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Supporting High Quality Teacher Preparation: Developing a Mentoring Program for New and Early Career Special Education Faculty

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Supporting High Quality Teacher Preparation: Developing a Mentoring Program for New and Early Career Special Education Faculty

Abstract

As any new or early career faculty member in the academy can attest, the early days of one's career in higher education can be daunting, often evoking feelings of unsteadiness, tentativeness, and low self-efficacy. Despite knowing the landscape, academic neophytes are required to navigate the social and political rungs, negotiate participation on university, college, and department committees, develop and/or enhance their research niche, and demonstrate uncompromising proficiency as a teacher, mentor, supervisor and advisor. This paper explores strategies and principles that were adopted by one department within a teacher preparation program to establish a mentoring program for new and/or early career special education faculty. A major assumption we put forth in this paper is that faculty mentoring is no longer an academic frill in academe, but rather a necessary way in which we build and foster high quality teacher preparation within a complex field.

Keywords

Mentoring, New Faculty, Special Education

Supporting High Quality Teacher Preparation: Developing a Mentoring Program for New and Early Career Special Education Faculty

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Introduction

There is ample evidence that mentoring, as a support mechanism that provides necessary scaffolding, support, and growth potential for beginning practitioners at all levels in the field of education, helps new and/or early career faculty acquire and develop the competencies they need to thrive while building their careers (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014; Benson, Morahan, Sachdeva, & Richman, 2002; Mayer, Blair, Ko, Patel, & Files, 2014; Tareef, 2013; Thorndyke, Gusic, & Millner, 2008). The mentor-mentee partnership can best be described as a relationship that is deliberate, tailored to the unique work context of the faculty member, and intentional. As Johnson (2007) posits, “To mentor is to model. Research from a wide range of professional fields confirms that in addition to providing career guidance and psychological support, outstanding mentors are also deliberate models” (p. 59).

Taking a new member of the academy on as one’s protégé is both a formidable and noble task. Mentors and mentees each have their needs, not the least of which involves practical training, adequate preparation, introduction to - and dissemination of - a plan for assessing the relationship and a plan for sustainability. For the mentor, there are responsibilities related to deeply understanding and being able to relay structural and organizational information, developing a mentoring plan, negotiating the amount of oversight by the mentor, assessing the attainment of goals, and providing the right amount of guidance so as to create a confident, informed, self-sustaining professional who will take ownership of his or her career path and seek and achieve success in academia. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), establishing high quality teacher preparation programs involves preserving sustainability by renewing the resource pool from which outstanding educators can be drawn. It is characterized by investing resources in training, trust building, and teamwork whose effects remain long after resources have disappeared (p. 267). It encourages senior faculty to ensure their efforts become “embedded within the wider culture” (p. 267) so that newer, or less-experienced faculty are strategically

prepared to assume key teaching and leadership roles. Developing and implementing a high-quality teacher preparation program where faculty, especially new faculty, are mentored to assume such roles are critical requisites not only to the success and stability of their careers, but to the capacity of the department and the institution as a whole.

Supporting high quality, special education teacher preparation, however, involves more than preparing faculty to become successful in their new role in the academy. Developing expertise among new or early career special education faculty adds layers of complexity to the mentoring process.

Developing Expertise Among Special Education Faculty

It is not surprising that preparing special education teachers has become increasingly significant since the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). This legal mandate, associated with major elements such as Least Restrictive Environment, Individualized Educational Programs, and Due Process, have put special education preparation programs in the spotlight for legal review and scrutiny for over four decades. Against the backdrop of exponential growth, the number of special education teachers has not been able to keep pace with the demand for their services and expertise. With better knowledge of how struggling students learn, along with keener insight into the needs of learners who are culturally and linguistically diverse, special educators' roles and practice have multiplied and become more specialized (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). As McLeskey et al. (2017) argue, effective practices are research-based and essential to improving student outcomes:

The need to improve teacher practice has led several prominent teacher educators (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2011; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015; McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanaugh, 2013) to take the position that teacher education should focus more deliberately on instructional practice, and that teacher preparation programs should be developed that address this goal. In these programs, teacher education would be centered on a set of effective practices that all teachers need to learn (i.e., practices that are used frequently in classrooms and have been shown to improve student outcomes). Programs also would embed much of teacher preparation in clinical settings to systematically support teacher candidates (p. 4).

Although all beginning teachers are challenged to teach in ways that are responsive to students' needs, special education teachers, in particular, are responsible for increasing the achievement levels of students with some of the most complex learning and behavioral difficulties. Preparation programs are charged with producing beginning special education teachers who are "prepared to engage in the types of complex instructional practice and professional collaborations that are required for educating students with disabilities effectively" (p. 5). Teacher education programs that take on the mantle to prepare special education teachers have been traditionally held to a high standard, i.e., meeting requirements of professional accreditation groups, such as Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), changing state licensure requirements, and federal regulations related to teacher preparation (CAEP). Preparation programs have also been responsible for responding to the long-term shortage of special education teachers, with intensive and rapid preparation of highly qualified teachers, despite, as McLeskey et al. contend,

“no clear guidance as to the most effective practices to target” (p. 5). Without clarity or guidance on which practices could make the biggest difference in the lives of students with exceptionalities, the demands on teacher education in the area of special education has only intensified.

Leko et al. (2015) assert that beginning special education teachers require multiple opportunities to both apply their knowledge in real-life settings and receive meaningful, ongoing feedback regarding their practice. Such deliberate practice is the cornerstone of our program. Faculty must share their expertise within both university and field-based settings and support comprehensive student learning goals. As McDonald, Kazemi, and Kavanaugh (2013) purport, preparation programs must: (a) “articulate a common language for specifying practice, which would facilitate the field’s ability to engage in collective activity; (b) identify and specify common pedagogies in teacher education; and (c) address the perennial and persistent divides among university courses and between university course work and clinical experiences” (p. 378). We believe that mentoring new and early career faculty establishes a space for the confluence of specialized language, specialized pedagogies, and deliberate “in-seat” and “on-site” approaches to happen in a field dedicated to improving the lives of students with disabilities and others who struggle to succeed in school.

Background

In the spring semester of 2017, a department within an educator preparation program (EPP) unit in the college of education at a large, comprehensive university in the southeastern sector of the U.S. began making plans to develop a mentoring program for new and/or early career faculty. The chairperson of the Inclusive Education Department proposed a mentoring program that would provide targeted support and guidance to faculty entering academe. The department had traditionally relied on the generosity of the department chair, seasoned faculty, and other new faculty for advice, support, and the sharing of ideas, resources, and knowledge about the specifics of the department. This informal process was not unlike the process that many institutions of higher education follow for enculturating new faculty. As Fountain and Newcomer (2016) point out,

More-senior members of organizations in all sectors are frequently asked informally, or are even required, to socialize and support new and/or more-junior members of their organizations to strengthen the latter’s relevant skills, to develop potential leaders, and to build organizational capacity more generally. These relationships are typically called *mentoring* (p. 483).

Seeking a more formalized process whereby mentees would be systematically inculcated into the department, the department chairperson and a senior faculty member met to discuss the possibility of establishing a mentoring program for three new faculty; two of whom would be described as “early career” (i.e., bringing minimal experience to the position) and a third who was new to academe. The process that would befit our department and the unit that housed the college of education was one that the department chair envisioned as a “reciprocal learning relationship characterized by trust, respect, and commitment in which a mentor would support the professional and personal development of another by sharing his or her life experiences, influence, and expertise” (Zellers, Howard, & Barcie, 2008, p. 555).

The senior tenured member of the department, who also had the greatest longevity in the department and the college, was approached by the department chairperson and asked to become a mentor. As that person, I began examining what the literature revealed about formal and informal mentoring processes and contemplating how I could make the best use of resources at my disposal. *How would we move forward, what would future meetings between my mentee and I look like, and how much information could or should be shared and when*, were among the many questions I had.

What resulted from these conversations and the questions that were asked is this manuscript, which combines weeks of document gathering, reviews of relevant literature, and a plan for building the structure and content of a formal mentoring program in which mentors and mentees would be expected to interact within the mission, values, and work culture of the department (Lumpkin, 2011). It was a plan for making mentoring an established protocol in the department while supporting high quality teacher preparation.

Initial Steps

The mission of our mentoring program was envisaged as providing visible and consistent support for new and early career faculty development. To accomplish this, we – the department chairperson and I - developed uncompromising goals for the newly developed program. We sought visible and authentic support from the highest levels of the university, as well as from the dean of the college. We also provided ongoing support for effective and accessible mentor training, professional development, guidance, and resources for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the mentor (myself, at first, and ultimately, others) and the program. Mentees would be provided training that addressed hard skills, i.e., informally, those related to working knowledge of the job and the institution (Johnson, 2007), and soft skills, i.e., those related to understanding the political environment, negotiating interpersonal relationships, protecting oneself emotionally, and becoming a good colleague. To formalize the process, explicit and written guidelines on topics such as promotion and tenure guidelines, annual departmental evaluations, faculty performance agreements, and university, college, and departmental strategic goals, policies and procedures, were provided. We committed to providing new and early career faculty career advancement and learning across the lifespan by establishing opportunities for success in the areas of preparing preservice teachers, supervision and mentoring, research and scholarship, professional service, work-life balance, and personal satisfaction.

Leadership and/or administrative support was critical, if not tantamount, to the success of the mentoring program, which is why the department felt well positioned to undertake a mentoring program when it did. With the addition of three new faculty, the opportunity for faculty mentoring presented itself. Those selected to become mentors, along with the department chairperson, pointed new faculty in the direction of existing resources initially, such as teaching and assessment information, networking strategies, technological assistance, and other short-term issues, (e.g., posting grades).

It was an ambitious task that required strategy and organization. A list of possible mentors and mentor/mentee pairings was first created. The department chair provided all participants with a copy of *On Being a Mentor* (Johnson, 2007), and procured resources for having the first mentor

attend the Mentoring Institute at University of New Mexico's Annual Mentoring Conference, *A Decade of Cultivating an Inclusive Mentoring Community: Developmental Networks for Innovation, Achievement, and Transformation* conference, which was held in 2017 in Albuquerque. It was decided that this conference, which both attendees (the department chairperson and I) found not only illuminating, but essential, to professional educators wishing to engage in mentoring, would be made available to more mentors and mentees in the future.

The next steps involved the establishment of Mentoring and Faculty Development Handbooks. The department had already developed an anthology of necessary information for new faculty members in its Faculty Development Handbook. This handbook included guidelines, links, bylaws, mission statement and core values, and a New Faculty Resource Page; however, there was no mention of mentoring. As a way of organizing the many facets of information that new faculty are required to navigate, the University of Maine's ADVANCE Rising Tide Center suggests that the mentoring relationship focus on short-term issues (i.e., How do I post grades online? How do I deal with suspected plagiarism, etc.?) as well as long-term (How do I achieve tenure? How do I articulate my research agenda, etc.). Convinced that short-term topics for consideration such as *functional items*, which would get the new faculty member up-and-running on Day 1, that was where we began. Next, *organizational items*, such as Promotion and Tenure Guidelines, Annual Review Documents, Course Scheduling, Syllabi Construction, Registration Issues, and Course and Program Descriptions, were included to assist new faculty members in positioning themselves within the department. Long-term topics, such as *institutional items* that could help mentees discover their positionality within the larger institution, would follow; and finally, *transitional items* (e.g., Useful Acronyms, Digital Measures, Important Links, Evaluation of Faculty Performance, etc.) to which new faculty members would return as needed, would round out the informational source.

Relevant Literature

As mentioned earlier, the literature was reviewed for framing the conceptual underpinnings for mentoring, adult learning, knowledge acquisition, collegiality, professional advancement, psychosocial functions, expectations, monitoring, and responsibilities of mentors and mentees. The theories of Vygotsky (1978) and neo-Vygotskian scholars, as well as more current theorists, provide the theoretical origin of mentoring as a socially mediated construct, as conceptualized within our department. Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian scholars stand in agreement that both teacher (mentor) and learner (mentee) work collaboratively to bring the learner from an initial level of mastery to gradual independent activity (Vygotsky, 1978), and that jointly (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), there is the potential to bring the mentor to higher levels of expertise as well (Tsay, 2014). Thus, both mentee and mentor appropriate cognitive ideas, skills, and knowledge (Rogoff, 1992). Hence, our basic assumption that learning is reciprocal.

Reciprocity is a major theme in the realm of mentoring, as explicated by the theories of Tharp and Gallimore (1988), who posited that instructional conversations and joint productive activity promulgated adult learning, where all parties are accountable to one another and all parties provide benefits to the other. Wertsch (1985) and Bahktin (1981) espoused the belief that verbal communication was a powerful cultural tool for learning. These theories have particular usefulness to our current endeavors as the cultural aspect of mentoring has garnered increased attention in the literature (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004), despite the findings of Fountain and

Newcomer (2016), who purport that race and gender were not factors in predicting mentoring success for mentees. Our leanings support adequate mentor training as the only strong predictor for success, especially in terms helping mentees plan and implement a research agenda. The support of the department head was found to be the strongest predictor of mentees' finding mentoring useful for academic career planning (p. 499).

We can refer back to Vygotsky (1978) to find a meaningful construct, and that is the notion of interpersonal and intrapersonal planes of knowledge acquisition as a conceptual underpinning for our work. At the juncture of understanding is the idea that new knowledge is first received on an interpersonal plane of learning, or the interchange between two or more individuals, only to be mediated and constructed within an intrapersonal plane where an individual is able to make sense of and apply a new construct. This theory provides our conceptual frame for the nature of adult learning as a result of mentoring in academe.

Promoting Professional Growth

In studies reviewed by Fountain and Newcomer (2016), faculty mentors provided the following benefits: (a) facilitating the recruitment, retention, and advancement of faculty (Bland et al., 2009; Falzarano & Zipp, 2012; Gwyn, 2011; McKinley, 2004); socializing protégés into an academic unit's culture (Bland et al., 2009; Cunningham, 1999; Lumpkin, 2011; Luna & Cullen, 1995); (c) increasing collegiality and the building of relationships and networks among protégés and mentors (Benson et al., 2002; Borders et al., 2011; Luna & Cullen, 1995); (d) increasing productivity among both protégés and mentors (Falzarano & Zipp, 2012); (e) promoting professional growth and career development for protégés and mentors (Kram, 1985); and, (f) increasing productivity and organizational stability (Bland et al., 2009; Cunningham, 1999; Falzarano & Zipp, 2012) (p. 485). These authors and others shaped our efforts going forward in developing and implementing our own mentoring program.

The Mentor

As Carnethon, Kim, and Lloyd-Jones (2012) profess, “the ultimate metric of a successful mentoring program for junior faculty is demonstrated excellence in research, teaching and service resulting in promotion according to the standards established for their career track” (p. 4). Ideally, the mentor should be a Professor or Associate Professor in the department. This individual is expected to take a broader view of the mentee's activities related to their professional development. The mentor may share professional interests with the mentee and may include the mentee in scholarly pursuits, such as research, professional presentations and academic writing. The mentor also carries out the department's evaluation and review process for the mentee. This is not to be confused with the annual review process or promotion and tenure, which, within our setting, is the purview of the department chair and the Promotion & Tenure Committee, respectively.

Mentoring Functions

As Kram (1985, in Johnson, 2007, p. 45) proposes, mentoring functions within two broad categories: (1) *Career functions*, or those aspects that help the mentee “learn the ropes” and

prepare for promotion and tenure; and (2) *Psychosocial functions*, which enhance a mentee's sense of self-esteem, professional identity, and sense of competence. These are built upon the mentor's affirmation, counseling, and mutuality, as well as a bond of trust between the two. A mother of two adolescent boys, the chairperson of our department not only advocated, but modeled, a "family first" environment, which resonated with each new faculty member, all of whom are parents with young children. They were especially appreciative of this philosophy and favorably to her lead. As a result, faculty productivity, job satisfaction, and high morale characterize the work environment. New and early career faculty are producing scholarship in the form of publications and earning grants at rates comparable to faculty in Tier 1 and Tier 2 institutions. The literature is forthcoming on the benefits of faculty satisfaction, self-esteem, and professional identity, as expressed in the psychosocial or "soft skills" that form the foundation for any successful mentoring program. Johnson (2007) adds that the role of mentor includes being accessible; providing encouragement and support; providing direct teaching and guidance; clarifying performance expectations; initiating sponsorship (i.e. sharing power when appropriate); demystifying the system; encouraging risk-taking; promoting visibility; being an intentional model; providing professional socialization; delivering feedback; offering counsel (without being too heavy-handed); and allowing for increased mutuality and collegiality (p. 68).

Setting Expectations

Mentors need to begin with a Mentoring Plan, where mentor and mentee (a) decide on meeting dates; (b) agree on time commitments (frequency, length) by planning for scheduled future/special meetings; (c) discuss and set goals and expectations together and ensure that both parties understand goals and agree on their importance; (d) set benchmarks where appropriate (i.e., re-defining goals; attending to new issues); (e) make goals specific and incremental; (f) plan for acquisition of discipline-specific conceptual knowledge and research skill development; (g) identify specific research skills needed to complete research projects; (h) structure how these skills will be acquired; and (i) form an appropriate balance between one's scholarly work and service-oriented activities such as committee membership, how to best handle pressures, and when it is appropriate to decline. My mentee and I established our own pre-planning, which was essential in the early stages of the development of our mentoring relationship.

On-going Monitoring/Formative Feedback

On-going monitoring by the mentor is equally essential and should include not only involve keeping the mentee on track, but also observing the new faculty member teach; monitoring his/her presentation/publication (papers, abstracts, works in progress) record and research agenda; producing and disseminating scholarship with the mentee; reviewing of the new faculty member's CV; and reviewing a new faculty member's professional goals. Mentors should also be consistently assessing the mentoring relationship itself with a mentee, the amount of satisfaction with the relationship (i.e., is mentee comfortable approaching mentor for assistance? Is there mutual trust?), and be candid regarding the mentee's strengths and assets, areas for growth and development, attitudes, and observations on how the mentee may be perceived by others. Feedback should be *formative* in nature, allowing the mentee the opportunity to re-plan, re-calibrate, and revise as necessary. Conversely, the mentee should take the initiative to meet with the mentor and provide feedback on his/her mentor's advice or guidance.

Within our setting, my mentee and I co-taught two special education seminars, shared clinical supervision, developed presentations and publications collaboratively, and conducted a review of the mentee's professional goals on a monthly (and sometimes, bi-monthly) basis. Checklists that referenced competencies (such as those highlighted above), were used by my mentee and I to evaluate and self-evaluate one another. Supporting high quality teaching, special education knowledge, and clinical supervision and mentoring of preservice teachers within the Master of Arts program, were identified by my mentee as the most significant goals for professional growth.

The Mentee

A professional mentoring program demands a high level of professionalism in terms of the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentees need to keep in mind that while they view their mentor as a "friend," the mentor may be a senior colleague in the same department and the relationship should be carried out with every degree of respect and professionalism possible. Carnethon et. al (2014) have harnessed a list of characteristics common among successful mentees from a number of on-line sources. Some of these characteristics include: showing appreciation for the mentor's time and efforts on his or her behalf; meeting regularly with their mentor; showing trustworthiness toward their mentor and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate; following up on project and commitments in a timely way; learning from successes and errors; displaying an inquiry stance toward scholarship; suggesting mutual projects with the mentor; actively utilizing the mentor's advice and guidance; displaying optimism and staying on course in order to meet personal goals; holding realistic expectations of one's mentor and the mentoring relationship; accepting constructive criticism and acting to improve upon areas identified by the mentor; developing realistic and thoughtful goals for furthering his or her career; and approaching tasks pensively and introspectively (p. 11). The relationship between my mentee and I developed into one in which we are consistently looking for research projects and actively seeking collegial feedback.

Responsibilities of the Mentee

Following the initial meeting, at a minimum, new and early career faculty should meet at least once a month with their mentor. The purpose of this is to both review any handbooks and discuss the mentee's progress toward the original goals (or, to revise the original goals) within the Mentoring Plan. My mentee and I agreed that it was her responsibility to call any meetings outside of our regularly scheduled meetings when there was an issue to be addressed or when she was in need of extra support on a particular project. It is also up to my mentee to schedule a meeting with the department chairperson to discuss feedback from each review that took place.

Anticipated Outcomes

Outcomes are key to any program, as they help us measure the effectiveness and efficacy of our efforts (Guskey, 2000). Fountain and Newcomer (2016) suggest several factors that appear to be connected with successful mentoring programs, including: clearly stated purpose and goals

(Lumpkin, 2011; Luna & Cullen, 1995); support from faculty and leadership (Peters & Boylston, 2006); evaluation for continuous improvement (Lumpkin, 2011; Luna & Cullen, 1995); inclusive design that instills mentoring as a cultural value and core institutional responsibility (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014); and intentional strategies for matching pairs based on professional compatibility (Lumpkin, 2011) (p. 492). The last two criteria presented here were essential to providing a working environment where my mentee felt she could take risks, discuss delicate issues, and become empowered within the department. Not all outcomes, of course, are expected to be realized immediately. In fact, many of the strategies already discussed have been implemented incrementally in our own program and may even lapse slightly before being fully actualized.

We have structured our own mentoring program to be evaluated on several criteria, many of which Carnethon, Kim, and Lloyd-Jones (2012) identify here, and they are: (a) integration into the departmental, collegial, and institutional culture; (b) clarified expectations and criteria for promotion and tenure; (c) steady and consistent productivity with guidance and support of scholarly efforts; (d) support in professional writing skills and the conventions of journal writing; (e) transparent and timely feedback on progress and accomplishments; (f) reduced potential for burn-out; (g) increased perceptions of institutional support; (h) increased overall career satisfaction; (i) increased overall sense of confidence and well-being; (j) increased visibility in the institution and in the mentee's field by introduction to others (advocacy); (k) better understanding of the social, political landscape; (l) providing a confidential venue for discussing concerns and challenges; (m) mutual exchange of ideas and opinions; and, (n) enhancement of leadership and interpersonal skills (p. 6). These elements were incorporated into our own feedback form at the end of our first year as open-ended statements where both my mentee and I assigned ratings and comments on these outcomes.

Implications and Recommendations

Carnethon et al.'s (2014) previously discussed set of recommendations, which is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research adapted from on-line mentoring handbooks, modules and research manuscripts, provides the backdrop for the following discussion. Drawing from our own experiences and understandings in developing and implementing our own mentoring program, we paired several of their recommendations with actions we have taken:

Developing Professional Skills

Developing professional skills goes back to Carnethon et al.'s (2012) ultimate metric of a successful mentoring program for new and early career faculty: demonstrating "excellence in research, teaching and service resulting in promotion according to the standards established for their career track" (p. 4). Fountain and Newcomer (2016) point out that while mentors may attach more importance to psychosocial/socioemotional, personal, and/or interpersonal support (i.e., "soft" support), mentees are typically focused largely on getting the "hard" (i.e., handbook guidelines, promotion & tenure, annual review and faculty performance), practical advice they need to be successful on the surface. Mentors must discuss which professional skills (e.g., presenting, writing, teaching, leadership) the mentee feels that he/she has a good handle on and which he/she feels are areas that require attention and discuss a plan for skills development. Just

as we require our students in higher education to know their strengths and weaknesses, so too must new faculty members.

In our experience, mentees were strongly preferential toward the career functions, or “hard skills,” of mentoring (Kram, 1985, Johnson, 2007). They wanted to know what they needed to accomplish, when, and to what degree their performance would determine having their work looked upon favorably. We began our work in the areas of teaching, supervision, and student mentoring in special education settings as these were areas that demanded excellence and proficiency. Mentees in our department were initially versed in teaching strategies, syllabus construction, and instruction demands. They found themselves needing to acclimate to an academic career; one that could be grueling, given students’ expansive expectations. Our mentors soon realized that they needed to share their strategies for coping with all the demands of teaching – the perfunctory details as well as special education content delivery. Supervising student teachers was another demand of new faculty, involving translating evidence-based and high-leverage strategies to student support in the field, developing strong interpersonal skills for cooperating with classroom teachers and school administrators, coordinating visits, and evaluating students according to special education teaching standards outlined by the state. “Learning the ropes” in these areas and others (e.g., acclimating to a new space, communication conventions, setting up passwords, etc.) helped new faculty gradually assimilate to the departmental culture. Despite having fairly strong content and pedagogical knowledge in special education, new faculty were nearly wholly dependent on their mentors for clarifying expectations and criteria for annual reviews and promotion and tenure.

Defining their Research

It is inevitable that new faculty members will be expected to produce scholarly work that is peer-reviewed and made available to audiences within their particular field. This is why it is critical that mentors ask their mentee if he/she has identified a particular area in which he/she would like to focus. As Carnethon et al. (2012) suggest, steady and consistent productivity with guidance and support of scholarly efforts (involving not only the mentor, but other professional faculty as well) is an expectation that weighs heavily at review time. Mentors, therefore, need to begin supporting new faculty in professional writing skills and the conventions of journal writing. Mentors can ask whether there are collaborators within the department or the college who can help newer faculty pursue a particular research area; we have found, however, that mentors are the first line of defense for providing assistance to faculty new to academe. It is common for new faculty members to choose an overly broad area or an area that they are interested in, but that is replete with gatekeepers’ names in the literature. That is why mentors are needed to help new faculty members identify whether there is a sub-area for research that they can claim as their own. If a mentee does not have a clear idea of what he/she would like to pursue, guidance is needed. Developing a research agenda is paramount for new faculty.

A strategy that we have adopted is to invite mentees to collaborate on our ongoing research. By doing so, they may be able to identify aspects of the work that are of greatest interest to them. We have found that encouraging new faculty to co-present at conferences is an effective way to help them develop their scholarly portfolio. We have also found that many new faculty have already been exposed to conference attendance and/or presentations prior to being hired,

which gives them an advantage in the area of scholarship. We have also found that new faculty are coming to our university with publications they have either co-authored or authored solely, which is a definite plus. Even so, mentors need to be able to facilitate opportunities for the new faculty to go beyond developing presentations and publications, such as applying for and earning grants, contributing to grant reviews, or serving on editorial boards or as reviewers. Reviewing is a great opportunity for mentees to learn about research going on in the field and to consider and contrast different writing styles and strengths of applications. Finally, within our college and university there exist several awards for which new faculty can apply. Mentors have identified opportunities for our mentees to apply for research awards or research funding targeted to their research agendas. To date, two mentees have been awarded grants within the college of education. This type of support leads to mentees gaining confidence and independence in their new role as a faculty member.

Building a Professional Network

Mentors should be asking what they can do to help introduce new faculty to other faculty in the department, the college, the university, and outside the institution who would be amenable to scholarly collaboration. This is assistance that our mentors provide to help mentees gain footing in committees and the larger structure of academe. Recommending service committees that the mentee should join that will offer him/her the best opportunity to gain particular knowledge and/or build a strong network, helps the mentee become visible beyond the department's environs. Mentors should encourage mentees to become available for search committee work, curriculum work, and other initiatives that support the department and college and provide evidence of the quality and significance of their work. Although service commitments are discouraged for new faculty in their first year at our institution, we have observed how service involvement has increased their sense of self-efficacy and visibility within the institution, as well as assist their understanding of the social, political, and academic landscape (Carnethon et al., 2012). Further, mentees have been encouraged to build a network and become known in their field, especially by being invited to give talks at other institutions. Not only do these activities increase the mentee's professional profile and provide him/her with opportunities to get feedback on ongoing work from people outside the institution, they also play an important role in the promotion and tenure process at our university in terms of outside letters of recommendation, which have recently become a requirement.

Monitoring Progress

Like their colleagues, mentees are responsible not only for annual reviews but also progress toward promotion and tenure. Within our department, mentees can receive feedback as soon as 3-6 months following being hired. The mentor has an opportunity to work with the mentee early on in terms of observing their activities, gauging their progress, identifying needs and assisting them in determining their career objectives, prior to review by the department chairperson. Other institutions may have similar methods for tracking the progress of new faculty, yet we have found that helping the mentee with the assembly of short-term goals provides opportunity for reflection, recalibration of short-term goals, and skills improvement (Carnethon et. al., 2012, p. 10).

Recommendations for Department Chairpersons and Deans

As Johnson (2007) posits, “no treatment of mentoring in higher education would be complete without directing attention to the critical role that institutional leaders play in facilitating and promoting a culture and structure conducive to mentoring” (p. 222). The author goes on to state the belief of deans, department chairpersons, and senior faculty members have in terms of “moral obligation and collective responsibility” to the new faculty member (p. 222).

Department chairpersons and deans who elect to implement departmental mentoring need to actively support mentoring efforts through word, allocation of resources, and positive reinforcement. The department chairperson, in particular, can implement a low-key but strategic strategy for assessing the needs of new or early career faculty for stronger support and better connections with seasoned faculty. The department chair is the strongest predictor of mentees’ finding mentoring useful for academic career planning; and women are significantly more likely than men to feel that they benefit from mentoring in this area (Fountain & Newcomer, 2016, p. 499).

Conclusion

We realize that this is just the beginning of our journey in investigating the efficacy of our mentoring program and its impact on new and early career special education faculty development. There is still much data needed to gauge how effectively we have provided the stepping stones for our protégés to become successful, productive, and confident members of the academy. At the time of this writing, all three (one, new and two, early career) faculty members are embarking upon leadership roles within the department and college and all three have, in the course of one year, distinguished themselves academically with funded grants, national and international presentations, numerous publications, and outstanding peer and student teaching evaluations. One could argue that our search committee selected these faculty well, and we certainly would not disagree. They are strong, talented individuals and have already been recognized in our department for their excellence in teaching, scholarship and professional service. We believe that the inclusion of our mentoring program, however, provided our new colleagues an important means for personal and professional growth, while laying the groundwork for supporting and sustaining them well into the future.

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