentioned that there were times when they were uncomfortable evaluating the student teacher, but they still wanted a say in the process. Interviewees recommended that the pass/fail decision be a mutual decision of the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor.

When survey respondents were questioned about how comfortable they were allowing student teachers to try strategies they did not use, 98% stated they were comfortable. This disconfirms the research literature that states cooperating teachers do not want student teachers to use new strategies.

Reciprocal learning was considered a benefit of having a student teacher, but in the role of a mentor cooperating teachers feel they are responsible for the learning given to student teachers and often part of this learning process is the use of new strategies.

Interviewees support the survey responses, as all 12 of them indicated they had no problem with student teachers trying new strategies but... The 'but' was loud and clear, and the cooperating teachers' answers provided more information about why many student teachers feel that their cooperating teacher is opposed to their using new strategies. Interviewees gave insight into this misconception. Expressing concern that a strategy might be unclear, or incorrectly applied might not be research based, might not address accommodations, or might not be aligned with the school's curriculum to meet the Common Core State Standards.

When responding to the question about challenges, many survey respondents indicated that giving up control of the classroom was quite difficult. The survey respondents went on to say that they felt accountable to their students and sometimes emotions were involved, as they felt protective of their students.

Interviewees indicated feeling the same. Time and time again the interviewees commented that giving up ownership of the classroom to the student teacher was the most difficult part of being a cooperating teacher. Interviewees even expressed a desire for training in how and when to give up control of the classroom.

**Cooperating teachers' desire for power and respect.** When survey respondents were asked if they viewed the university supervisor as an authority figure or a colleague, 88% said colleague. Responses to the open-ended survey question showed that cooperating teachers felt that more collaboration among all three stakeholders (the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor and the student teacher) would improve the student teaching experience for all involved. This agrees with the viewpoint of the interviewees, who expressed a strong desire to be treated as a colleague, as an equal.

When survey respondents were questioned about how comfortable they would be if a student teacher who was having difficulty in their classroom were reassigned, a little over half of the respondents indicated they would be comfortable with this action. This response did not support the interviewees who were not comfortable with reassignment. It was observed that many of the cooperating teachers interviewed had a negative experience with the reassignment of a student teacher. In the final analysis, it appeared that the issue with reassignment was not itself the problem but rather the lack of collaboration or communication between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor.

When asked if a trained state evaluator through the edTPA program should assess the student teacher, only 10% of survey respondents approved. Interviewees confirmed the survey respondents' opinion. Interviewees appeared to dislike the thought that an outside evaluator was needed to decide who passes or fails. Interviewees felt that an "outsider" would only get a "snapshot" of the type of teaching that took place during the student teaching experience.

Four interviewees stated that the cooperating teacher alone should determine whether the student teacher passes because the cooperating teacher has seen this person in action many more times than the supervisor or any other possible evaluator. However, eight interviewees suggested a system of checks and balance in order to reduce the possibility of bias. These interviewees said the cooperating teacher should share the power with at least one other: the university supervisor and possibly also a representative of the student teaching department, or a professor, or a portfolio evaluator.

When survey respondents were questioned on whether they would like to be asked for their input about the student teaching program, 97% said yes, and this supports

the findings from the interviews. However, when asked if they would like to give input in the design of the student teaching experience, just over a third (34.7%) said yes, while nearly half (48%) said maybe. This hesitation might indicate that while cooperating teachers value being asked for their ideas, many have concerns about being part of the actual planning process. This could be due to time commitments.

All of the cooperating teachers interviewed stated that they would like to give suggestions for design of the student teaching program. In addition, all but one interviewee had specific ideas for improving the student teaching program. Interviewees suggested changes in the type and length of the student teaching placement, partnerships between the school district and the university, addition of auxiliary duties for student teachers, and better assessment of student teachers and cooperating teachers.

Survey respondents (97%) said they wanted to meet with the student teacher prior to the student teaching field experience. In response to the open-ended question about challenges, many respondents indicated they had at one time or another dispositional concerns about student teachers. These concerns include lack of professionalism, a know-it-all attitude, and poor work ethic. Interviewees agreed with the survey respondents and elaborated by adding that they would like to have the power to veto the student teaching placement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The results of the findings lead to further limitations. One limitation of this study was that Phase I was limited to descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies and means. To include inferential statistics such as correlations or analyses of variance an additional research question would be needed. Another limitation of this study was the

small population of interviewees in Phase II. In order to provide sufficient probing and depth in the interviews, the number of interviewees had to be limited. Future survey research could address topics that were suggested by the interviews. For example, the comfort level of cooperating teachers when they failed a student teacher would have been an excellent addition to the survey.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

**Summary of Study and Findings**

The purpose of this two-phase sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to investigate cooperating teachers' perceptions regarding the mentoring of student teachers, including the support and training they receive and still need while mentoring student teachers, the roles they play and challenges they face during the clinical field experience. In order to achieve this purpose, the study used survey design methodology and interviews.

In Phase I of the study, a cross-sectional survey design was used to examine the attitudes, opinions, and needs of cooperating teachers about the mentoring of student teachers. The quantitative portion of the online survey included 21 Likert-type questions that were analyzed using the SPSS software program. The qualitative portion of the survey included two open-ended questions. A total of 153 cooperating teachers responded to the survey. The open-ended questions offered insight into challenges cooperating teachers face during the student teaching experience and provided a better understanding of the support the cooperating teachers need from the university supervisor.

Phase II of the study, which was entirely qualitative in nature, involved interviews of 12 cooperating teachers, a small subset of the 153 survey participants. The



12 cooperating teachers were selected to be interviewed according to their responses to the open-ended survey questions. In addition, their in-depth responses helped to answer the four research questions that guided this study and connected to themes found in current literature and in Phase 1 of this study. These themes included preparation of student teachers; training of cooperating teachers; support for cooperating teachers; communication among the university supervisor, the cooperating teacher and the student teacher; control by the cooperating teacher; and supervision by the university supervisor. One interviewee was chosen as an outlier because of his somewhat controversial views of the student teaching program.

The Nvivo software program was used to analyze the data, and coding was utilized to identify reoccurring themes. Codes were established by looking at key words and main concepts. Cooperating teachers' responses were coded several times, and concept maps were created to organize the information into the main themes. Data were initially analyzed one transcript at a time and subsequently by comparing participants' responses from the 12 different cooperating teachers. Data were repeatedly dissected, analyzed, regrouped, and reanalyzed, and the qualitative analysis was peer reviewed. The interview responses gave insight into the cooperating teachers' reasoning and suggested ideas for further research.

In Phase I, the analyses of the survey and open-ended questions were organized under the four research questions guiding the study. In Phase II, the data from the interview questions were organized into five reoccurring themes that related to the four research questions.

Phase II of the study centered on the stories and experiences of the cooperating teachers who were interviewed. A snapshot of each cooperating teacher who was interviewed is found in Phase II under the heading “Portraits of the Interviewees.” All participants shared their experiences and perceptions relating to their role as a cooperating teacher. The interviews with 12 cooperating teachers included middle school and high school teachers with a range of 7-30 years of experience working with student teachers in a variety of content specialties. This diversity allowed for different experiences and still produced many consistent themes. Most of the cooperating teachers’ experiences and perceptions fit into the themes of lack of preparation, desire for feedback, better selection of student teachers, roles cooperating teachers should play and desire for power and respect. Cooperating teachers also shared their ideas for improvement of the student teaching program.

Interviewees expressed frustration with the lack of communication about the university’s expectations for them and for the student teacher. Regardless of the participant, a consistently repeated observation was that cooperating teachers needed to receive support from the university supervisor, especially when dealing with a difficult student teacher. Cooperating teachers stated often that they felt they would benefit greatly from some type of training, and they expressed the need for more collaboration with the university supervisor. All 12 interview participants expressed the desire to be seen as a colleague rather than a subordinate.

Another significant finding was that cooperating teachers see themselves as colleagues of the university supervisor. They would like to collaborate with the university supervisor when it comes to providing formative and summative evaluation to

the student teacher, providing input on the design of the student teaching program, and deciding whether to reassign the student teacher to a new placement. It was determined that cooperating teachers would like the university supervisor to check in with them more often, and they would prefer the university supervisor to be more visible and include unannounced observations of student teachers as part of their supervisory procedures.

Cooperating teachers identified six roles they thought all teachers who work with a student teacher should play: mentor, content expert, role model, evaluator, collaborator, and encourager. One major role that cooperating teachers play is that of a mentor, and cooperating teachers expressed a strong desire to receive more training on how to become a better mentor of student teachers. Cooperating teachers stated repeatedly they appreciate the opportunity for reciprocal learning, the sharing of strategies and ideas with the student teacher. With that said, interview participants revealed that a major deterrent to using strategies provided by the student teacher is that in some cases the strategies are not research based or do not have a clear purpose.

Evaluating the student teacher can cause cooperating teachers a great deal of anxiety, especially if the student teacher is weak. For this reason, it was found that cooperating teachers would like to meet the prospective student teacher before the field placement, and they would like the power to veto the student teacher. Cooperating teachers mentioned the importance of being a good role model (effective teaching, professionalism and collaboration skills), and throughout the student teaching experience they stressed the importance of being transparent in their work with student teachers.

The most significant finding from the online survey and from the interviews was that cooperating teachers have significant issues with the university supervisors. They

feel that their input about the student teacher's ability to teach is often ignored by the university supervisor, especially when the student teacher is having difficulties.

Cooperating teachers often expressed that their opinion is not respected or valued by the university supervisor. This lack of respect is evident when the university supervisor places a student teacher at the last minute without giving the cooperating teacher an opportunity to meet with the student teacher prior to the placement, when the university supervisor reassigns a student teacher to another placement without discussing this important decision with the cooperating teacher, and also when the university supervisor overrules a cooperating teacher's negative evaluation and gives the student teacher a passing grade.

Based on information and research provided in the literature review in Chapter II, it is apparent that listening to the voices of the cooperating teachers is long overdue.

### **Discussion**

This study focused on the responses of 153 cooperating teachers to an online survey about the perspective of cooperating teachers about the mentoring of student teachers. From the 153 cooperating teachers, 12 were chosen to interview in order to examine more deeply the perspective of cooperating teachers about the mentoring of student teachers. While the investigation is not considered a large-scale research study of the cooperating teacher-university supervisor-student teacher relationship, it does provide some meaningful information about the student teaching program. In this climate of reform of student teaching programs, the voices of the cooperating teachers surveyed and interviewed could assist in improving the university's existing student teaching programs.

Earlier findings from the literature showed that very few studies had been conducted about the cooperating teacher's perspective of the student teaching program. Through the implementation of this study it was discovered that cooperating teachers want to discuss many aspects of the student teaching program, and they appreciated the opportunity to share their insights and knowledge. Cooperating teachers had many concerns. Some of these issues related to university supervisors' attitudes towards cooperating teachers, but some issues could be traced back to university policies.

Major findings of this study include the following: cooperating teachers' lack of preparation for the semester, a need for better selection of student teachers, cooperating teachers' desire for feedback, roles of the cooperating teacher, and cooperating teachers' desire for power and respect. Each finding is discussed along with related literature, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### **Cooperating Teachers' Lack of Preparation for the Semester**

According to the literature and this study, there is a lack of preparation and training for cooperating teachers. This lack of preparation includes lack of information, lack of materials, lack of expectations, and lack of guidelines for the cooperating teacher and the student teacher.

This study showed that cooperating teachers tend to be well educated. Analysis of the data indicated that two-thirds of the cooperating teachers who responded to the survey had advanced degrees, while 11 of the 12 interviewees held at least one advanced degree. This confirms the findings of Killian and Wilkins (2013) that cooperating teachers are more likely than other teachers to hold a master's degree, while Clarke (2001) found that cooperating teachers were almost twice as likely to hold a master's

degree compared to non-supervising teachers.

Clarke (2001) and Killian and Wilkins (2013) both stated it was not clear whether such academic preparation affects the cooperating teacher's desire for workshops or other preparation that is specifically related to the field experience. However, it was very clear from this study that academic background does not reduce the desire for preparation to act as a cooperating teacher. Of the 11 interviewees with advanced degrees, all wanted preparation for the supervision of student teachers. Even so, experience as a cooperating teacher might reduce the need for specific preparation. Also in his research, Clarke (2001) indicated that experienced cooperating teachers did not see the need for formal coursework in preparation for their role. Experienced cooperating teachers may well not want formal coursework, but they still need to know the university's expectations for their work with student teachers.

In this study, many cooperating teachers mentioned that they needed more training in the preparation to work with student teachers. Hastings (2004) and Smith (2007) suggest that workshops should prepare cooperating teachers to facilitate planning, explore practices different from their own, engage in discussions that explore teaching ideas, explore questions and uncertainties about teaching, and assist student teachers.

**Unclear expectations.** The cooperating teachers in this study stated on several occasions that they were unclear of what was expected of them during the mentoring of a student teacher. This study confirms the findings of several researchers. A study by Beck and Kosnik (2000) revealed considerable confusion about expectations. Beck and Kosnik state that the lack of clarity and agreement regarding the role of cooperating teachers is a "pressing practical problem" (p. 209). Anderson (2007); Baum, Powers-

Costello, VanScoy, Miller, and James (2011); and Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) agree that cooperating teachers are unclear about what needs to be taught. An interviewee from the portraits, Rikki, stated, “As far as getting preparation there really wasn’t any. I was pulling from my own experiences as a teacher.”

**Desire for support from the university supervisor.** The data from this study indicate that cooperating teachers value support from the university supervisor during the student teaching experience. They expect the support to be in the form of communication, frequent observations and other visits, discussions about issues, guidance for student teachers, and backing for cooperating teacher’s decisions.

Cooperating teachers in this study also wanted discussions about the mentoring process. Sadler (2006) found cooperating teachers wanted support on how to be a more effective mentor. Gardiner’s 2009 study found that the mentoring development provided to the cooperating teachers was insufficient, and cooperating teachers reported they were left to their own devices to learn how to mentor. Cooperating teachers in this study reported similar experiences. Also, this present study confirms the findings of Horton and Harvey (1979), Koster, Korthagen and Wubbels (1998), and Kent (2001) that university supervisors should provide in-service meetings for cooperating teachers to educate them about the mentoring process.

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001) it is important that universities not only prepare cooperating teachers but also support them during the field experience. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005); Grove, Strudler, and Odell (2004); and Hastings (2004) state that cooperating teachers need to be supported so they will be more able to handle the emotional aspects of the role

of a cooperating teacher. Schultz (2005) suggests that university supervisors move from the role of trainer to that of mentor and work collaboratively with cooperating teachers.

Clarke (2001) states that cooperating teachers valued periodic meetings during the field experience. He further suggests increasing the frequency and duration of school visits by university supervisors, holding more in-services, and communicating systematically with the cooperating teachers; all of these supportive interactions are essential to the development of an effective clinical experience. This finding aligns with suggestions from Chelsey and Jordan (2012) about the need for better support for the cooperating teacher from the university supervisor. Clarke (2001) found that 70% of the cooperating teachers interviewed indicated they had on-site meetings with a supervisor. Even though such meetings are often administrative in nature and take very little time, they can provide cooperating teachers information about supervision of teacher candidates.

The present study disconfirmed the above findings by Clarke (2001). Cooperating teachers in this study said they need information, but they need it before the semester begins. During the semester, they want to discuss progress with their student teacher, and brief “hallway meetings” are too rushed.

### **Cooperating Teachers’ Desire for Feedback**

This study found that cooperating teachers want and value feedback about their work with student teachers. Of the 153 cooperating teachers who responded to the survey, 91% said they value feedback about their work with student teachers. All of those interviewed desired feedback. This study confirmed the finding of Clarke (2001) that 85% of cooperating teachers wanted feedback. Hastings (2004) supports these



findings, quoting one cooperating teacher as saying, “Help! I just—I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing. What have I done wrong? Have I not been giving her enough feedback?” (p. 139). An interviewee from this study, LeAnn, stated:

I want to know if I am doing a good job and whether or not I should be mentoring a student teacher. If the student teachers are saying, ‘Man, she is old and stuck in a rut,’ maybe I shouldn’t be the one mentoring them.

Feedback on the cooperating teacher’s mentoring can assist the development of a cooperating teacher. However, when the present study asked about cooperating teachers’ desire for formal evaluation, only 85% of survey respondents were comfortable with this type of feedback. Some cooperating teachers said they were concerned because they felt unclear about the university’s expectations for them and for the student teacher.

Interviewees from this study suggested several options for receiving feedback. They did not agree on who should give it, when it should be given, or what form (in writing or face to face). In Clarke’s 2001 study, the participants also disagreed: 26% requested a survey response from their student teachers; 21% asked for a post-semester meeting with the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor; and 18% requested a meeting between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor.

### **Mentoring and Its Benefits for the Cooperating Teacher**

Cooperating teachers in this study noted that mentoring a student teacher was beneficial to their growth as an educator, as they learned new ideas, strategies and current approaches to teaching. Grove, Odell and Strudler (2006) define this mutually beneficial sharing of knowledge as “reciprocal mentoring” (p. 90). Hamilton (2010) found that cooperating teachers reported they were better organized and more aware of their own practice. Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) and Landt (2004) revealed that cooperating

teachers found an improvement in their own teaching, and they credited their work as a mentor. According to Brink, Grisham, Laguardia, Granby, and Peck (2001), increased reflection, increased time to plan, and their value as a mentor provided the cooperating teachers with feelings of self-efficacy. Mentoring a student teacher helps cooperating teachers to become more effective educators as they examine and reflect on their interactions and decisions while working with the student teacher.

### **Need for Better Selection of Student Teachers**

This study also found that universities need to do a better job of selecting student teachers. When student teachers are not prepared in the pedagogy or methodology of teaching, the cooperating teacher spends valuable time teaching the student teacher before any students in the class are taught. Weak student teachers were a major concern of the cooperating teachers in this study. When the cooperating teachers know they should fail the student teacher, many emotions surface.

According to Chesley and Jordan (2012) many student teachers are not prepared in content knowledge, and this is a major concern for cooperating teachers, as this lack of preparation results in cooperating teachers spending an inordinate amount of time instructing the student teacher in the necessary content knowledge for teaching.

Sandholtz and Wasserman (2001) found that cooperating teachers were concerned with the possibility of re-teaching their own students after the student teacher taught, while Hamilton (2010) found that cooperating teachers felt their first obligation was to the academic growth of their own students. Goodfellow (2000) added that when student teachers lacked initiative or fail to take responsibility for students' learning, cooperating teachers felt frustrated and tension developed between the cooperating teacher and the

student teacher. This present study corroborates the above researchers' findings. Due to student teachers' apparent lack of content knowledge, many cooperating teachers in this study felt a need to identify weak student teachers prior to placement. If necessary, they wanted to be allowed to deny the placement. Eric, an interviewee from this study, commented:

One of my biggest issues is student teachers' lack of content knowledge. Working with my last student teacher was quite difficult, due to her lack of content knowledge. There were just enough mistakes that I had to say, "No. I think it's this way or okay we're going to have to correct this tomorrow." I tried not to do it in front of the kids, but the misinformation had to be corrected.

### **Roles of the Cooperating Teacher**

The interviewee participants in this study recognized the need to have criteria for selecting cooperating teachers, and they identified six main roles played by cooperating teachers: mentor, content expert, role model, evaluator, collaborator, and encourager. From this study it was determined that cooperating teachers need to be supportive providing guidance throughout the experience; be knowledgeable about the content being taught; be transparent about all the aspects of teaching; model 'best practices'; consistently provide formative evaluations; plan lessons with the student teacher; and encourage independence. In the selection of cooperating teachers as mentors of student teachers, it is important that the cooperating teachers chosen by university supervisors and by school principals have a solid understanding of methodology and pedagogy. In addition, the interviewee participants reported that they lacked training for these roles and relied on their own teaching experience or assistance from colleagues to navigate the many issues that would arise during the student teaching semester. A few cooperating teachers mentioned they consulted with their student teacher to find out

necessary information.

According to Gardiner (2009), cooperating teachers noted that mentoring a student teacher was challenging due to the multiple roles they were required to perform (p. 69). Cooperating teachers stated that they need support when they transition from classroom teacher to mentor-teacher due to the duality of their roles. The present study confirms this finding.

Often an ideal placement is considered one in which the cooperating teacher models, co-plans, provides opportunities for practice and reflection, and provides feedback, while the student teacher assumes increasing responsibility (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; He & Levin, 2008; and Henry & Weber 2010). According to Sayeski and Paulsen (2012), four specific characteristics were identified as important in the selection of a cooperating teacher: (a) provide an example - - be a good role model, (b) use research-based strategies, (c) use “think alouds” while modeling effective teaching, and (d) be identified by peers, administration, or past student teachers as a high-quality teacher. Attributes that Sadler (2006) felt set apart quality cooperating teachers from weak cooperating teachers were their ability to provide constructive feedback, their ability to relinquish control of the classroom, and their ability to encourage and praise the student teacher. Russell and Russell (2011) and Sawchuk (2012) declared that education programs need to be more intentional about how cooperating teachers are selected in order to ensure that the field experience is productive for all involved; it is clear that the student teacher needs a role model who is skilled and experienced in mentoring (Weasmer & Woods, 2003). This study would include in its description of an ideal placement, a cooperating teacher who uses “best practices” and is transparent about every aspect of

teaching. Sayeski and Paulsen (2012) refer to a frequently-expressed sentiment: “Not all good teachers make good mentors.” They suggest a more appropriate statement, and this researcher agrees: “Only good teachers can be good mentors” (p.127).

### **Cooperating Teachers’ Desire for Power and Respect**

A major finding was that cooperating teachers wanted increased power and respect. They wanted to be treated more like equals and seen as colleagues. They want a more powerful voice in decisions about selection of the student teacher, instructional choices, reassignment, and passing of the field experience. Specifically, they wanted the power to veto a prospective student teacher, veto a student teacher’s instructional idea, have an equal voice in the reassignment of a struggling student teacher, have an equal voice in the pass/fail decision, and contribute to the design of the student teaching program.

**Power to veto a prospective student teacher.** Cooperating teachers in this study indicated they wanted to meet with the student teacher prior to the placement and wanted veto power over the selection of the student teacher. If, upon meeting the student teacher, the cooperating teacher felt this placement would not work due to the student teacher’s personality, academic background, or teaching ability, the cooperating teacher wanted to be able to reject the student teaching applicant. As one cooperating teacher said, “I do not want to deal with a difficult student teacher.”

The literature supports this study by showing the importance of compatibility between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. Student teachers consider the personal characteristics of the cooperating teacher to be six times more important than supervisors or cooperating teachers believe (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; He &

Levin, 2000), and, according to LaBoskey and Richert (2002), compatible placements are more conducive to growth. Cooperating teachers involved in this study agreed with those findings.

**Power to veto a student teacher's instructional idea.** A common complaint by student teachers was that the cooperating teacher did not allow them to use new strategies that they had learned in their college courses. Brookhart and Freeman (1992) and Smith (2007) report a disconnect between strategies that students learn in college classes and those modeled by cooperating teachers. Sinclair, Munns, and Woodward (2005) suggest that many cooperating teachers encourage their student teachers to ignore what they were taught during their teacher education courses because their "real learning" takes place during student teaching. Often researchers and student teachers alike think that cooperating teachers want everything taught their way and are not willing to use new ideas. This negative perception of the cooperating teacher fails to consider valid reasons for vetoing new instructional ideas proposed by student teachers. According to Chesley and Jordan (2012), cooperating teachers pointed out that some student teachers used strategies that lacked a research base. In the present study, cooperating teachers explained that they needed to veto some of the student teacher's ideas if these ideas were not researched based, did not meet the Common Core State Standards, or did not fit into the curriculum in place by the school district. Where there is a disconnect between strategies that student teachers learn in college classes and those modeled by cooperating teachers, a student teacher may be applying new strategies without regard to context.

**An equal voice in reassignment and evaluation.** This study found that cooperating teachers wanted an equal voice in any reassignment of a struggling teacher.

This study found that, during the semester, cooperating teachers wanted to speak as an expert to the university supervisor. They wanted the university supervisor to listen to what they knew because they saw the student teacher five days a week and were better able to assess any progress or lack of progress. Data from this study showed that cooperating teachers wanted an equal voice in decisions about whether to fail the student teacher. They wanted to be seen as colleagues in the supervision process, and they did not appreciate the university supervisor's undermining their authority by overriding their recommendations. In the present study, cooperating teachers complained that often if they evaluated a student teacher negatively, the university supervisor reassigned the student teacher to another cooperating teacher so the person would pass. This created negative feelings toward the supervisor. This study confirms the finding by Hastings (2004) that one possible reason for cooperating teachers to be uncomfortable in the role of evaluator is a lack of agreement between the cooperating teacher and the supervisor concerning standards for the student teacher.

Cooperating teachers did not want their voice to be disregarded, but they also did not want to be the only one making this decision. In that respect, this study confirms the findings of Anderson (2007); Hastings (2004); and Sinclair, Dowson, and Thistleton-Martin (2006) that failing a student teacher is uncomfortable. However, this study disconfirms Sinclair et al.'s finding that cooperating teachers want to avoid anxiety by giving up the power to decide, and does not support Feiman-Nemser's 2001 suggestion that the evaluation process should be considered as an administrative function. When asked about letting an outside evaluator assess the student teacher, this idea met with a resounding No! Anderson (2007) agrees, stating that cooperating teachers must assess

and provide final evaluations of student teachers before they can receive their teaching certificate. The written evaluation at the end of the practicum can “make or break a career” (p. 2).

Cooperating teachers in this study reported that they would like to provide more formative evaluations, and they would like to provide this feedback in a discussion format with all stakeholders present at the meeting. They do not want to be a part of the ‘gotcha’ evaluation.

This research study confirms Sinclair, Dowson and Thistleton-Martin’s 2006 finding about the anxiety cooperating teachers feel when mentoring a weak student teacher. On the other hand, the cooperating teachers in this study wanted to be considered a colleague during the assessment process. They felt the assessment process should be a mutual decision between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher.

Briers and Edwards’ 2001 study documented the importance of the relationship that develops between the teacher candidate and the cooperating teacher. According to these student teachers, the clinical field experience and the mentoring provided by cooperating teachers were valuable components of teacher preparation programs. Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett, and Dunn (2007) indicated that professional development is also important in improving the cooperating teacher–student teacher relationship.

According to Bennett (2002), cooperating teachers want to be included in the preparation and planning of the student teaching program. The present study confirms Bennett’s finding up to a point. When asked if they would like to be consulted about the design of the student teaching program the cooperating teachers said yes. However,



when asked if they wanted to help with the actual design of the student teaching program, there were quite a few ‘maybes,’ indicating that many cooperating teachers were hesitant. A possible deterrent to getting 100% yes responses to this question could be the prospect of an abundance of meetings.

In summary, cooperating teachers wanted more power and respect; however, giving them this power would work only if they have the ability to use power wisely. This, in turn, would depend on careful selection and training of cooperating teachers.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

#### **Recommendations for the University Supervisor**

It is important that the university value cooperating teachers’ commitment and dedication to the student teaching program. It is imperative that the university recognize the challenges that cooperating teachers face and provide the necessary training and materials to ensure the highest quality student teaching experience. This study was designed to listen to the voices of the cooperating teachers. The findings, therefore, can inform teacher preparation programs, cooperating teacher-university communication, and cooperating teacher training and support.

**Better selection of cooperating teachers.** A recommendation for future practice would be for university supervisors to consider the need for better selection of cooperating teachers. Universities should set up interviews with potential cooperating teachers and develop criteria for selection. One possibility is to make it more of an honor to be chosen as a mentor for a student teacher and rely less on the principal’s suggestions, which can often be biased. Principals may select a cooperating teacher as a way to provide an aide in an unruly classroom or as support for a less than stellar cooperating

teacher. Choosing the best possible cooperating teacher should be the top priority of the university.

**Better selection of student teachers.** The implication for future practice is that the university supervisor needs to schedule a meeting between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher before the semester begins in order to allow the cooperating teacher the opportunity to veto an unsuitable student teaching candidate. This screening process would provide a level of comfort for cooperating teachers. Problems and failures during the student teaching semester can often be attributed to incompatibility issues or poorly prepared student teachers.

**Preparation and training before the semester.** Time and time again, research has shown that cooperating teachers do not know what the university's expectations are for them or for the student teacher. From this study the implication is that it is important that university supervisors make time in their busy schedules to meet with cooperating teachers to discuss the university's expectations. One suggestion for future practice is that university supervisors first clarify expectations and then spend time building rapport with the cooperating teacher so feedback would be considered as support and not as judgment of the cooperating teacher's mentoring ability.

Many researchers have found that cooperating teachers need training about the supervision of cooperating teachers. Unfortunately, due to the ever-present myth that cooperating teachers do not want training, very few universities have provided the much-needed training. The implication for future practice is clear: universities need to provide funds and personnel for training of cooperating teachers.

**Support from the university supervisor.** Lack of support was a major complaint from the cooperating teachers in this study. This study recommends that in the future, university supervisors check in and visit every two weeks. Also, cooperating teachers would appreciate better communication about expectations, as well as information about the program. These changes to the student teaching program would require financial backing by the university. Since research strongly supports providing feedback to cooperating teachers about their mentoring of the student teacher, this researcher suggests setting aside time for the university supervisor to meet with the cooperating teacher during the semester and at the conclusion of each semester that the cooperating teacher mentors a student teacher. Future practice could involve giving feedback in multiple forms, and future research could determine which of these is the most effective.

**Power to veto instructional idea.** Another recommendation for practice is for the university supervisor to treat the cooperating teacher as a colleague, listening carefully to the cooperating teacher's concerns and suggestions. For example, where there is a disconnect between strategies that student teachers learn in college classes and those modeled by cooperating teachers, a student teacher may be applying new strategies without regard to context.

**An equal voice in decisions.** A suggestion for future practice is to include the cooperating teacher in any decisions concerning reassignment of a student teacher, not just to inform the cooperating teacher but to actually give the cooperating teacher an equal voice. Because cooperating teachers want to be co-decidors of the final student teacher evaluation, a recommendation for future practice is for universities to require that

the pass-fail decision should be a mutual decision of the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. If there is a dispute, then a third party, such as a state evaluator (using the edTPA portfolio), could be included to break the tie. Another suggestion was for all three of the stakeholders to meet and discuss the areas of concerns with the weak student teacher.

**Opportunity to be part of the design process.** For future practice, cooperating teachers should be asked for their ideas and offered release time to sit on committees to design the student teaching program. Note: During the interviews cooperating teachers offered many specific suggestions for design of the student teaching program. Although these ideas are not a focus of this study, the ideas seem valuable; they appear in Appendix E.

### **Recommendation for the Teacher Education Programs**

The reality is that it can be extremely difficult to find compatible placements for student teachers. Universities need to create partnerships with school districts, and the university supervisor needs to work closely with the cooperating teachers and administration to create settings that would enhance the student teaching field experience. As teacher education programs grapple with the many state and national recommendations, it is imperative that collaboration occurs within the student teaching program and with cooperating teachers as well as with the partner schools. Baker and Milner (2006) point out that the collaborative model needs to take center stage, not simply as a way to prepare cooperating teachers but as a way to create a new collective ethic.

To enhance the work of cooperating teachers, the university must first look at the university supervisors. Selection of university supervisors who have the necessary

disposition to be a collaborator and colleague is imperative. The university supervisor must be respectful and supportive of the cooperating teacher. Also, instead of using site-based supervision, the university should assign supervisors according to their content area specialty; otherwise, student teachers' problems with content may go unrecognized. Next, the university needs to provide training for university supervisors. This training should address expectations for cooperating teachers, ways to support student teachers and cooperating teachers, and ways to deal with difficult situations. Also, because university supervisors play an important role in guiding and supporting cooperating teachers, their workload needs to be reasonable so they can spend more time working with cooperating teachers and student teachers. Finally, to make sure that university supervisors are doing their job, they should be evaluated. This will provide accountability for the student teaching program.

The university should also provide training for cooperating teachers. In past research, as well as this study, cooperating teachers have stated that they would benefit from training. They would like to have a better understanding of the expectations for them and the student teacher, and they would appreciate guidance in their role as a mentor. The cooperating teachers in this study understood how crucial their role as a mentor is in the professional development of the student teacher. Probably new cooperating teachers need more training than experienced veteran cooperating teachers, but all cooperating teachers want some type of training. One suggestion from this study was to employ veteran cooperating teachers as mentors to new cooperating teachers. Since finances are often an issue with universities, one incentive for veteran cooperating teachers to mentor would be CPDUs in return for their expertise.

To support cooperating teachers and student teachers, universities need to authorize more visits to the schools by the university supervisor so that the supervisor can offer support and encouragement to the cooperating support and the student teacher.

Sadler (2006) reported that student teachers were overwhelmed and believed their education programs had not provided adequate preparation. Most universities have a content test that student teachers are required to pass before they can student teach; however, from this study, it appears that the content test is not doing its job and needs to be changed. In addition, the university needs to make sure that student teachers know their content before they are given a placement.

The university needs to raise the standards for both cooperating teachers and student teachers. One way to do this, suggested by a cooperating teacher in the study, would be to create a program to recognize Master Cooperating Teachers. The Master Cooperating Teachers would be the first choice of the university to mentor student teachers, and they would also be the ones asked to mentor new cooperating teachers. Another suggestion would be to create a grading system for student teachers that has three divisions: honors, pass, or fail.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Since research shows that professional development through workshops or coursework can strengthen the rapport between the university supervisor and the cooperating teachers, providing workshops about the mentoring of student teachers could help to establish a bond between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor as well as provide professional development in the form of CPDUs or credit hours toward a degree, certificate, or licensure. This researcher's recommendation for further research is

to investigate what type and how much preparation cooperating teachers would like. Another suggestion for further research would be to investigate whether including a course on the supervision of student teachers within a master's of education program would be feasible. Future research could include surveying teacher education programs that are already providing training for cooperating teachers to examine the effectiveness of the training. Future research should also be conducted to investigate the types of mistakes that cooperating teachers make while mentoring student teachers. This research could be used to help plan workshops on how to mentor a student teacher.

With the Danielson evaluation model in place in many schools, this evaluation tool could be considered a way to decide who gets to mentor a student teacher. If a cooperating teacher is at the highest level of the Danielson evaluation, then possibly that could be one of the criteria for choosing a cooperating teacher. The criteria for the selection of the cooperating teacher need to be examined. What qualifies a cooperating teacher to be selected as a highly effective cooperating teacher? This is a topic for further research.

Although there is plenty of literature on the student teacher's viewpoint of the student teaching experience, there is very little literature on the cooperating teacher's viewpoint. The qualifications for being allowed to student teach should be reexamined. Possibly the clarification of what constitutes a prepared student teacher calls for further research. If we want to keep our cooperating teachers, we need to send them our brightest and finest student teaching candidates.

## Conclusion

The student teaching experience is the most prevalent way colleges and universities link theory of education program with the reality of the classroom (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). The university is a key player in the student teaching program, and it would be difficult to change many parts of this program without the initiative and financial support of the university.

The university needs to recognize the impact cooperating teachers have on student teachers. Soon there could be a shortage of good, qualified cooperating teachers. Some reasons for this shortage are cooperating teachers' accountability for their own students' success, bad experiences with university supervisors and student teachers, retirement of veteran cooperating teachers, and a lack of incentive for working with a student teacher. Cooperating teachers are facing many changes to the teaching profession; they do not need to experience anxiety and tension while mentoring a student teacher. Without the contributions and services provided by dedicated cooperating teachers for the professional development of student teachers, the university's student teaching program, as we know it, could cease to exist.

All of these suggestions require commitment and financial support from the university. However, a better student teaching program will result in better teachers and, in the long run, better-educated citizens.



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APPENDIX A  
SURVEY



## SURVEY

### Section 1. Your Background and Preparation

**Instructions: Please select only one choice response.**

1. Gender  
 Male             Female
  
2. Grade Level  
 Middle School             High School             Middle and High School
  
3. The highest degree I presently hold is:  
 Bachelor's     Master's             Specialist     Doctorate
  
4. The number of years I have been a certified classroom teacher is:  
 less than 5 years     5-10 years             11-15 years             16+ years
  
5. During my years as a professional classroom teacher, I have worked with approximately how many student teachers?  
 1-2             3-5             6 or more
  
6. I have had the following preparation for work with student teachers (**please select all that apply**):  
 University Course             Orientation Session  
 Handbook             Workshop  
 TPAC training              
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 2. Experience with the Student Teaching Process

**Instructions: Please indicate the extent to which you value each of the following as a component of the student teaching process. Please select only one choice response.**

	Extremely Valuable	Somewhat Valuable	Not Valuable	Somewhat Detrimental	Extremely Detrimental
7. Frequent supervisor visits to my classroom to meet or observe the student teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Information about the student teacher prior to the field experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Detailed guidelines about university expectations of the student teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Detailed guidelines about university expectations of the cooperating teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Feedback about my supervision of the student teacher during the field experience

12. Request for my input on the student teaching program

### Section 3. Your Role as a Cooperating Teacher

**Instructions:** In your role as a cooperating teacher, how comfortable are you with each of the following. Please select only one choice response.

	Extremely Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Neutral	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Extremely Uncomfortable
13. Student teacher trying strategies that I myself do not use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Evaluating my student teacher	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Being evaluated in my role as cooperating teacher by the university supervisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Reassignment of a student teacher who is having difficulty in their placement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Section 4. Your Perspective on the Student Teaching Experience

**Instructions:** Please select only one choice response.

17. How often do you prefer the university supervisor to observe in your classroom?  
 weekly  every two weeks  monthly  less than once a month

18. How often would you prefer the university supervisor to check in with you about your student teacher?  
 weekly  every two weeks  monthly  less than once a month

19. Do you see the university supervisor as an authority figure or as a colleague?  
 authority figure  colleague  other \_\_\_\_\_

20. Would you like to have input on the design of the student teaching field experience?  
 yes  no  maybe

21. Who should make the final determination on whether the student teacher should pass student teaching? **Please select all that apply.**
- cooperating teacher
  - university supervisor
  - trained state evaluator who reviews a student teacher's collection of materials (videos, lesson plans, etc.) developed during student teaching

**Please write your response to each question below. If you need additional space, just attach note paper .**

22. What challenges do cooperating teachers face before or during the field experience?

23. Overall, what could the university supervisor do to enhance the cooperating teacher's experience?

**Thank you for your participation!**

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your level of education?
2. How long have you been working with teacher candidates and how many student teachers have you mentored?
3. What type of preparation have you had for working with student teachers and how well did you feel it prepared you for the role of a cooperating teacher?
4. What requirements or preparation should cooperating teachers have to mentor teacher candidates?
5. What do you perceive as the important roles that cooperating teachers need to demonstrate to be considered good mentors of teacher candidates?
6. What challenges or difficult situations have you faced before or during the student teaching field experience and how were you supported by your university supervisor to meet those challenges?
7. What are your thoughts about allowing the student teacher to use new strategies that you have not used in your classroom?
8. Who should ultimately make the determination whether the student teacher successfully completes the student teaching experience and why?
9. Would you like to receive feedback on your work with teacher candidates? Why or why not?
10. What could the university supervisor do to help you while you mentor the teacher candidate?
11. Would you like to have input on the design of the student teaching field experience?  
If so, how would you design or change the student teaching experience?

APPENDIX C  
LETTERS

## INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am a graduate student at Illinois State University. I am conducting a research study called the “Cooperating Teacher Research Study” to identify the concerns of cooperating teachers who provide guidance and support for teacher candidates during student teaching. I am asking that you complete a written survey taking approximately 15-20 minutes; afterward, I may contact you to discuss your responses for perhaps half an hour. (I would audiotape our conversation.) By participating, you may help improve the student teaching experience for cooperating teachers.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no loss of benefits or penalty of any kind. The information provided will not be used in any way to impact assessment of your performance in any future courses.

I will take all precautions to maintain your confidentiality. All responses will be kept under lock and key. Findings will be reported mainly in the aggregate; pseudonyms will be used to report any individual responses in the transcripts and in the final report. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Although, it is not my intent to seek emotionally distressing responses, it is possible that some questions may involve emotionally sensitive material. If so, I will give you names and contact information of individuals you can talk to.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] (cell) or call my advisor Dr. Nancy Latham at 309-438-5451. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2529.

If you are willing to participate in the study as described above, please respond to this email with the statement “I consent to participate in Dawn Paulson’s “Cooperating Teacher Research Study.”

Sincerely,

Dawn Paulson

## RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Through Eastern Illinois University, I have been working in the schools with teacher candidates during both student teaching and practicum. Cooperating teachers have given me valuable ideas about their views on these experiences. For my doctoral research at Illinois State University, I would like to further explore the cooperating teachers' perspectives, specifically their concerns and their beliefs about what factors contribute to a successful field experience.

I hope you can help me by completing a survey. I estimate that the survey will take 15 to 20 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and I will maintain your confidentiality at all times. No real names will appear on any documents reporting the project. If you have any questions about this survey, feel free to contact me.

If you are willing, please reply to this email by typing "Yes, I will participate."

Your opinions will be extremely valuable to the success of this research. The insights you share will be useful in improving the quality of the field experiences for other cooperating teachers and teacher candidates.

Sincerely,

Dawn Paulson





APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Study: Perceptions of Cooperating Teachers About the Mentoring of Student Teachers

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Description of the Study (Review each of the following topics with the interviewee.)

- a) Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the cooperating teacher's viewpoint in the development of the teacher candidate and provide information about what the cooperating teacher feels needs to transpire to develop a better learning environment for both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. This study will examine how prepared the cooperating teacher is to mentor a student teacher and what type of preparation they think they need. It will look at what helps or hinders the cooperating teachers while they mentor the student teacher and it will find what roles cooperating teachers play during the mentoring of the student teacher.
- b) Data Collection: During this interview, I will ask you questions about your mentoring of a student teacher. Please answer as specifically and fully as you can. I will be using a tape recorder to assure the accuracy of my reported findings, and to be sure to protect against any unavoidable mechanical failures, I will also take handwritten notes while we are discussing the questions.
- c) Protection of Data Confidentiality: You will be assigned a pseudonym and transcribed interviews will be kept in secure files with access codes known only to me.
- d) Data Accuracy: After I have transcribed the interview, I will email you if there is a discrepancy in a answer to a question.
- e) Interview Length: Approximate length will be 45 minutes to one hour.  
"I have your permission to record the interview so I will now tum on the recorders." Turn on the recorders and begin the interview.

Thank you

APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEWEES' SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DESIGN  
OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

## INTERVIEWEES' SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

1. ***Better selection of cooperating teachers.*** Beth suggested rethinking the requirements of the cooperating teacher. For example, she would like to see more professional cooperating teachers used for student teaching. Brenda mentioned that it really bothered her when a cooperating teacher is given a student teacher just because they are working on their master's degree. Several interviewees suggested that the requirements for cooperating teachers needed to be more rigorous. Jillian thought it would be good idea to develop a tool and allow practicum students, student teachers, and university supervisors to fill it out so the most highly qualified cooperating teacher is identified. For the selection of cooperating teachers, interviewees suggested two criteria: (a) educational level and teaching experience, and (b) ability, including content knowledge, use of best practices, and overall ability as reflected in good recommendations.

2. ***Educational level and teaching experience.*** When discussing whether the amount of education a cooperating teacher had should be a requirement to mentor a student teacher, there were conflicting thoughts. Rikki stated, "I think they need to have a master's degree and teach 5 years." In opposition to Rikki, Jillian stated, "I just think [cooperating teachers] need to have enough experience, because a master's degree does not mean you are more qualified to have a student teacher." Shannon concurred, stating:

I hate to limit it like that because man sometimes there's a phenomenal teacher who just gets it and does it well without higher education. I think it should be part of the criteria but I don't feel like it should necessarily be a requirement.

Most cooperating teachers stated that 2 or 3 years of experience should be a requirement before a cooperating teacher should be allowed to work with a student teacher.

Karla suggested 4 to 5 years as a good guideline because the experience would help the cooperating teacher be a better mentor. Barbara concurred, stating "I don't know what the magic number would be, but I would think that, if we don't consider them ready to go until they have tenure, why would we think that they'd be ready to teach somebody else?" Peter added a different perspective by pointing out that that cooperating teachers need tenure before they mentor a student teacher, so they would have some protection if something becomes a major problem.

3. ***Solid content knowledge—expert in their field of study.*** When deciding who should be allowed to work with a student teacher, several interviewees stressed that the cooperating teachers definitely need to be knowledgeable about the content they are teaching. Karen stated, that, "[Cooperating teachers] have to know the content well before we can teach it." She continued by stating that:

In science [cooperating teachers] have gone from being a specialist to being a generalist. Sometimes we are asking [cooperating teachers] to teach something that they don't have a passion about and they don't have an understanding of, but they have a license because we have gone to generalist instead of specialist.

Furthermore, there is a disconnect between what the university is teaching and the common core state standards.

Rikki agreed:

The [cooperating teacher] is the content expert, you know what needs to be taught, so you can make accommodations in your classroom. That's good teaching. Learning to accommodate and learning to modify and learning to make changes where you are still being true to the curriculum and the expectations is something that needs to be learned.

It was mentioned several times by the interviewees that if a cooperating teacher is working with a student teacher they need to be knowledgeable about the RTI process and IEPs. According to Jillian, "Student teachers should be placed where there are students with IEPs, so they understand the whole process."

4. *Use of best teaching practices.* The cooperating teachers mentioned the importance of using good teachers as role models for student teachers. Beth stated, "I think if they're a good teacher they're going to be able to isolate what's important and good about teaching, deliver constructive criticism, praise and encourage when needed. You know, I think those are hallmarks of being a good teacher."

5. *Overall ability as reflected in good recommendations.* Several interviewees mentioned that it is very difficult for the university to know who is a really good teacher and who is not a good teacher. Shannon stated, "I feel like whoever is placing [student teachers] really should be in that [cooperating] teacher's classroom prior to the [placement] in order to make the placement "a good fit

Because the university supervisor may not know the cooperating teacher before placing a student teacher with them, some interviewees suggested getting recommendations from the administrator. Barbara mentioned the administrator would know if the cooperating teacher was tenured, and also if they are struggling right now. She put it this way, "Maybe they are a great teacher, but they are going through something. I would place her with you any other day, any other year, but she needs to get through this year." Jillian agreed, "A principal at a high school could say definitely this person is ready for a student teacher even though they don't have their master's degree." On the other hand, there could be disadvantages to using only administration recommendations. When Karen was asked how she thought cooperating teachers were presently being chosen she stated, "Word of mouth, who you know, who's looking for doing less work."

Two cooperating teachers had been part of school districts incorporating the Charlotte Danielson evaluation tool of their teachers. Beth mentioned, "We're using the Charlotte Danielson model, "why not choose teachers to mentor student teachers who are [deemed] proficient to excellent? I think we should be more selective in who we match [student teachers] up with, myself included." She went on to discuss the Charlotte Danielson model. "This is a very strong rubric. I'm finding it incredibly challenging and I think if I come out the other side proficient or above I've earned the chance to train someone who's coming to the program." Barbara concurred, stating, "Why would you not [use the Danielson model]?"

**6. *Partnership arrangements.*** Brenda commented on the benefits of setting up a partnership with the university and then the practicum student could go from practicum with the cooperating teacher straight to student teaching with the same cooperating teacher. She explained that she had a practicum student who the next semester was placed with her to student teach. “The [student teacher] knew my procedures and protocols, so she folded really well into what I was already doing. There was a sense of trust already established and a sense of communication.” Brenda explained that the practicum connection made [student teaching] more comfortable.

Brenda added:

Many student teachers are from the Chicago area, and they often want to go home. In order for this work, student teachers would be required to do their student teaching in the partnership school. If [the student teachers] are going to [attend a university here] they need to make that commitment to finish their degree [at the partnership school.]

On the other hand, Beth mentioned that she would like to see a variety of experiences during student teaching, “because when you work with one teacher it is a singular thing; it’s what that teacher coaches, it’s what that teacher advises.” She went on to say that she didn’t like it that her student teachers have only seen her. She said hitting the ground running and having a good rapport is all positive but it isn’t really what the goal of the student teaching program is. Given the goals, I think it’s much more purposeful if the student teachers could have three-four placements throughout their educational experience. “I think multiple placements are important.” Beth also suggested providing an opportunity for student teachers to observe the other teachers during the student teaching experience. She said, “It inspires you!”

**7. *Changes in type and length of placement.*** Shannon commented that she finds it more difficult to work with a student teacher in the fall, when she is in the process of setting up her classes and getting to know her students. Personally, she would rather have a student teacher in the spring, but she added that she thinks a student teacher gets a more realistic perspective of teaching when they start the year with the students in the fall.

Karla suggested the idea of requiring year-long student teaching. She said one semester is too short. “Once the [student teacher] gets the hang of it ‘Oh by the way, we’re done!’” Karla also thinks they need to be more involved with parents. Karla commented, “Dealing with parents I think that’s the hardest thing for [student teachers.]” She concluded by saying the student teacher also needs time to learn about the community, issues with poverty and developing collaborative relationships with faculty.

Brad also mentioned the possibility of creating a full year of student teaching: I think it was Wisconsin several years ago required a full year of student teaching, and it was an internship more than student teaching because [the student teacher] started the year and ended the year and it was [the cooperating teachers] classroom. There wasn’t another cooperating teacher in [the classroom] and in some ways I think that would be better because the safety net is out.

Brad added,

In the spring [placements] the [student teacher] comes in and the classroom environment has already been established, and [the student teacher] didn't have a hand in it, which is probably one of the most important skills [student teachers] need to learn. If the student teacher had their own room from the beginning, they would have a lot more authority to make the [necessary] decisions. Also, the grading system is set up in the fall.

Wanda would like to see a year of student teaching, but she would like it to be divided up into two parts. The first semester the student teacher would observe, participate in planning lessons with the cooperating teacher and discuss pertinent issues about lessons and students. Then the second semester the student teacher would take over the classroom from the beginning of the semester. By the time the student teacher is ready to take over the class, he/she has been immersed in the classroom and has gotten to know the students and school faculty.

LeAnn is fine with one semester because she thinks it is a "big commitment" to student teach for one year. On the other hand, she thinks if student teaching lasted a year, student teachers with a rural background could observe an inner-city school and vice versa because "student teachers never know where they are going to end up." She also felt that this allows student teachers an opportunity to experience school "outside their comfort zone." LeAnn continued, "I think most [student teachers] probably think they're going to [teach] in a school like [the student teacher attended.]" She thinks it would be a good idea to allow student teachers a choice of a one-semester placement or a one-year placement. Giving a choice would help student teachers who could not afford two semesters. Beth commented, "There's no way [student teachers] could afford it. The semester... was brutal."

**8. *Better assessment of student teachers.*** Interviewees were dismayed by the idea of a portfolio assessment of the student teacher's ability. LeAnn would like to see the elimination of the portfolio assessment. She stated, "I've heard what the [authorities] are going to have the [student teachers] do and it is almost [like] doing a national board portfolio during their first teaching experience. It's a crazy expectation." Karen added, "I'm concerned about the amount of time that [student teachers] are going to spend on the edTPA, especially the written part. . . and the additional stress it's going to put on [the student teachers.]" Not only is the portfolio cumbersome, it is not as good a judge as the cooperating teacher. According to interviewees' responses, the cooperating teacher is better able to assess student teachers' capabilities to teach.

Beth mentioned the benefit of evaluating the student teacher using the assessment tool that her school district is currently using for its teacher, The Danielson Model. However, she added, if it's necessary to have one assessment tool for all districts it would be "huge to align [the rubric] more closely with what [the student teachers] are going to experience."

**9. *Addition of auxiliary duties for student teachers.*** Beth discussed the importance of immersing the student teachers into the educational process. She said, "I think the student teacher gets a watered down version of the teaching experience. [The auxiliary things] teachers deal with actually make the 54-minute classroom time so much

more difficult. Attending IEP meetings and [handling] the parents who call because their kid doesn't play enough on your freshman softball team are the hardest to navigate.”

Brad agreed stating, “Design the student teaching program so the student teachers have to take care of parents, the [student teachers need] to take care of all the hard stuff.”

10. *Calendar of requirements and due dates.* A few cooperating teachers mentioned that each cooperating teacher seemed to handle student teaching in their own way and they would like to see more structure in the student teaching experience. For example,

By week two the student [teacher] should be able to do.... By week three the student [teacher] or by week six they should be taking all day. Then [the cooperating teacher's] role at this point would be supplemental grading or whatever [is designated for] the [cooperating teacher] to do.

Shannon would also like to see a timeline and she added, “I would like clarity as to what [is supposed to be accomplished] during that last week or two. I have had different [university supervisors] give me different answers.”

11. *More content knowledge for student teacher.* A major concern of the interviewees was the placement of student teachers who appeared lacking in content knowledge. One solution presented was to only place student teachers in their area of concentration within the major; for example, not asking a student teacher with a concentration in biology to teach physics. (Another possible solution would be a more rigorous content test as a basis for selection of student teachers.)

Another way for the student teacher to gain more content knowledge is to have the university supervisor with knowledge of that specific content area work with the student teacher. Karla suggested this specific change in the design of the student teaching program.

I think it is a good idea to have a [university] supervisor who knows the content.

The [university supervisor] would know exactly what the [student teacher] was doing in the class. Also, the [student teacher] would learn from the [university supervisor] who is an expert in the [content] area.

According to Brad, in addition to being a support for the student teacher, the university supervisor would be able to assess the student teacher more accurately.

12. *Training of cooperating teachers.* All the interviewees suggested some type of training for cooperating teachers who are working with student teachers, especially concerning the various roles they play as they mentor student teachers. Beth mentioned that student teachers, “pass back a lot of papers and they make a lot of seating charts [mostly non-teaching duties] and it's still almost like a practicum. I ...see a lot of [cooperating] teachers struggling to let go, and I think a training is needed.” In addition, Emily would like to receive evaluation materials, and she would like to have training in how to use them. Jillian suggested the need for more training on the importance of professionalism with the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. Another suggested “training before the cooperating teacher takes on a student teacher and reflections after the semester [to discuss] recommendations for improvement.”



Jillian suggested, training of cooperating teachers could be a criterion for selection, or it could be a requirement that must be completed before the beginning of the student teaching semester begins, depending on the length and format of the training.

I would say the first time [a cooperating teacher has a student teacher] they would need to maybe go to some type of class or workshop or something where these things are gone over, these expectations, what [cooperating teachers] need to do with their student teacher.

**13. Format of university-sponsored training.** The interviewees suggested several different possible formats: a college course, an online webinar, a 2-3 day workshop and a one day training. Shannon stated, “Anyone who wants to do [student teaching] well is going to want to be trained.” Wanda agreed stating, “I think it would be nice to have a course offered. If you want a student teacher, then you take this course.”

**14. Release time.** Brad added that he would like to see release time for the cooperating teachers, so they would have time to meet with the student teacher and debrief. Also, he thinks there needs to be time set aside for the student teacher to meet with other teachers who teach the same content.

In summary, all of the interviewees wanted a voice in program design and had many suggestions for improvement of the student teaching program, including more information about the student teaching experience, changes in format of placement and increase in its length, partnership arrangements, addition of auxiliary duties for student teachers, better assessment of student teachers, better selection of cooperating teachers, more consistency in the student teaching program, and more content knowledge as a prerequisite for student teaching.

**15. Degree in content area.** It was suggested by several interviewees that teacher candidates should be required to get a degree in their content area first then get a teaching license.