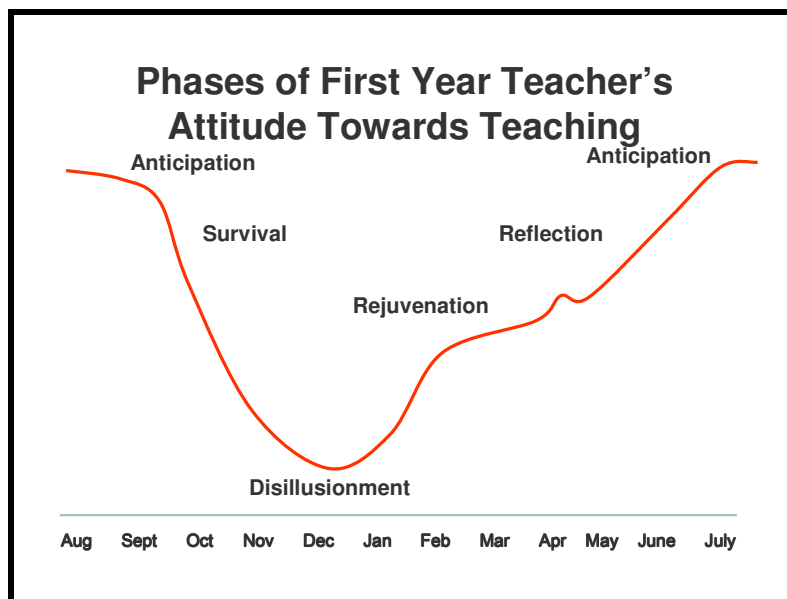


**Promising Professional Support and Assistance Activities for Entry-Level Teachers: *What Early-Career Agricultural Education Teachers Suggest Mentors, Teacher Educators, State Supervisors, and Agricultural Education Teachers Can Do!***



Source: Moir, E. (1990, 1992)

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2006

This is a product of the National Teacher Induction and Mentoring Project. This special project was funded  
By the Council for Agricultural Education

# **Promising Professional Support and Assistance Activities for Entry-Level Teachers: What Early-Career Agricultural Education Teachers Suggest Mentors, Teacher Educators, State Supervisors, and Agricultural Education Teachers Can Do!**

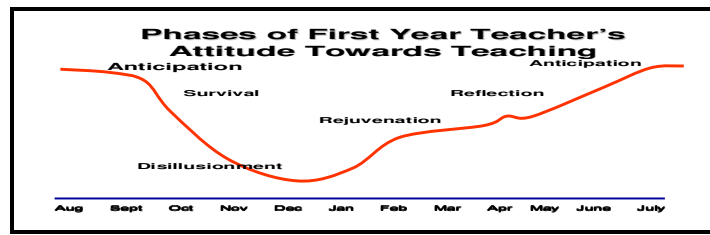
## Introduction

Recommendation for support and assistance of ELTs following each phase of changing attitudes (Moir, 1992) were secured from 56 practicing second year agricultural education teachers from across the USA. The forms of assistance listed in the instrument for each phase of the attitudinal development were derived from interviews with 8 Second Year Teachers from across the United States. Fifty-six second year teachers of agricultural education completed an on-line or hardcopy of an instrument that sought how strongly they recommended mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and ag teacher use selected forms of support and assistance.

Characteristics of the participants show that there was a similar share of males and females. Eighty-two percent had mentors during their entry year of teaching. Nearly 90 percent completed their pre-service training through a traditional teacher education program.

What follows is an initial listing of the forms of support and assistance activities that the 56 agricultural education teachers *strongly or very strongly recommended* they and peers use at different phases during the attitudinal development of entry-level agricultural education teachers. The phases for which forms of assistance were developed in the instrument were anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation.

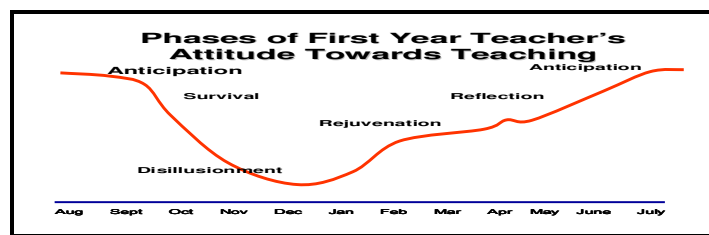
The characteristic feature of each phase will be initially presented; immediately following will be the forms of assistance that the agricultural education teachers strong or very strongly recommend contemporary teachers conduct in each phase of attitudinal changes of the ELTs.



**Anticipation Phase.** The entry-level teacher (ELTs) has a tendency to romanticize the role and position of the teacher. ELTs initiate their jobs with a tremendous commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how to accomplish their goals. Feelings of excitement carry the new teachers through the first few days to weeks of school. They often believe they are going to be the best teacher their program has ever had, and that they have the skills, attitude, and dispositions to complete the role!

As noted on the graphic below, the anticipation phase characteristically occurs from the time entry-level teachers sign their contract through the early days of teaching in the fall. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

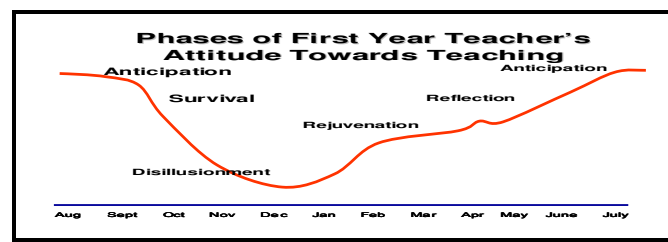
- Be available to provide assistance for selecting and/or developing instructional activities for lessons.
- Be readily available to discuss progress, challenges, successes, and concerns associated with teaching roles and education.
- Emphasize and provide approaches and strategies for meeting parents, business, faculty, and other community members.
- Ensure that the local mentor or guide assist the ELT in becoming familiar with school district policies and practices.
- Ensure that the local mentor or guide assist the ELT in becoming familiar with the policies and recommended practices outlined in the faculty and student handbooks
- Provide an overview of the typical teaching day routine in the local school.
- Provide examples of instructional plans and typical school schedules for the first day of school.
- Provide ideas for organizing the classroom and laboratory(ies).
- Provide information concerning how to complete teaching and advising roles with students interested and involved in local, county, and state fairs and expositions.
- Share a realistic picture of the rigors of teaching and advising the FFA.
- Share communication contact info for teachers, state, NAAE-affiliate officers, and university staff.
- Show examples and assist in creating effective syllabi, unit and lesson plans.
- Suggest effective approaches for understanding the history of the department.
- Supply appropriate amounts of encouragement and advocacy for the ELT.
- With the involvement and approval and of the entry-level teacher, identify a local school district teacher and area agricultural education teacher to serve as a designated mentor or guide.



**Survival Phase.** Entry-level teacher (ELTs) learn a lot at a rapid pace. They are instantly bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated, and are caught off guard by the realities of teaching. They struggle to keep their heads above water and become very focused on the day-to-day routine of teaching, with little time available to stop and reflect on their experiences. They often report spending up to 70 hours per week on school-related work and activities. In addition, they are overwhelmed by a constant need to develop curriculum and instructional materials. They are not sure which instructional materials and strategies will work and many expend considerable effort thinking about and developing their instructional plans for the first time. Much to their disappointment, they experience the negative consequences of poorly-prepared lessons. ELTs are surprised by the amount of work involved in being a teacher. They usually are able to maintain a high level of energy throughout this phase. They report being hopeful the stress and strain will subside and maintain belief there is a 'light at the end of the tunnel'. During this phase new teachers often feel alone and really desire that others will reach out to them.

As noted on the graphic below, the survival phase usually occurs during the early days of the fall teaching assignment. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

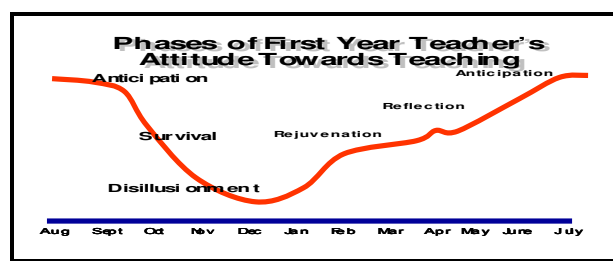
- Encourage ELTs to regularly talk with friends, peer teachers, mentors, administrators, and other agricultural education teachers.
- Encourage the ELT to take initial steps to establish an advisory committee, or schedule a meeting for an existing committee.
- Organize a special meeting in early fall for ELTs to socialize and address a variety of topics including, but not limited to: working with school principals and administrators, advising the FFA chapter, sources of instructional resources, and student management.
- Provide strategies and processes for prioritizing teaching and FFA activities.
- Provide the rationale and strategies for gaining support from parents.
- Share the benefits of reaching out to community members, and local program support groups such as the FFA Alumni.
- Supply appropriate amounts of encouragement and advocacy for the ELT.



**Disillusionment Phase.** The entry-level teacher (ELT) realizes things are not going as smoothly as earlier envisioned. Low morale leads to disenchantment with the job. They question their competence and commitment. The level of stress and worry often leads to bouts with illness. The situation is compounded by new events including back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and initial evaluations by the administrator. Many of the beginning teachers find that classroom management is more stressful than anticipated. The unexpectedly large time commitment brings complaints from family members and friends. Teachers in this phase express self-doubt, have lower self-esteem, and question their professional commitment. This is the toughest phase for many new teachers.

The disillusionment phase may occur during the later days of the first and may last until the holiday break of the fall teaching assignment. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

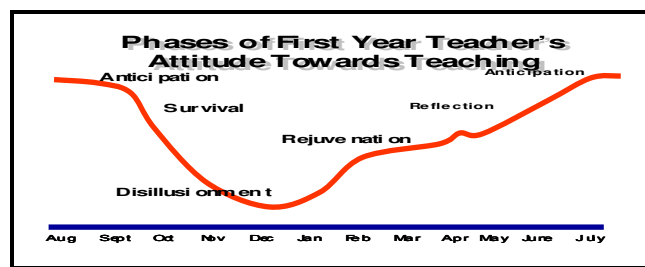
- Advise ELTs to participate in community events.
- Advocate for the ELT in their school and community.
- Disclose that the difficulties, questions regarding their competence and commitment to teaching, and other negative emotions are quite normal during this stage of teaching.
- Discuss the benefits of inviting, preparing, and profiting from visits from the principal.
- Encourage ELTs to plan and participate in a variety of activities with family and friends during fall and winter holiday breaks.
- Encourage ELTs to take intermittent breaks from various teaching roles, even during the busiest times. Examples of activities include: personal hobbies, watching movies or TV, and attending local sports activities and other student performances.
- Encourage the ELTs to maintain a social life.
- Ensure that area agricultural education, state staff, teacher educators, mentors and/or other agricultural education professionals visit the ELT at professional meetings, CDEs, and/or in their department.
- Invite the ELT to social activities sponsored by peers and other Ag Ed professionals.
- Maintain written and verbal communications that encourage the ELTs.
- Provide ideas and sources for other effective instructional methods, strategies, and/or tactics for teaching a variety of subjects.
- Provide ideas for additional teaching resources (e.g., instructional guides, lesson plans, teaching activities).



**Rejuvenation Phase.** During this phase, entry-level teachers experience a gradual improvement in their attitude toward teaching. They make an effort to prepare new and better instructional materials, and are ready to acknowledge their accomplishments while putting past problems behind them. Better understanding of the school system occurs along with an acceptance of the realities of teaching. Experience taught them coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many problems they are likely to encounter in the second half of the year. The teachers experience some sense of relief as they realize only half of the year remains before they can take a break. During the rejuvenation stage, novice teachers focus more on curriculum and instructional materials development, long-term planning and teaching strategies. This phase often lasts into spring. As the phase starts to come to a close, the beginning teachers become more concerned about getting everything (i.e., units, tests, competency exams) completed by year's end as well as student performance and levels of achievement on various assessments).

As noted in the graphic, this phase usually occurs after a holiday break, when new teachers find time to reflect and invest more time in planning curriculum and instruction. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

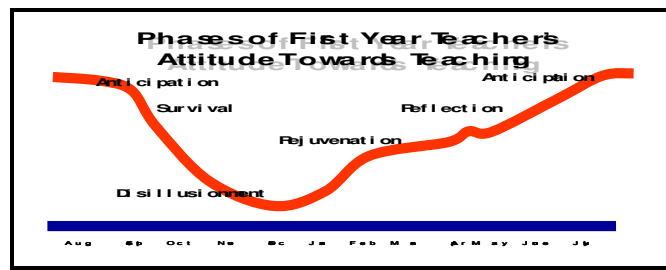
- Create a list of changes needed for improving their teaching performances (e.g., instructional strategies, changes in curricula, equipment, and supplies).
- Encourage ELT to identify and celebrate their teaching, SAE, and FFA successes.
- Encourage ELT to participate in professional development activities provided by state departments, the local school district, and professional teacher organizations.
- Encourage ELT to reflect upon and learn from their teaching mistakes.
- Encourage the ELTs observe the teaching of very effective teachers within their school
- Make ELT and other early-career teachers feel welcome at professional development events and professional teacher organization meetings.
- Promote the importance and strategies for creating a more balanced professional and personal life.
- Promote the importance of maintaining communications with friends, peers, and professional associates.
- Provide strategies for becoming more organized as a teacher.
- Provide strategies for establishing realistic one-year and extended year professional teaching goals.
- Share effective classroom and student management strategies.
- Share the importance of becoming involved in community activities and involving community members in instructional and FFA program activities.
- Sponsor a 1-2 day social activity solely for ELTs.



**The Reflection Phase.** This is a somewhat invigorating time. During this phase the ELT can reflect upon the successful and least effective instructional strategies and activities. The teachers begin to think more about what they will do differently in the future with regard to management, curricula, teaching strategies, resources, and any intra or extracurricular activities. They start to anticipate what teaching will be like with all of the changes they are envisioning.

During the reflection phase the comments and feelings expressed in Moir's (1990) study reflected the personal assurance and satisfaction associated with the ELT completing the first period of teaching. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

- Assist the ELT in evaluating the merits of continuing to teach in the present school in the upcoming school year.
- Assist the ELT in identifying concerns and challenges that will limit future success in the classroom, FFA, and SAE.
- Disclose the value of the first year of teaching experience for having a successful second year in the classroom.
- Identify and reflect upon the changes that need to be made to enhance the program in the upcoming academic year.
- Provide encouragement and materials for creating goals for the upcoming academic year.
- Provide encouragement. (The ELT is experiencing demanding FFA activities, course registration activities for upcoming year, and the decision to continue teaching.)
- Provide ideas, rationale, and materials to ELT for establishing an advisory committee if not yet established.
- Provide names of vendors and recommended practices for ordering supplies, equipment, and textbooks for the coming year.
- Provide strategies for enhancing organizational skills for teaching, SAE, and FFA roles.
- Share ideas regarding how to create a program budget for the upcoming year.
- Share strategies and materials with ELT for surveying students and/or community for future instructional needs.



**Anticipation Phase II.** As they finish their first year of teaching, entry-level teachers express a heightened sense of what they hope to accomplish in the classroom and laboratory settings. They have less concern for survival. They focus more on their impact on students, and less on themselves. They have greater concerns with quality instructional materials and teaching strategies than they did during the initial time of anticipation that occurred before and during the first couple of weeks of teaching.

As noted in the graphic, the end-of-year anticipation phase usually occurs toward the end of their first year of teaching. The ELTs express a heightened sense of what they hope to accomplish in the classroom and laboratory settings. The summarized ratings from the second year agricultural education teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **very strongly to strongly recommend** that all mentor, teacher educator, state supervisor, and agricultural education teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with ELTs:

- Communicate sources and types of professional development activities and events available during summer.
- Encourage ELT to establish program goals for the upcoming year.
- Encourage ELT to establish program goals for upcoming year.
- Encourage ELT to examine school student performance data .
- Encourage the ELT to visit a neighboring school to observe another program and gain ideas to improve their program.
- Encourage the ELT to visit a neighboring school to observe another program and gain ideas to improve their program.
- Establish an end-of-year activity for the ELT that allows other agricultural educators, mentors, and school administrators to provide feedback about their first year of teaching.
- Involve ELT in programs designed for next year’s beginning teachers.
- Provide instruction and information to further develop and promote FFA activities in the upcoming year.
- Provide instruction that addresses how to identify health and safety issues, and if needed, means to finance the needed changes in equipment and facilities.
- Provide materials and encouragement to conduct and end-of-year program evaluation.
- Provide questions to sponsor additional thoughts about possible changes the ELT should make in the program for the coming year.
- Share ideas of how to create, locate, and/or update curricula so it features quality “hands on/minds-on” activities.

