

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ON THE SELECTION CRITERIA AND TRAINING OF COOPERATING TEACHERS; STRATEGIES TO FOSTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to survey and examine the selection criteria used by school districts administrators to select cooperating teachers to work with student teachers in Central New Jersey. Furthermore, the study sought out the perceptions of school district administrators with regards to the selection process and training of cooperating teachers. The study focused on the cooperating teacher selection criteria, process, qualifications, and administrators' perceptions of the qualifications deemed important. The cooperating teacher plays a crucial role in preparing student teachers to become well-qualified and proficient teachers. This key person serves as the primary teacher educator (model, coach, and evaluator) for teacher candidates. Because of the close contact and extensive period of placement, the cooperating teacher has a unique opportunity to profoundly influence the student's professional growth. Data revealed that there was no written criterion or process for selecting cooperating teachers. The selection was based on volunteers; a supervision course or experience was not important criterion for selecting cooperating teachers. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the administrators indicated that teachers did not know about the selection criteria. Positive role model, classroom management, and effective communication were perceived to be important attributes for selecting cooperating teachers. Overall, there is no evident pattern or criteria commonly used by administrators when deciding who should hold these critical roles, and there was no evident training program or process of those selected to be cooperating teachers.

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1 Sumario en español

El propósito de este estudio fue de inspeccionar y revisar los criterios de selección utilizados por administradores de distritos de escuela para seleccionar maestros que cooperan para trabajar con maestros de estudiante en Nueva Jersey Central. Además, el estudio buscó las percepciones de administradores de distrito de escuela con consideraciones al proceso de selección y entrenando de cooperar a maestros. El estudio se centró en los criterios de selección de maestro que cooperan, el proceso, los requisitos, y las percepciones de administradores de los requisitos creyeron importante. El maestro que cooperan juega un papel crucial a preparar a estudiante maestros para llegar a ser maestros bien-calificados y capaces. Esta persona clave sirve como el educador primario de maestro (modelo, el entrenador, y el evaluador) para candidatos de maestro. A causa del contacto cercano y el período extenso de colocación, el maestro que cooperan tiene una oportunidad extraordinaria para influir profundamente el crecimiento profesional de estudiante. Los datos revelaron que no había criterio ni proceso escritos para seleccionar cooperar maestros. La selección fue basada en voluntarios; un curso de supervisión o experiencia no fueron criterios importantes para seleccionar cooperar maestros. El setenta y dos por ciento (72%) de los administradores indicó que maestros no supieron de los criterios de selección. El modelo a imitar positivo, gestión de aula, y comunicación efectiva fueron percibidos para ser atributos importantes para seleccionar cooperar maestros. En términos generales, no hay pauta ni criterios evidentes comúnmente utilizado por administradores al decidir que debe tener estos papeles críticos, y no había programa de capacitación ni proceso evidentes de éstos que fueron seleccionados para estar cooperando maestros.

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2 Introduction

It has been argued that student teaching is the most important component of any teacher training program (Montgomery (2000)). Most teachers claim that the most important elements in their professional education were the school experience found in student teaching (Guyton & McIntyre, (1990)). Cooperating teachers are generally understood to be classroom teachers who participate in the education program by agreeing to work with student teachers in their classroom. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) noted that cooperating teachers “set the effective and intellectual tone and also shape what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their roles as teacher educator” (p. 256). Traditionally, student teaching practicum has been viewed as critical to the development of pre-service teachers’ pedagogical skills, socialization into the teaching profession, and as the most effective preparation for teaching and learning the professional role of a teacher (Tannellhill and Goc-Karp 1992, Carnegie Task Force 1986, Johnson 1982).

Cooperating teachers have played and continue to play significant roles in the process of the development of student teachers. However, little research has been conducted on how they are selected and trained. Liftquist (1986) argues that the cooperating teacher is the most influential individual in pre-service teacher undergraduate preparation. Posner (1989) and Roe, Ross and Burns (1989) suggest that the cooperating teacher is the individual most responsible for the quality of experience the student teacher receives. For their key role, the above authors concluded the qualities cooperating teachers bring to the student teaching experience must be considered and better understood. Moreover, Smith (1991) argued that cooperating teachers help to convert student teachers into teachers by taking full responsibility of the student teacher’s instruction. Ironically, not much emphasis and effort have focused on how they are selected and prepared for this essential role. Ramanathan & Wilkins-Canter (2003) concurred when they raised a question “to what extent are cooperating teachers adequately prepared to observe, analyze, guide, and evaluate the field experience teacher?” (p. 101). Tannellhill and Goc-Karp (1992) argue that although the student teaching practicum has been the focus of considerable research efforts, little attention has been given to the organization and implementation of this student teaching practicum.

The purpose of this study was to examine cooperating teacher selection criteria, process, and the perceptions of school administrators on the desired qualifications and characteristics of cooperating teachers. Specific research questions guiding this study were: (a) what, if any, are the selection criteria for cooperating teachers? (b) What are the perceptions of school district administrators with regards to the selection and qualification of cooperating teachers? (c) What training or professional development do cooperating teachers have to work and supervise student teachers?

Through our research, we not only wanted to examine the selection criteria and qualifications of cooperating teachers, but we also wanted to explore the training or professional development that is given to these teachers to prepare them for this important job. Hence, our study used the results to recommend strategies that could be used to foster collaboration between universities and school districts to train cooperating teachers in supervision and mentoring of student teachers. Goodlad (1990) suggested creating collaborative “centers of pedagogy” devoted to improving teaching practice in our schools’ nation. The Holmes Group (1990) labeled these school/university partnerships as Professional Development Schools with the mission of fostering development of novice professionals, continuing development of experienced professionals, and allowing research and development within the teaching profession.

2.1 Cooperating Teachers’ Qualities

Koerner & O’Connell’s (2002) study, ‘Exploring roles in student teaching placements,’ found that most all participants agreed that good cooperating teachers and supervisors were perceived to be good mentors and

role models; they were professionals who took their time to share their knowledge of good teaching, and offered support and encouragement (2002). Koerner and O'Connell also found that professional dispositions and personal qualities were important attributes of cooperating teachers. Professional dispositions included such attributes as mentoring, collegiality and openness. Enz and Cok (1992), in their study of student and cooperating teachers' perceptions of the roles and functions of cooperating teachers, had the same findings when they concluded that, cooperating teachers ought to be selected because they demonstrate the qualities of effective mentors. In addition to instructional and management strengths, the authors found that effective cooperating teachers should be caring, active listeners who are sensitive to the views of others and who are able and willing to articulate the intricacies of their craft and the subtleties of the school culture.

While effective teaching is perceived as an important attribute of a cooperating teacher, Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) argued that this attribute does not translate to good supervision. They noted that most cooperating teachers have been selected on the false assumption that they are effective teachers, and, therefore, they should be effective supervisors. They concluded that effective teaching does not address issues related to being an effective supervisor, which include, but are not limited to: observation skills, analyzing teaching performance, and conferencing.

2.2 School and University Collaboration

The past two decades have been times of heightened emphasis on changing structures between universities and public schools towards collaboration as means of improving the education and preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers. Research indicates there has been less partnership and collaboration between schools and universities in preparing that teacher preparation for the future. (Moore 2001, Alvermann, Dollion, & O'Brien 1990; Goodlad 1984; Holmes Group 1990). A quality driven field experience cannot be accomplished without a cooperative partnership with PK-12 schools. In 1984, Goodlad observed that the joining of schools (and school district) and universities is commonly purposive and mutually beneficial; linkages are a virtually untried and, therefore, unstudied phenomenon. There must be a collaborative effort between the college of education at the university and the schools to maximize resources and efforts to improve the quality of the pre-service teacher (Goodlad, 1991 & 1994; Grow- Maienza, 1996). The Holmes Group issued the challenge to focus attention on the formation of university/public school partnerships as a means of bringing practicing teachers and administrators together with the university faculty in collaboration efforts to improve teaching and learning on the part of their respective students (Holmes Group 1986, 1990).

Whitford, Schlecty and Shelor (1987) examined partnerships and identified three types of collaboration: cooperative, symbiotic and organic. In cooperation, the relationship is a short-term collaboration in which information is shared or a service is provided by one partner to the other. Whitford et al. (1987) described the key features of symbiotic collaboration as being a mutual and reciprocal relationship, which does not lead to any change within partners (Sampson, Foote, Fleenor, & Moore 2001). In an organic collaboration model, partners are equally vested in the goals and issues of the collaborative relationship, and the process ultimately changes both partners (Dixson & Ishler, 1992). Several studies concur that a significant premise of a successful university/public school partnership is that the relationship progresses beyond cooperation and symbiosis (Goodlad, (1988) to an organic collaboration model (Dixson & Ishler, 1992; Schlecty & Whitford, 1988).

It would seem essential that those persons selected as cooperating teachers would be both competent teachers and have a supervisory skill set. Philips and Bagget-McMinn suggested that another method to help cooperating teachers in their roles as mentors is to provide workshops and seminars to improve communication between cooperating teachers, colleges of education, and the student teachers. Didham (1992) found that cooperating teachers who have had training in supervision skills provide a more stable field experience, give more specific feedback and provide a more positive affective experience to the students. Furthermore, Didham suggested that university supervising teachers and cooperating teachers should attend a yearly training together to ensure continuity of programming and mentoring. Brown (1979) pointed out that teacher preparation institutions show a lack of concern for the competency of supervisors of student teachers. Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) concurred with Brown when they suggested that, although teacher

training programs reflect a concern for supervisor competency in the criteria they suggest are important, actual placements of student teachers with trained cooperating teachers are a few. Furthermore, they argue that that this is an illustration that placement of student teachers with competent supervisors is not a priority of teacher training institutions, or at least one which they are able to control. They concluded that at best the results indicate a haphazard approach to the selection of cooperation teachers and placement of student teachers. Caires (2007) argued that the effectiveness and productivity of the student teaching practice depend significantly on the help and support provided by the university and school supervisors.

2.3 New Jersey Code and Practice

Setting standards for the selection of cooperating teachers has been an issue in teacher training programs for some time. Over the years, there has always been a conflict in philosophy over the control of student teaching experience. While the schools of education train students in content and pedagogy and the New Jersey Administrative Code at NJAC 6A:9(c) requires “input from the teacher candidate’s preparing institution,” in practice universities have no real role or they find their role sharply limited when it comes to student teaching placement. The process is such that when students complete specific coursework and early field experiences (observations with limited teaching components), they are shuffled into the school systems for student teaching placement. The universities have no practical influence over who will be selected for cooperating teacher service. The large numbers of student teacher candidates make slots for student teaching difficult to secure, especially in certain areas of certification. It is understood that the school districts are doing a collegial service, a favor, for the universities and the aspiring teachers. It is also understood that the schools retain all responsibility for what happens in the classroom and control the cooperating teacher selection process.

Student teaching is meant to be an internship experience during which the student teacher is gradually given the full load of a working teacher and for several weeks teaches under supervision. It is the opportunity to implement pedagogical practices and theory, under the control of ‘veteran’ teachers, who are certified in regular and/or special education. Although universities provide qualified, usually state certified, clinical supervisors (often retired school supervisors), who work as adjunct professors, it relinquishes direct daily control of the student teacher’s activities to the school and cooperating teacher. University supervisory personnel visit the classroom periodically during a semester of 15 weeks and, while they document progress and demonstration of teaching effectiveness. Given a roughly estimated 6 period teaching day, if the university supervisor observes the student teacher every other week he/she will see perhaps 8 out of over 400 lessons.

The New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A 9-10.3(c)) requires cooperating teachers to have 3 years teaching experience, a standard instructional certificate, certification that “coincides” with that sought by the candidate and to be a full time faculty member with demonstrated expertise in the field of mentoring / supervision. “Coincides” is not defined in the code and “prior demonstrated mentoring / supervisory experience” is neither defined nor explained. Many New Jersey teachers serve as mentors for first year teachers, but there is no systemic linkage to the student teaching experience. Supervision roles are reserved for those holding specific certification in New Jersey, and it would be rare that a supervisor in a school would also serve as the cooperating teacher. The intention of the code is consistent with the role, but the observance of this aspect of code is ignored. Nagle (1991) suggested that the cooperating teacher needs to be qualified in the role as mentor to help enable the student teacher apply university-based knowledge to the day-to-day routine of teaching.

NJAC 6A 9-10.3(e) requires universities of higher education to “make available. . . professional development opportunities and experiences to increase cooperating teachers’ expertise in the field”. It does not specify the nature of these opportunities or experiences, nor does it require any cooperating teacher to attend or meet any standard as a result of such participation.

The New Jersey Statutes Annotated 18A and the New Jersey Administrative Code (other than as noted above) are silent on the criteria to be used in the selection or training of teachers, cooperating teachers. Some districts have a policy, but a review of model policies provided by the New Jersey School Boards and Strauss Esmay, the two largest model policy providers to public schools in the state, reveals that these

policies are procedural in nature and direct administrators to complete certain steps to garner approvals but do not speak to the qualitative decision making process. The region is also served by the Trenton Diocese, which runs parochial schools. The Trenton Diocesan school policy leaves all cooperating teacher selection decisions to the local parochial schools.

It seems that cooperating teacher selection and training are functions of tradition rather than established best practices. It could be argued that the system has “worked” for as long as there were student teachers learning under the guidance cooperating teachers, but has it? Arthur Levine (2006), the Chancellor of New York City Schools, described teacher education as, “like wild west Dodge City, unruly and chaotic.” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a speech at Columbia University (2009) recently criticized the nation’s schools of education saying that they are doing a “mediocre job” and calling for linkage between the schools of education and outcomes in the classroom.

Research contends that traditional student teaching practicum has been viewed as critical to the development of pre-service teachers’ pedagogical skills, socialization into the teaching profession, and as the most effective preparation for teaching and learning the professional role of a teacher (Tannhill and Goc-Karp (1992), Johnson, 1982, Carnegie Task Force, 1986). Philips and Bagget-McMinn (2000) found that, although many states have their own procedural requirements for eligibility to supervise students teachers, most institutions seem to use the requirements only as guidelines, enabling waivers of those requirements when the emergencies arise. Goodlad (1983, 1990) suggested that cooperating teachers will not be anything special unless they are selected with deliberate care as there is more to a teacher’s job than what occurs in the classroom.

3 Method

The population of this study included 81 school administrators who attend the monthly mandatory meetings in two counties in central New Jersey. A list of all administrators (superintendents) or school districts representatives was compiled at the beginning of the study. Consent letter were sent to the chair persons of the administrators and participants prior to the study. School administrators representing school districts attending state required meetings in Central New Jersey were invited to participate in the survey during the 2008-2009 school year. Questionnaires were distributed on each county at the beginning of their meeting. In addition some participants from these counties were solicited at the annual New Jersey School Board / New Jersey Association of School Administrators Convention. The questionnaires were coded to guard against duplicating participants and to keep the participants anonymous. Fifty-eight (58) surveys were returned, 52 surveys were deemed useable for this study.

3.1 Instrument

The instrument was developed based on the review of literature on cooperating teacher selection criteria, supervision literature, and supervision textbooks (e.g., Clarke 2001; Caires & Almeida 2007; Glickman & Bey, 1990; Pelletier, 2000). The survey was twofold; the first part asked the participants to indicate what selection criteria they currently used to select cooperating teachers (if any). The second part of the instrument was based on a four point Likert scale (VI = Very Important, must be considered, IM = Important, should be considered, SI = Somewhat Important, could be considered, and NI = Not Important) to measure the perceptions of administrators on how importance or not important the following cooperating teacher characteristics would be for selecting cooperating teachers; teaching experience, interpersonal skills and professional attributes. A point 4 value was assigned for a Very Important to a 1 for a Not Important. Also several opened ended questions were used to measure any other criteria or opinion about the selection process or procedure.

After developing the instrument, the researchers used three faculty members, who have extensive experience with student teaching and school administration, to review the items and structure of the instrument for content validity. They were instructed to assess each item for the degree to which it addressed underlying supervision constructs, and whether its wording and content were appropriate. In addition, the content

experts were instructed to suggest additional items. When three of the five content experts agreed on a particular item, that item was accordingly retained, modified, or changed. Creswell (2008) and Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) defined content validity as the extent to which the questions on the instrument and the scores from these questions are representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the content or skills.

Furthermore, a pilot study using 10 school administrators was conducted for internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Calculations of internal consistency and test-retest reliability were made for the combined and individual subscales using Cronbach's alpha (α) and intra-class correlation coefficient R , respectively. According to Clark-Carter, (1997), Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 denote satisfactory reliability, the instrument was judged internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$ Teaching experience, 8 items); 0.78 (Interpersonal Characteristics, 13 items); 0.77 (Professional skills, 11 items).

4 Results

As shown in Table 1, the majority school administrators who participated in the study were male (35) or 66%; only 18 or 34% were females. Eighty-one percent were superintendents, while 19% assistant superintendents, human resources directors, principals, or supervisors. Seventy-five percent of the participants have been in their positions for less than five years.

Table 1

Demographics Data (N= 55)

Characteristics	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender		
Male	35	66
Female	18	34
Position		
Superintendent	43	81.1
Other	10	18.9
Year in Position		
1-5	40	75.4
6-10	11	20.8
11-15	2	3.8
Age		
Less than 30	6	11.3
30-40	36	67.9
41-50	3	5.7
51-60	6	11.3
61 and above	2	3.8
School Type		
Public	53	100
Student Enrollment		
Less than 2, 000	41	74.5
2000 and A bove	14	25.5
Organization		
PK-12	28	52.8
PK-8	9	17.0
PK-6	11	20.8
9-12	4	7.5
Other (vocational)	1	1.9

2

The participants were asked about their cooperative teacher selection criteria in the last three years, whether they have a written policy or criteria, and whether teachers knew about the criteria and lastly if Board of Education approval was needed. Table 2 illustrates the responses.

Table 2

²<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table1.PNG/image>

Procedure/Policy

Characteristic	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>
District accepted student teachers in last 3 years	48	(90.6%)	3	(5.7%)	2	(3.8%)
District has written criteria/policy	18	(34.0%)	13	(24.5%)	22	(41.5)
Are teacher aware of the written criteria/policy	15	(28.3%)	20	(37.7%)	18	(34.0%)
BOE approval required	39	(73.6%)	2	(3.8 %)	12	(22.6%)

3

The instrument solicited two responses from participants. The first responses were on whether the participants used the provided criteria to select cooperating teachers. The second part asked the participants to rate the criteria on a scale of 1-4. (1=Not important, SI = Somewhat important, could be considered, IM= Important, should be considered, and VI= Very Important, must be considered)

The results on whether the administrators used the criteria are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Education

Characteristic	Yes		No	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Has a bachelor's degree	50	(94.3)	3	(5.7)
Has a master's degree	18	(34.0)	35	(66.0)
Has taken a supervision course	7	(13.2)	46	(86.8)
Has a certificate in the same area of instruction	48	(86.8)	7	(13.2)

4

Table 4 below show the responses on the perception of the educational qualification of cooperating teacher selection criteria.

Table 4

³<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table2.PNG/image>

⁴<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table3.PNG/image>

Education				
Characteristic	VI	IM	SI	NI
	<i>Freq (%)</i>	<i>Freq (%)</i>	<i>Freq (%)</i>	<i>Freq (%)</i>
Has a bachelor's degree	38 (71.7)	9 (17)	3 (5.7)	3 (5.7)
Has a master's degree	3 (5.5)	15 (28.3)	27 (50.9)	8 (15.1)
Has taken a supervision course	3 (5.7)	8 (15.1)	22 (41.5)	20 (37.7)
Has a certificate in the area of instruction	34 (64.2)	8 (15.1)	9 (17.0)	2 (3.8)

5

Table 5 below, illustrates the responses on whether teaching experience is used as a criteria for selecting cooperating teachers.

Table 5

Teaching Experience				
Characteristic	Yes		No	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Has a 3 years teaching experience	42	(79.2)	11	(20.8)
Has 1 year experience in district	34	(64.2)	19	(35.8)
Has mentoring or supervision experience	23	(43.4)	30	(56.6)
Teacher serves in grade which is not tested	22	(41.5)	31	(58.5)
Has taught the same grade level or subject	32	(60.4)	21	(39.6)
Is a tenured teacher	37	(69.8)	16	(30.2)
Is full time teacher	50	(94.3)	3	(5.7)
Has past experience working with student teachers	31	(58.5)	22	(41.5)

6

Table 6, shows the perceptions about the selection criteria on the teaching experience variables/characteristics.

Table 6

⁵ <http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table4.PNG/image>

⁶ <http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table5.PNG/image>

Teaching Experience

Characteristic	VI	IM	SI	NI
	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%
Has a 3 years teaching experience	38(71.7)	6(11.3)	7(13.2)	2(3.8)
Has 1 year experience in district	24(45.3)	14(26.4)	9(17.0)	6(11.3)
Has mentoring or supervision experience	14(26.6)	17(32.1)	19(35.8)	3(5.7)
Teacher serves in grade which is not tested	5(9.4)	11(20.8)	11(20.8)	26(49.1)
Has taught the same grade level or subject	17(32.1)	20(37.7)	10(18.9)	6(11.3)
Is a tenured teacher	30(56.6)	11(20.8)	7(13.2)	5(9.4)
Is full time teacher	38(71.7)	10(18.9)	3(5.7)	2(3.8)
Experience working with student teachers	8(15.1)	20(37.7)	17(32.9)	8(15.1)

7

Table 7 illustrates the responses on general variables.
Table 7

Organizational Skills

Characteristic	Yes		No	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Demonstrates an expertise in mentoring	43	(81.1)	10	(18.9)
Has good organizational skills	49	(92.5)	4	(7.5)
Has good interpersonal skills	43	(81.1)	10	(18.9)
Willingness to discuss concerns	42	(79.2)	11	(20.8)
Good role model	44	(83.0)	9	(17.0)
Positive attitude	45	(84.9)	8	(15.1)
Volunteer to have student teacher	39	(73.6)	14	(26.4)
Teacher would benefit from student teacher	26	(49.1)	27	(50.9)
High level of professional ethics	40	(75.5)	13	(24.5)
Master teacher	40	(75.5)	13	(24.5)
Works cooperatively with colleagues	42	(79.2)	11	(20.8)
Displays professional growth	43	(81.1)	10	(18.9)
Openness to inclusion	44	(83.0)	9	(17.0)

8

Table 8 illustrates the administrators' perceptions of the general selection criteria.
Table 8

⁷<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table6.PNG/image>

⁸<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table7.PNG/image>

Teaching Experience

Characteristic	VI	IM	SI	NI
	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%	Freq/%
Demonstrates an expertise in mentoring	17(32.1)	21(39.6)	11(20.8)	4(7.5)
Has good organizational skills	27(50.9)	22(41.5)	4(7.5)	-
Has good interpersonal skills	33(62.3)	16(30.2)	4(7.5)	-
Willingness to discuss concerns	27(50.9)	23(43.4)	3(5.7)	-
Good role model	42(79.2)	8(15.1)	3(5.7)	-
Positive attitude	41(77.4)	9(17.0)	3(5.7)	-
Volunteer to have student teacher	24(45.3)	16(30.2)	10(18.9)	3(5.7)
Teacher would benefit from student teacher	11(20.8)	12(22.6)	13(24.5)	17(32.1)
High level of professional ethics	34(64.2)	15(28.3)	4(7.5)	-
Master teacher	21(39.6)	23(43.4)	9(17.0)	-
Works cooperatively with colleagues	31(58.5)	18(34.0)	4(7.5)	-
Displays professional growth	31(58.5)	19(35.8)	3(5.7)	-
Openness to inclusion	35(66.0)	13(24.5)	5(9.4)	-

Table 9 shows the results on the professional skills variables for cooperating teacher selection criteria.
Table 9

Characteristics

Professional Skills	Yes	No
	Freq (%)	Freq (%)
Maintains positive classroom environment	46(86.8)	7(13.2)
Develops good lesson plans	46(86.8)	7(13.2)
Achieves excellent test scores	34(64.2)	19(35.8)
Can benefit from student teacher (technology)	29(54.7)	24(45.3)
Classroom management skills	46(86.8)	7(13.2)
Strong oral and written communication skills	44(83)	9(17.0)
Has unique skills to offer to student teacher	40(75.5)	13(24.5)
Excellent command of content	42(79.3)	11(20.8)
End of career and has protégé to give to student teacher	22(41.5)	31(58.5)
Uses technology effectively	41(76.4)	12(22.6)
Works well with all diverse student population	44(83)	9(17.0)

⁹<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table8.PNG/image>
¹⁰<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table9.PNG/image>

Table 10 below shows the administrators' perceptions on the professional skills selections criteria. Maintaining a positive classroom environment (75.5%), developing good lesson plans (71.7%), classroom management skills (71.7%), and the ability to work with a wide range of student with disabilities (69.8%) were perceived as importance ingredients for cooperating teachers.

Table 10

Characteristics Professional Skills	VI	IM	SI	NI
	<i>Freq/%</i>	<i>Freq/%</i>	<i>Freq/%</i>	<i>Freq/%</i>
Maintains positive classroom environment	40(75.5)	11(20.8)	2(3.8)	-
Develops good lesson plans	38(71.7)	11(20.8)	4(7.5)	-
Achieves excellent test scores	17(32.1)	22(41.5)	12(22.6)	2(3.8)
Can benefit from student teacher	20(37.7)	11(20.8)	6(11.3)	16(30.2)
Classroom management skills	38(71.7)	12(22.6)	3(5.7)	-
Oral and written communication skills	28(52.8)	19(35.8)	6(11.4)	-
Has unique skills to offer to student teacher	20(37.7)	23(43.4)	9(17.0)	1(1.9)
Excellent command of content	28(52.8)	17(32.1)	6(11.3)	2(3.8)
End of career and has protégé to give to student teacher	12(22.6)	10(18.9)	15(28.3)	16(30.2)
Uses technology effectively	21(39.6)	23(43.4)	7(13.2)	2(3.8)
Works well with all diverse student population	37(69.8)	11(20.8)	5(9.4)	-

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5 Findings, Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Findings

The results of this study indicate that even though 90% of the schools accepted student teachers only a third (34%) had a written policy on how to select cooperating teachers. Interestingly only 28% indicated that this policy is known by teachers in the district. The results also showed that there was not much difference based on the school size on the selection criteria. Board of Education approval of student teachers was indicated as required by 74% of the respondents. Administrators also indicated that having a master's degree (66%) and a course in supervision (87%) were not important criterion used to select cooperating teachers. When asked about their perception on having a master degree and a supervision course as a criterion for selecting cooperating teachers, 56% and 79% rated it as being *somewhat important* and *not important*. Only 34% and 21% rated it as being *very important* or *moderately important*.

The leading major criterions were: maintaining positive classroom environment (95%); good role model (94%); good organizational skills (94%); positive attitude (94%); shown willingness to discuss concerns (93%); developing good lesson plans (92%). The second major finding was that 73% indicated that cooperating teachers were selected based on volunteering. Seventy six percent perceived volunteers as an important

¹¹<http://cnx.org/content/m38306/latest/table10.PNG/image>

criterion that should be used to selecting cooperating teachers. Surprisingly, 38% indicated they placed student teachers based on their belief that the cooperating teacher would benefit from the student teacher. Sixty percent of the administrators indicated that they did not assign cooperating teachers based on the fact the teacher is at the end of their career and have a lots expertise to share.

Sixty-nine percent indicated that tenure was a criterion that they used to select cooperating teachers; seventy-nine percent perceived tenure to be an important criterion for selecting cooperating teachers. Fifty eight per cent indicated that they used prior experience with student teachers as a criterion in selection.

5.2 Conclusions

Although required in the administrative code, the expectation that cooperating teachers would have some mentoring or supervisory background is neither used as a selection criteria by school administrators nor is it particularly valued. This study didn't delve into the rationale behind the decision making, but a clue may be in the heavy reliance on volunteers for the role of cooperating teacher. A follow- up study could shed light on the reasons teachers choose to volunteer, and these could vary. However, the fact that volunteerism is at the core of the student teaching process is significant. Shouldn't the school leaders be able to identify the best possible cooperating teachers and engage them in the process?

School leaders overwhelmingly identified skill areas as important in their selection of cooperating teachers. Classroom management, classroom environment, technology, and communication skills and the ability to work well with diverse populations were all included by 80% or better of the respondents. Perhaps the murky selection process allows school administrators to screen out those with lesser classroom skills but in an informal, quiet fashion. The expectation that Board of Education approval is required for student teachers is important for both the school administrators, who are very aware that accountability expectations for the cooperating teacher and the administration are not diminished by virtue of the fact that a student teacher is present. This has implications for schools of education, which must plan in a way that allows lead time for BOE approvals and which must understand that even a novice student teacher must be able to perform successfully in the school district.

It was not alarming that many administrators suggested that they would assign cooperating teachers based on fact that they cooperating teacher would benefit from the student teacher. The assumption could be that new teachers are exposed to current ideas, technology, research, and etc. while in coursework so there should be an added benefit to a school and classroom teacher supervising a student teacher.

It could be argued that the role of cooperating teacher isn't really valued and rewarded. Self-selected volunteers may be the best teachers; the most effective professional models in whose classrooms aspiring novice teachers should be placed to learn, but this isn't known. It could just as easily be argued that the volunteers are looking for an extra pair of hands to help with the burdens of today's complex classrooms.

Many administrators noted that teachers were not aware of policy regarding cooperating teacher roles. It could also be that potential cooperating teachers, not aware of the policy and procedure to become a cooperating teacher, don't participate by volunteering thereby shrinking the pool of potential cooperating teachers from whom to choose. Additionally, almost 60% rely on those with past experience with student teachers. This may relieve concern about experience as a factor but again narrows the potential pool dramatically.

5.3 Implications

The results of the study have implications for practice. The results of the study show that school administrators use volunteers as cooperating teachers. There was little or no evidence that the districts have a written policy which complies with the state's code and university expectation of cooperating teachers for accreditation and state certification requirements. There needs to be better collaboration between the schools' criteria, state expectations, and universities' expectations. Failure to have this coordinated list of the acceptable qualifications may result in student teaching as a haphazard experience where student teachers are under the supervision of unqualified teachers.

The results of the study also have major implications when one looks at the mentoring process and its expectations. Since education reform is moving towards full accountability, it is imperative that cooperating teachers be held to the same standards and expectations. However, based on the results of this study, school districts and teacher training programs cannot expect much from cooperating teachers when there is no evident pattern or criteria commonly used by administrators when deciding, who should hold these critical roles. The process of teacher education is under attack at the highest education office in the nation. Leadership is needed to create a system of supervision for student teachers, which is grounded in clearly defined procedure and best practice, uses our best and most effective in-service professionals to guide the newest aspiring professionals, and holds all accountable (Duncan, Arne (2009).

Data from this study also indicated that there were some commonly agreed qualifications for selecting student teachers such as: being a good role model, having good classroom management skills, and being an effective communicator. One explanation of for this finding may be that administrators see more value in interpersonal and professional criteria that are important to the day to day demands of student teaching.

6 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion of this study the following recommendations are suggested:

1. All school districts should have written criteria for selecting cooperating teachers.
2. Close communication ties should be maintained between the colleges of education and local School Districts to ensure the best placement for each individual student teacher
3. The university supervising teachers and cooperating teachers should attend a yearly training together to ensure continuity of programming and mentoring.

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