

Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #2: Social Support¹

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Introduction

In this second publication of the *Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring* series, the mentorship area focus will be on social support. Social support is most often considered the care of the student teacher's problems (Alemdag & Simsek, 2017; Scandura, 1992). Kram's (1983) laid the foundation for the work of Scandurina and Ragins (1993) related to the functions that support a positive mentoring relationship: career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling. Through social support, cooperating teachers help their student teachers find solutions to the problems that arise during the internship. Most importantly, this area also includes a high level of quality communication between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. This publication will describe the major areas of social support and provide real-world examples of how to implement them during the internship. The areas of social support were developed from literature by Alemdag & Simsek (2017) and Scandura (1992), and research in the space of agricultural education and cooperating teacher mentor practices (Barry, 2019; Nesbitt et al., 2022). This publication also provides an overview of the *Best Practices for Mentoring* series in Appendix A.

Components of Social Support

1. *Communicating Regularly*

Regular and consistent communication involves the cooperating teacher checking in with the student teacher daily and weekly. The cooperating teacher should be available for face-to-face conversations, as well as accessible for helping the student teacher via phone calls, texts, and/or emails. Some examples of communicating regularly are (1) checking in with the student teacher each morning before classes begin; (2) checking in between classes with the student teacher to see if any problems have arisen; and (3) being available to answer questions the student teacher might have outside normal school hours.

2. *Communicating Openly*

Communicating openly with the student teacher involves honest and candid discussions. Cooperating teachers should openly discuss all aspects of their job with their student teachers. This includes highlights of their daily responsibilities, as well as the challenges of their role as an agriscience teacher and FFA Advisor. In addition, cooperating teachers should seek to discuss the student teacher's performance, including positive and constructive feedback. Some examples of communicating openly are (1) discussing a less-than-stellar lesson execution; (2) talking through the improvement of classroom management skills; and (3) openly discussing the challenges that teachers experience in the school environment (i.e., school district policies, parent/teacher conferences, and communicating with administration).

3. *Encouraging Efforts and Staying Attuned to Mindset*

Encouraging and supporting the student teacher's effort, as well as staying attuned to their mindset, attitude, and well-being, involves actively listening to the student teacher and being aware of any changes in their frame of mind. The cooperating teacher should be able to identify when their student teacher is having a bad lesson or day and be able to discuss strategies with them on how to work through challenges of their internship and the teaching profession. This component also emphasizes the importance for the cooperating teacher to discuss strategies for finding a work/life balance with the student teacher. Some examples of encouraging efforts and staying attuned to mindset are (1) acknowledging the student teacher's frustration and offering support on how to manage and work through it; (2) sharing personal challenges with work/life balance with the student teacher and how to work on improving this area; and (3) providing positive feedback, even during challenging times, in order to help the student teacher develop a growth mindset.

4. *Weekly Comprehensive Feedback*

In addition to conversations throughout the week and in between daily lessons, weekly comprehensive feedback should be provided on performance and progress in an uninterrupted setting (Figure 1). This should occur

without other distractions, such as students or other teachers, and be purposively scheduled as one-on-one time. The cooperating teacher should use what has been observed as the basis of the conversation and include opportunities to discuss what went well, as well as potential adjustments to lessons and classroom management (Figure 2). Some examples of weekly comprehensive feedback are (1) determining a set time each week to meet; (2) holding meetings in an area that is private and will not be interrupted by other teachers or students; and (3) utilizing this time to discuss lesson performance using observational notes from previous lessons.

7 KEYS to EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Effective feedback = specific information you're offering a teacher in their efforts to reach an identified goal.








	GOAL REFERENCED
	Effective feedback for student teachers required that they have a goal, are taking action to achieve that goal, and are receiving information on how their actions are helping them meet that goal.
	TANGIBLE & TRANSPARENT
	Remember...feedback must be concrete! Give student teachers specific evidence you observed. This might sound like: "I counted 12 out of 29 students on task after the lesson started."
	ACTIONABLE
	Student teachers want to know...what should I do more of or less of next time, to help me achieve my goal? Actionable feedback helps them make clear decisions in response to this question.
	USER FRIENDLY
	Too much feedback can be counterproductive. One or two, high leverage next steps will work just great.
	TIMELY
	The sooner you can give your feedback to a student teacher, the better! The lesson is still fresh in their minds, and the feedback will be more relevant.
	ONGOING
	Ongoing feedback ensures student teachers have time to implement the feedback you've given them and reflect on progress made.
	CONSISTENT
	When feedback is consistent, both cooperating teachers and student teachers become better at giving and receiving feedback. It's a partnership and everyone wins!

Figure 1. 7 Keys to Effective Feedback.
Credit: MsHouser.com

Observation Look-Fors

What should Cooperating Teachers give Student Teachers feedback on?	Student Movement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive: Quickly transitioning, following directions, taking initiative Negative: Getting out of seat frequently, fidgeting, interfering with others
Monitoring/Checks for Understanding	Clarity of Presentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring student progress during independent work time Pauses at appropriate points in lesson to check for understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modeling Clarifying Providing clear directions
Material Management	Participation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student and teacher materials organized to support flow of lesson Handouts are clear, meaningful, and appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of cold call to ensure variety of student voices Use of discussion protocols Opportunities for partner or small group collaborative work
Strategic Questioning	Student Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect to lesson target/objective Assess understanding Stretch student thinking beyond yes/no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive: Volunteering responses, on task student-student interaction, listening, carrying out roles Negative: Speaking out while off task, off task student-interaction, interrupting, interfering
Differentiation	Pacing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scaffolding of lesson to meet diverse student needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too fast, too slow? Time spent in each lesson component
Classroom Arrangement	Use of Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Furniture placement Visual supports Environment for learning Provisions for multiple use of space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions from one activity to another Time spent with individual students or small groups Time spent getting lesson/class started

Figure 2. Observation Look-Fors.
Credit: MsHouser.com

The area of social support that should be provided by cooperating teachers for their student teachers includes the four components of communicating regularly, communicating openly, encouraging efforts and staying attuned to mindset, and the use of weekly comprehensive feedback. When student teachers feel supported in this area, they are more likely to have a positive internship experience and remain in the profession (Edgar et al., 2011; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Rocca, 2005). For additional information related to social support, check out www.UFCooperatingTeachersSupport.com.

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Appendix A: Best Practices for Mentoring: Cooperating Teacher Series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cooperating Teachers' Best Practices for Mentoring #5: Implementation and Adoption of a Cooperating Teacher Support Program

An overview for school-based agricultural education (SBAE) program coordinators on how to implement or enhance a research-based cooperating teacher preparation and support program for mentoring student teachers.

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