Preservice Agriculture Teachers' Development during the Early Phase of Student Teaching

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Abstract

The student teaching practicum experience is designed to give preservice teachers practical experience with teaching and is an important step in their development. While literature in agricultural education exists about preservice teacher professional development, little is known about the developmental process of agriculture teachers during the student teaching experience. Utilizing the theory of teacher concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975) as a theoretical lens, the purpose of this qualitative document analysis was to determine how preservice teachers develop over the first half of the student teaching practicum by examining the way they talk about concerns. Written reflections of five different cohorts from 2010 through 2014 were analyzed at two different points in time (week two and week seven). During the first two weeks of student teaching, three themes emerged, including: 1) teacher/student identity crisis, 2) teaching competence: "I do not know how, what, or who…," and 3) adjusting to change. During week seven, the concerns changed, which indicated the student teachers were developing into the professional role of a teacher. The three themes that emerged from the data for week seven were: 1) building professional relationships, 2) engaging students, and 3) it is about time: work-life balance. Implications exist for teacher educators to place more emphasis on teaching strategies to engage and motivate students in the learning process, rather than just the task itself. Recommendations are suggested for teacher educators to discuss with preservice teachers before student teaching the realities and challenges of balancing work and life roles.

Keywords: concerns; development; preservice teachers; identity; student teachers; agricultural education; work-life balance

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Introduction and Review of Literature

The process of becoming a teacher has been extensively studied and discussed in the scientific and academic community worldwide (Caires, Almeida, & Viera, 2012). Research on the transition from student to teacher has been identified in literature as the construction of a teacher identity (Franzak, 2002). In most cases, the early stages of becoming a teacher, or constructing a teacher identity, begin at universities in teacher preparation programs. Darling-Hammond (2010) stated teacher preparation programs should include combination of didactic as well as clinical curriculum used to prepare the student for a culminating student teaching experience. As one component of this process, the major aim of the student teaching experience is to offer student teachers a "first" teaching experience through which they can develop specific competences (de Jong, Tartwijk, Wubbels, Veldman, & Verloop, 2013).

Consequently, the student teaching experience has been described as the capstone experience of the preservice teacher education program and is critical to the process of preparing future teachers and developing a teacher identity (Borne & Moss, 1990; Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2011; Edwards & Briers, 2001; Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007; Vinz, 1996). Caries et al. (2012) stated the student teaching practicum is a period of intense search and exploration of self, others, and the new scenarios; including a focus on cognition, emotion, doubt, fear, procedural and pedagogical growth, and the meaning that emerges from the student teaching experience. Sources such as positive role models, previous teaching experiences, the cooperating teacher, and significant education classes have a significant impact on a preservice teacher's self-conception and pedagogical development (Fairbanks, Freedman, & Kahn, 2000; Velez-Rendon, 2006).

Despite agricultural education's similarity to other teaching disciplines in terms of the requirements, scope and structure of the student teaching practicum, agricultural education is unique in its own way. In agricultural education, teachers are not only expected to develop strong classroom and laboratory practices, but also develop the ability to manage and supervise an active FFA chapter, conduct Supervised Agricultural Experience programs (SAE), foster community and school partnerships, and plan and market the local program (Torres, Ulmer, & Aschenbrener, 2008). The additional competencies required of agriculture teachers, may lend itself to unique challenges in the process of development for preservice agricultural education teachers. However, despite the unique characteristics of agricultural education, there is a lack of framework for preservice agriculture teacher development that explains the transitioning process from student to teacher. Therefore, one central purpose of this study is to begin to develop a framework in agricultural education that explores the development of student teachers towards becoming practitioners.

Designed to be a transition from student to practitioner, some student teachers progress and assimilate into teaching better than others. Challenges and successes give students experiences that help them mature and grow into professionals. Literature in agricultural education indicates common concerns, challenges, and professional development needs of preservice and beginning agriculture teachers. Managing student discipline, teacher-student relationships, engaging students, technical competence, balancing work and personal responsibilities, motivating students, working with diverse students, helping student to think critically, and completing paperwork have been cited as concerns or needs for professional development among early-career or preservice teachers in agricultural education (Duncan, Ricketts, Peake, & Uesseler, 2006; Joerger, 2002; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Myers, Dyer & Washburn, 2005; Stair, Warner, & Moore, 2012; Talbert, Camp, & Heath–Camp, 1994; Thieman, Marx, & Kitchel, 2012). Further, the success of a new teacher has been linked to a positive student teaching experience and the most important experience completed through the teacher development program (Borne & Moss, 1990; Harlin, Edwards, & Briers, 2002).

Despite the literature identifying the challenges and successes of student teachers, there is a slight lack of literature regarding preservice agriculture teacher development and the influence of certain challenges towards their development in transitioning from a student to a teacher.

Caires et al. (2012) suggest answering the question, what are student teachers' main difficulties and concerns while they prepare for a teaching career? It is important to identify what challenges student teachers face in order for preservice agriculture teacher education programs to take steps to assist students in overcoming these challenges. Therefore, several questions remain. What types of challenges do preservice agriculture teachers face as they begin the transitioning process from student to practitioner? Do student teachers overcome challenges in the early stages of their student teaching experience or are they more persistent problems that may need to be addressed more heavily in preservice programs or in teacher induction programs when they enter the profession? Examining student teacher concerns may be able to shed light on the development of becoming a professional practitioner.

Theoretical Framework

Research shows that student teachers go through various stages during their initial teaching practice (Kagan, 1992). A number of theoretical models exist that aid in the understanding of these stages of teacher development (Burden, 1990; Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Katz, 1972). One prominent theory guiding research in teacher development, and the theoretical basis for this study, is the theory of teacher concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Initially, Fuller (1969) proposed a concerns based model of teacher development that focused on the concerns of teachers beginning at the preservice level and continuing throughout their career. The theory consisted of three phases which included: 1) pre-teaching phase, 2) early-teaching phase: concerns about self, and 3) concerns with pupils' needs. In the first phase, Fuller explains that preservice teachers, before the student teaching experience, rarely had specific concerns relating to teaching because they were not sure what to be concerned about. In this phase, preservice teachers only thought about teaching from a student perspective. In the second phase, which takes place during student teaching and first years of teaching, Fuller theorized that concerns were about the teaching self and centered on self-adequacy. Teachers in this stage are concerned with their own abilities and knowledge of the subject matter, fear of failure, getting along with other personnel, and presenting themselves as professionals. In the third stage, Fuller theorizes that teachers' concerns shift from themselves and to the needs of the students. Teachers in this phase measure success by student achievement rather than teaching evaluations.

Later, Fuller and Brown (1975) reexamined the 1969 theory of teacher development and readjusted their theory. They hypothesized that teachers continually experience concerns in three developmental stages; self, task, and impact concerns. However, concerns of student teachers are primarily situated within the stages of self and task. Self-concerns are associated with the student teachers' experiences in the classroom, receiving evaluations, being accepted, and their ability to perform adequately in a professional environment (Marshall, 1996; Watzke, 2003). After student teachers work through their concerns of self, they begin to worry about more of the task related issues. Task concerns focus on the daily situation of teaching including, teacher duties, materials, teaching methods, and classroom management. This stage is generally characterized by early career teachers. Finally, teachers transition away from their concerns of self and task and are more concerned about the impact their teaching has on students as well as larger educational issues and policies that impact students (Srivastava, 2007).

Other theories of teacher development exist verifying the concept of teacher development through stages as Fuller and Brown proposed (Burden, 1990; Katz, 1972). However, little attention

is paid to the preservice stage of development in these theories. The theory of teacher concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975) is ideal for studying preservice teacher development because it explicitly addresses concerns of teachers beginning in the preservice stage of development. Despite the growing knowledge about the process of becoming a teacher, several key questions remain unanswered regarding student teacher concerns and development. Understanding the level of student teachers' concerns and their development should be used as a means to help guide activities of teacher education.

Purpose and Objectives

Utilizing the theory of teacher concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975) as a theoretical lens, the purpose of this study was to determine how preservice teachers develop over the first half of the student teaching practicum. With its focus on field-based teacher preparation programs, this study aligns with research priority area five of the 2016-2020 AAAE National Research Agenda (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). The primary research question guiding this study was how do preservice teachers talk about their concerns at the beginning and the middle of the student teaching experience?

Methods and Procedures

This qualitative document analysis study was conducted to obtain information about preservice agriculture teachers' main concerns during the early phases of their student teaching practicum. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). O'Leary (2014) noted that one primary type of document used in document analysis is personal documents, such as reflections/journals, emails, or blogs, in which first-person accounts of an individual's experiences and beliefs are recorded. In this study, the documents used for analysis derived from five separate cohorts of preservice teachers during the beginning weeks of the student teaching practicum.

Participants

The participants in this study included all of the preservice teachers who participated in the student teaching practicum at Utah University in the years 2010 through 2014. In total, a convenience sample of 47 preservice teachers from the years 2010 through 2014 participated in this study (see Table 1). A variety of student teaching centers were used over the course of the five years of data. However, no changes were made to the student teaching program during those five years. All of the preservice teachers had completed a 30-hour field experience at the same school as the student teaching practicum that occurred during the preceding semester. This field experience, which occurred during the fall semester, enabled the participants to meet with their cooperating teacher to plan curriculum for the upcoming semester, meet students in the agricultural education program, and take part in some teaching experiences before beginning their student teaching experience in the spring semester. The student teaching practicum was a 14-week experience in which the student teachers immersed themselves into the day-to-day efforts of teaching agriculture. By the end of the second week, student teachers were required to acquire one to two classes from the cooperating teacher, and by the fifth week, were teaching a full load of coursework. At Utah State University, a full student teaching load is one class less than the school districts full-time contract.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Cohort	Number of participants	Gender of participants
2010	19	10 Female; 9 Male
2011	6	2 Female; 4 Male
2012	6	4 Female; 2 Male
2013	6	3 Female;3 Male
2014	10	4 Female; 6 Male
TOTAL	47	23 Female; 24 Male

Procedures

As part of the student teaching practicum, participants were required to register for a one-credit seminar, designed to provide the preservice teachers an opportunity to reflect and discuss their student teaching experiences. IRB approval was obtained, and the primary researchers for the study were not involved in the Seminar Course instruction. One particular form of data suitable for collection for document analysis are emails (O'Leary, 2014). Each week of the student teaching experience, participants were asked to respond to one email regarding specific experiences and topics for reflection. For this study, the focus was to elicit information from the participants about their concerns during the first two weeks of the student teaching practicum and then during the middle of the student teaching practicum (week 7). Due to the nature of the student teaching experience, it has great transformative potential, especially during the first few weeks as preservice teachers adjust to the new learning context of student teaching. Therefore, we focused our study on the first half of the student teaching experience. The email prompt to elicit this information was sent to the participants during their second week of student teaching and the seventh week of student teaching. The email prompt from the first two weeks consisted of four questions: What are the successes of your first week of student teaching? What are the challenges? What has surprised you the most about beginning your teaching experience? During week seven, the students were asked to respond to the following prompt: How do you feel about your student teaching experience at this point? What have you learned? What are the successes you have experienced? What are the challenges? Greatest area of growth? Participants answered the email prompts by drafting a written response, which was emailed to the instructor and all other student teaching cohort members via the reply-all function in email. The participant responses from the email prompts were gathered by the instructor of the course and shared with the research team through an online file storage and synchronization service.

Data Analysis

The data collected through emails were analyzed and coded for thematic content using coding protocols outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Bowen (2009) suggested that for document analysis, researchers should code document content into themes similar to how focus group or interview transcripts are analyzed. In this analysis, the data from the first week were kept separate and were coded separately from the seventh week prompt. The codes and themes were not compared until the final step of the analysis. Three separate researchers performed the coding process with constant checks for accuracy and reliability in coding. The process of coding was performed using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initially, the

researchers used open coding to identify and describe the repeating ideas found in the text. From this process, 47 different ideas emerged. The researchers grouped these repeating ideas into logical and coherent groups. The research team then conducted axial coding, examining how the categories might be related to each other. During this phase, the researchers connected categories with subcategories. This phase of coding yielded seven themes and two sub-themes. The final step in the analysis was selective coding where researchers interacted with the data in a more abstract level of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), connecting themes back to the theoretical framework. During this phase, themes and codes from both sets of data were compared and the researchers renamed the themes and situated them within the theoretical framework of the study. Throughout the coding process, researchers employed reflexivity through the use of personal reflective journals, constantly reflecting on the impact of the researcher on the data.

Trustworthiness

Rigor and trustworthiness were established for this study with a focus on measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). To establish credibility, the researchers used an outside source to assess the validity of the data and data analysis by reviewing the participant email responses and researchers' coding of the data. Additionally, the researchers utilized a reflective journal to help identify any research biases. Through the use of thick descriptions of the student teaching context and the participants, transferability was established. Dependability and confirmability were established through an audit trail and the use of a reflective journal throughout the process, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Limitations

Because qualitative studies are generally more suited for small samples, this document analysis is limited in scope and therefore limits the generalizability of the findings (Maxwell, 2005). However, because of the relatively large number of participants over a five-year span of data collection, this research has the potential to be transferable to other settings. Yet, the researchers make no attempt to generalize further and acknowledge the findings from this study are limited to the context of the five cohorts of preservice teachers who participated in the study. Additionally, the email prompts sent to the participants did not allow for follow-up questions and conversation, which may have limited the opportunity for in depth answers, clarification, and follow up on points of interest. Furthermore, because the participants were asked to reply to the prompts through email rather than conversation, this may have limited the amount of description the participants would have otherwise shared. On the other hand, having everyone see each other's responses may have swayed some of their thinking. Finally, because data were collected and analyzed by the researchers of this study, there is inherent bias that may have influenced the data analysis.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine how preservice teachers develop over the first half of the student teaching practicum by examining the way they talk about concerns. During the first two weeks of student teaching, three themes emerged, including: 1) teacher/student identity crisis, 2) teaching competence: "I do not know how, what, or who…", and 3) adjusting to change.

Theme 1: Teacher/Student Identity Crisis

Most of the participants shared their concerns of being identified as a teacher. The idea of seeing themselves as teachers and acting in a professional teaching role was a difficult transition for some of the students. At the beginning of the student teaching experience many teachers had

not fully embraced their new teacher identity. The participants expressed times where they struggled to take on the teacher identity and abandon their identity as a student. There seemed to be a dilemma; they wanted students to like them as friends but at the same time revere them as teachers. These concerns not only were internally motivated, as they struggled to see themselves as teachers, rather than students, but also externally motivated, as participants felt their students did not perceive them as teachers, but as peers. The participants shared examples of how they did not know how to act around students and what appropriate "teacher behavior" was. The following participant statements support this theme:

- "It was difficult not dancing during the state dance, "I had a hard time being 'the teacher' that night."
- "I have a difficulty separating myself from the students, and just being a teacher."
- "Student's aren't seeing me as a teacher, but as their peer."
- "I am trying so hard to be their teacher and not their friend."
- "I want the students to like me and respect me. My biggest challenge is balancing being a teacher versus being their peer."
- "I'm not 100% myself around students…I don't know how to act around them."

Theme 2: Teaching Competence: "I do not know how, what, or who…"

Another theme emerging from the data was teaching competence. Participants' concerns focused on themselves and their lack of perceived ability to function as a competent teacher. Most of the participants shared their frustrations and concerns about planning lessons, managing the classroom, their own content knowledge, and their students. Overall, participants did not feel they knew how to be a teacher. Four sub-themes comprise this theme: 1) how do I plan for instruction, 2) how do I teach and manage my classroom at the same time, 3) what am I supposed to know and teach, and 4) who are these students?

How do I plan for instruction? The first sub-theme captures the participants' concerns about planning lessons. They shared their frustrations about not knowing how to plan lessons with the right amount of time for each daily and unit lesson. They expressed their struggle with how to put different pieces into a lesson so students would understand the material. The following participant statements support this sub-theme:

- "I either have too much planned or not enough. Things I think will take twenty minutes take five, and things I think should take five take thirty."
- "The challenge that I face is dividing it up into a two week unit, adding material with labs, and adding facts and knowledge, so that students actually understand the material."
- "The biggest challenge that I face every day is deciding just how much of the material I want to cover in my classes."

How do I teach and manage my classroom at the same time? This sub-theme captures the idea that participants struggled to reconcile teaching while managing classroom behavior at the same time. Participants spoke about not knowing how or what to do in unfamiliar situations, especially regarding student discipline. The following participant statements support this sub-theme:

- "At first I was too worried about content and teaching it that I had students off task"
- "I get so wrapped up in the lesson that I become the cause of commotion."
- "I couldn't seem to keep them focused on the lesson, little conversations going on everywhere in the class."

- "In my classes there is unnecessary chatter that I have had a hard time stopping, and keeping their attention, especially with things that they are not interested in."
- "It is a bit tough to break a bad habit when there is little organization or structure."
- "I don't know what proper means of discipline are."
- "I have a hard time filling the time. The last five minutes of class are a disaster"

What am I supposed to know and teach? Most of the participants shared their concerns about feeling "unprepared" and "unqualified" to teach because of the lack of content knowledge they felt they had. Participants felt they did not know the content well enough to be a good teacher. Participants also shared they had a lack of knowledge of school policies and did not know how to plan for or deal with different situations. Additionally, participants questioned the content they were teaching and did not know if it was "the right stuff" they were supposed to teach. The following participant statements support this sub-theme:

- "I feel so unprepared to teach the students in some of the areas because I am still learning the content myself."
- "I do not know enough of the topics to teach it, and at times I feel I am unqualified."
- "I don't know the content, teaching six different classes is hard to know everything"
- "How do I know I am teaching the right stuff? I find myself wondering if I am covering material that I am supposed to."
- "I honestly had no idea what the schools policy was and I had no idea what to do. There was nobody to ask so I handled the situation as best as I could."

Who are these students? Most of the participants shared their frustration with their students. It seemed the students and their behavior were not what they expected. The participants quickly came to the realization of who their students were, and it did not seem to be congruent with their previous conceptions. This lack of congruence seemed to be one of the connecting threads for their struggle in planning and delivering effective instruction because they had not anticipated the range of student differences. They discussed their surprise and frustration in working with students who were not motivated to participate and their concern with how to deal with them. The following statements support this sub-theme:

- "I'm surprised…my classes are loaded with students that just don't seem to care, or students that come to school for the social aspect."
- "How do I get the students that aren't as concerned about their grade motivated to learn anything and participate in class?"
- "I'm wondering if students are even interested in anything."
- They just don't care and half of them are only in there for the credit."

Theme 3: Adjusting to Change

The third theme emerging from the data during the first two weeks of student teaching was the participants' struggle to adjust to change. The participants expressed concerns about change in two forms; 1) changes in the demands for their time and 2) changes from a new work environment. Concerning time, participants came to a realization of the amount of time that was required in order to survive during student teaching. Many shared their tendency to procrastinate, but learned they could not do that as a teacher. Many shared their concerns about not knowing how to manage their time because it seemed student teaching was taking all of their time. Concerning the change in work environment, many of the participants struggled to settle in to their new work location. Some

expressed how they did not feel like they belonged because there was no space for them to work or put their belongings. The following participant statements support this sub-theme:

- "Perpetual procrastination…I try to get ahead but just get further behind."
- "My biggest challenge has been adjusting to my wife working during the evening and having to try to teach myself how to cook dinner for my kids."
- "One of the challenges that I have had this first week is that I don't really have anywhere to go or put my stuff."
- "Some challenges this week were just getting my surroundings and organizing myself. It has been hard adjusting to this new place."
- "The only computer workspace I have is at the front of [teacher name] classroom and this is inconvenient. I am a distraction if I work while she is teaching. So my prep hours have been less productive."

After the seventh week of student teaching, participants again shared their concerns. In comparing the themes that emerged from the data from week two with week seven, some of the same concerns still persisted but they had taken on a different focus for the student teachers. Other concerns had disappeared altogether being replaced with different concerns. The three themes that emerged from the data for week seven were: 1) building professional relationships, 2) engaging students, and 3) it is about time: work-life balance.

Theme 1: Building Professional Relationships

This theme from week seven seemed to derive from the participants' identity crisis they experienced in their first weeks of student teaching. However, the participants moved their conversations away from their struggle to find their identity as a teacher to the struggle of developing teacher/student relationships. Now, instead of focusing on themselves and trying to find out their identity, it appears the teachers embraced their identity as a teacher and were trying to develop appropriate relationships with their students. In the process, the participants shared how these new relationships helped them in their teaching. While some of the participants expressed how they struggled to be a professional teacher and develop relationships at the same time, most explicitly labeled themselves as teachers. Some participants shared how they learned to be a teacher rather than a friend to the students. The following participant statements support this theme:

- "As I've gained more experience and built relationships with my students, teaching has become easier and less stressful."
- "Students are not satisfied with me as a teacher."
- "…Being professional but maintaining good relationships with my students."
- "I have been creating good teacher relationships with students."
- "I have learned how to be friendly, but not their friend."
- "Building student rapport and engaging students goes a long way."
- "I am a teacher and not a student."

Theme 2: Engaging Students

The most drastic change from the first weeks of student teaching to the seventh week was how the participants spoke about their teaching practice. During the first weeks, students were concerned about planning lessons, content knowledge, classroom management, and learning who the students were. By week seven, there was no more discussion of how to plan and about not knowing the content. Participants had moved past these concerns about their own ability as teachers, and they had developed confidence they could plan and teach the content. The focus

shifted from their own abilities of planning and content knowledge to engaging the students. In the early weeks of student teaching, participants shared their frustrations with learning that their students lacked motivation to participate. However, in week seven, these participants focused their conversations heavily on motivating and engaging these same students. The participants still talked about classroom management as a concern but did so in the context of student engagement. They moved their conversations away from reacting to discipline problems to preventing classroom behavior issues through student engagement. The following participant statements support this theme:

● "…My greatest challenge is trying to get kids involved that have no desire to be there while keeping those that already know the material from getting bored."
● "One of my biggest challenges has been motivating my students to do anything."
● "I am still struggling to mix things up for my classes to keep them engaged."
● "I struggle working with some of my students who act really childish and whine about everything. I try to get them motivated but they just complain."
● "I think the students have just been "getting by" for so long, that they have convinced themselves they are not smart enough to get an A, so they don't try as hard as they should."

Theme 3: It is About Time: Work-Life Balance

The third theme that emerged from week seven was work-life balance. In the beginning weeks of student teaching, participants discussed having to personally adjust to the time demands of student teaching. By week seven, this concern morphed into the realization that the time demands of student teaching also effects their personal and family life. During week seven, participants recognized the time commitment required to be successful and realized it was not congruent with their previous lifestyle. Participants struggled to reconcile personal life and student teaching because of the overwhelming amount of time required for student teaching. During week seven, the point at which the student teachers were teaching a full load of classes, there seemed to be a sense of frustration that teaching had created a time conflict with their own personal lives. The following participant statements support this theme:

● "Teaching takes first priority because it is so time consuming. Teaching puts everything else second. It is hard to put my family second."
● "I am used to doing things of my own free will, but now my life revolves around teaching and preparing lessons. I don't have time to decide what I want to do anymore."
● "It is so much better to prepare for class two days ahead than the night before. It gives you room to breathe and live."
● "Teaching is very time consuming, you have to be willing to put in the time."

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The theory of teacher concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975) posits student teachers would exhibit behaviors of the pre-teaching phase or early-teaching phase of teacher development. According to the theory of teacher concerns, in these phases, education students and student teachers struggle to personally connect with teaching concerns and only think about teaching from a student perspective. However, as student teachers gain more exposure and experience in the classroom, their concerns shift from student-self to teacher-self and then to the students. During these transitional stages, teachers realize and are concerned with their inadequacies but eventually move to thinking about student success and learning. It is clear that participants in this study showed evidence of transitioning from pre-teaching to the early teaching phase of teacher development during the first half of student teaching. The findings of this study suggest the participants started

out with a focus on "self" and transitioned to "task." No evidence exists from this study that suggests any of the participants were approaching the "impact" phase.

The findings of this study support research in agricultural education that student teachers often experience challenges related to technical competence and teacher-student relationships (Thieman, Marx, & Kitchel, 2012). Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that continued research be conducted using the findings of this study as a basis or conceptual framework to further explore preservice agriculture teacher development during the student teaching phase (see Figure 1). We acknowledge this study only examined the first half of the student teaching experience. We recommend other studies duplicate this research with the scope encompassing the entire student teaching experience. In order to expand the generalizability of this study, we also recommend research that quantitatively explores the themes that emerged from this study.
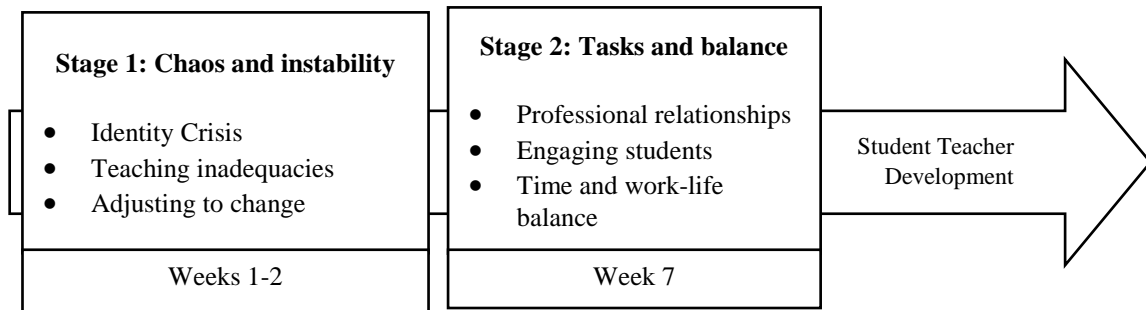

Figure 1. Concerns-based conceptualization of findings: Preservice agriculture teacher development during the student teaching phase.

When looking at the themes that emerged, the students' concerns changed over the course of the first half of the student teaching experience. The first two weeks of student teaching was characterized by instability and chaos while the seventh week was characterized by task and balance concerns. The transition from student to teacher and letting go of their student identity was a challenge for these participants. However, by week seven, the student teachers seemed to have found their identity and were focused on building positive teachers-student relationships. The student teachers had moved from concerns about "self" to concerns about "task."

During the first weeks of student teaching, participants were clearly concerned about their teaching inadequacies. The participants expressed their concerns with lesson planning, classroom management, content knowledge, and understanding the students. Fuller and Brown (1975) argue that teachers in the "task" phase of development are often concerned with daily teaching tasks that include teaching methods and classroom management. Fuller and Brown suggested this phase is characterized by early-career teachers. However, the participants in this study shared their concerns in the "task" phase during their first two weeks of student teaching. Participants shared concerns in both the "self" and the "task" phase of teacher development as they began their student teaching experience. By week seven however, the student teachers did not seem to be concerned about how to plan for lessons and content knowledge of specific subjects, rather, their concerns were focused on the task of how to engage students. Although participants were still not focused on student learning and success as the outcome (e.g., task phase), evidence suggests that by week seven, they were beginning to think of teaching more broadly than just the task itself. They had begun to think of teaching as a process that engages and requires student motivation to happen.

The participants in this study expressed concerns about their students. It seemed there was a lack of congruence between who the students were (how they would act and their motivation for participation) and the reality. Although these participants interacted with many of the students during their clinical experiences before student teaching, they were still surprised by the students' behavior. Perhaps preservice teachers are not able to understand student motivations until they are more fully engaged in the teaching role. Fuller and Brown (1975) describe that preservice teachers as juniors and seniors often do not fully understand teaching or the students because they have not been exposed to enough teaching. Perhaps, clinical or early field experiences before student teaching should enable preservice teachers the opportunity for more teaching experiences and more opportunities to interact with students in an authentic classroom setting. Furthermore, teacher educators should be frank with preservice teachers about the realities of students in today's 21st century secondary school classrooms. We recommend teacher educators place emphasis on teaching strategies to engage and motivate students in the learning process. Teacher educators should focus less on student teaching strategies and more on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, teacher educators should continue to focus their efforts of providing the necessary skillset to preservice teachers so that their lack of confidence is minimized.

During the first weeks of student teaching, participants realized the time and effort required to survive their student teaching experience. Evidence from this study suggests the participants were not prepared for this change. To this point in their education and preparation to become a teacher, many of them were able to just "get by." However, they realized this was not possible during student teaching and required a change in time management and lifestyle. Throughout the first half of student teaching, the participants continued to share their concerns about working so many hours. During the first weeks, it was more of a realization that their current lifestyle would have to change to keep up with the demands of student teaching. By the seventh week, participants were concerned with how the new lifestyle of working so many hours on student teaching was affecting other domains of their life.

The first signs of work-life balance began to emerge during student teaching and became even more evident by week seven. Perhaps the issue of work-life balance should be explicitly discussed in teacher preparation courses rather than waiting until the student teaching experience. Some of the participants in this study mentioned that because of the difficulty in balancing student teaching and life, they questioned whether or not they wanted to become a teacher. Having discussions with preservice teachers about coping with stress as well as personal and time management strategies during the teacher preparation courses may allow preservice teachers to have a more positive student teaching experience, one that will keep them excited about their future in the profession. Furthermore, we recommend careful placement of student teachers with programs and cooperating teachers that spend excess time at work, especially regarding student teachers with other important life commitments (e.g. married). Teacher educators need to assess student teaching placement sites and ask the question, is this cooperating teacher going to teach the student to burn out of the profession or will he/she help the student teacher balance work and life while still maintaining a strong agricultural education program?

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