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Supporting High Quality Teacher Preparation: Results from a Mentoring Program for Special Education Faculty - Two Years Later

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Abstract

Two years ago, we presented a newly formalized process for systematically inculcating new faculty into our department, which up to that point had relied solely 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 university, college, department, and academe in general. The mission of our mentoring program was envisaged as providing visible and consistent support for new and early career faculty development. The program that was established was conceived 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. How we would move forward, what future mentee and mentor meetings would look like, and how much information could or should be shared and when, were among the many questions we asked as we embarked on this journey together. This paper presents the results of that mentor-mentee partnership.

Keywords

Mentoring, New and Early Career Faculty, Teacher Education, Special Education

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Introduction

This manuscript is a follow-up to an earlier publication in which new and early career special education professors participated in a newly established mentoring program in the Inclusive Education department located within the school of education of a public research university in the Southeast US. We have learned many lessons for developing strong faculty mentoring relationships and developing high quality teacher preparation since the inception of our mentoring program. In this reflective manuscript, we, the authors –mentor and mentee - intend to share our background, our experiences, and what we have discovered about our mentoring relationship over the course of the last two years and ultimately where we hope this relationship leads in the future.

As we posited in our original article, mentors provide opportunities for success to new and early career faculty in the areas of preparing preservice teachers, supervision and mentoring, research and scholarship, professional service, work-life balance, and personal satisfaction (Johnson, 2007). Mentees are typically provided training that addresses both 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. 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, are often simultaneously shared with mentees, who are trying to "get their sea legs" during their earliest days in academe.

Conceptual Framework

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.

Supporting High-Quality Teacher Preparation

An abundance of literature exists which endorses mentoring as a critical support mechanism for new and early career faculty for acquiring and developing crucial competencies they will need for building successful and high-quality careers (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014; Benson, Morahan, Sachdeva, & Richman, 2002; Mayer, Blair, Ko, Patel, & Files, 2014; Tareef, 2013; Thorndyke, Gusic, & Millner, 2008). 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 and 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.

As university-based traditional teacher preparation programs continue to produce the majority of U. S. teachers, developing and supporting high quality teachers remains an irrefutable goal of such programs (Walsh, 2015). Swanepoel (2020) focuses our attention to the evidence in our own U.S. schools, averring "if there was ever a time for educational leaders to look for an opportunity to motivate the best and strongest veteran teachers and support their novice teacher retention, the time is now" (p. 170). Indeed, the time for preparers of pre-service teachers to engage in faculty development through mentoring has arrived. As Phuong, Foster, and Reio (2020) explain, faculty development (FD) has itself become an emerging discipline with an extensive body of literature, the most common pointing to outcomes involved in changes in new faculty knowledge, skills, and behavior (p. 1).

Garza, Reynosa, Werner, Duchaine, and Harter (2019) purport "Mentoring is a tool that may be instrumental in developing mentors' deeper understanding of the roles and purposes of mentoring to promote quality guidance and support for mentees" (p. 1). Promoting the professional development of both mentors and mentees supports the professional and scholarly growth that sustains mentoring in higher education.

Developing Expertise Within Our Context

Although all beginning teachers are challenged to teach in ways that are responsive to students' needs, supporting high quality special education teachers involves developing expertise among new or early career special education faculty adds layers of complexity to the mentoring process. Special education faculty are not only responsible for mentoring preservice teachers to collaborate with general educators in P-12 schools in specific disciplines, but are also responsible for increasing the achievement levels of students with some of the most complex learning and behavioral difficulties within general and inclusive classrooms alike. 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 have multiplied and become more specialized (Aronson & Laughter, 2016), as have those of university professors.

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 of preparing special educators whose research base is frequently challenged have been traditionally held to

a higher 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 – and the professors within the field – also find themselves responding to the long-term shortage of special education teachers, given increasing teacher turnover and attrition rates (Goldring et al., 2014). Further, with such intensive and rapid need for highly qualified special educators, university professors are sometimes faced with "no clear guidance as to the most effective practices to target" (McLeskey, 2017, p. 5). Without consistency, clarity or guidance on which practices could make the biggest difference in the lives of P-12 students with exceptionalities, university professors must possess the professional and pedagogical knowledge that preservice special education teachers will need in order to be "day-one ready" in the classroom.

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. It is important to note that while mentoring might be examined within any context or discipline within higher education, the context that our reflections are built upon require our professors to prepare teachers who possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise commensurate with effective special education practitioners in P-12 schools.

The Plan

Early Stages

An intentional plan was developed for making mentoring an established protocol in the Inclusive Education department in order to support high quality teacher preparation. 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, NM. It was decided that this conference, which both attendees (the department chairperson and mentor) 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 (2021) 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.?). The chairperson and I decided to begin with short-term topics (or *functional* items), which would get our new faculty member up-and-running on Day One.

Next, *organizational items,* such as Promotion and Tenure Guidelines, Annual Review Documents, Course Scheduling, Syllabi Construction, Registration Issues, and Course and Program Descriptions, were added to assist our new faculty member in positioning herself 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.

Last but not least, we stressed the significance of leadership and/or administrative support for the success of the mentoring program. With the addition of three new faculty members, 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, short-term issues, (e.g., posting grades), and other faculty with similar interests, research agendas, and where possible, professional and personal backgrounds. I was the first mentor to go forward with the first mentee.

The Relationship

Who We Are

Although our professional partnership began nearly two years ago, our working relationship actually began prior to that. Elizabeth, who would become my mentee, was hired as a limited term faculty member, which meant that she was appointed to a one-year limited term assistant professor position to teach courses in special education, including Masters-level courses that offered initial certification in special education and required student teacher supervision. At the time of her employment there was no official institutional commitment of continuing employment beyond the single term of the limited-term assignment. Elizabeth and I co-taught a year-long clinical experience which led to a Master of Arts degree in Special Education (General Curriculum) during consecutive Fall and Spring semesters. Throughout this experience we had the opportunity to develop curriculum, co-plan, create, and deliver lessons, supervise practicum students in the field, and collaboratively evaluate student performance. With both of us having expertise working with students with high incidence disabilities, our perspectives were similar and we quickly found common ground in our approach to teaching. One year later, Elizabeth responded to a faculty opening in the department and went through a formal interview process. She was hired and given a contract for a tenure-track assistant professor position. This set the stage for our formal mentoring relationship.

Our Reflections

Elizabeth and I began with a Mentoring Plan, where we would (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 our scholarly work and service-oriented activities such as committee membership, how to best handle pressures, and when it is appropriate to decline. We established our own pre-planning, which was essential in the early stages of the development of the mentoring relationship. As Johnson (2007) purports, the role of mentor includes being accessible; planning; 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). Such contexts provide fertile ground upon which the mentoring relationship to grow and thrive.

On-going Monitoring/Formative Feedback

As a mentor, I conducted on-going monitoring by not only keeping Elizabeth on track, but also observing her teach and prepare preservice special education teachers during clinical classes. Additionally, I monitored her presentation and publication (papers, abstracts, works in progress) record and research agenda; collaborated with her and produced and disseminated scholarship with her; reviewed her curriculum vitae; and honed and reviewed her professional goals. We agreed that it would be Elizabeth's 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 was also up to Elizabeth to schedule a meeting with the department chairperson to discuss feedback from each review that took place.

Elizabeth and I were also consistent in assessing the mentoring relationship itself, the amount of satisfaction with the relationship (i.e., was Elizabeth comfortable approaching me for assistance? Was there mutual trust?), and be candid regarding her strengths and assets, areas for growth and development, attitudes, and observations on how she may be perceived by others. Feedback was *formative* in nature, allowing Elizabeth the opportunity to re-plan, re-calibrate, and revise as necessary. Although Elizabeth seemed somewhat reluctant to reciprocate with feedback on my mentoring advice or guidance, she did provide feedback when asked.

As we began our formal partnership, we once again co-taught two special education seminars, shared clinical supervision, developed presentations and publications collaboratively, and conducted a review of my professional goals on a monthly (and sometimes, bi-monthly) basis. Checklists that referenced specific competencies were used by both of us to self-evaluate and

evaluate one another. I identified the following goals as most significant for my professional growth: supporting high quality teaching, special education knowledge, and effective clinical supervision and mentoring of preservice teachers within the Master of Arts program. As Carnethon, Kim, and Lloyd-Jones (2012) posit, "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). A mentor may share professional interests with the mentee and may include the mentee in scholarly pursuits, such as research, professional presentations and academic writing.

What We Learned

What we discovered in the course of our mentoring partnership can best be described in the following rating scales adapted by Phillips and Dennison (2015) in their text, *Faculty Mentoring: A Practical Manual for Mentors, Mentees, Administrators, and Faculty Developers*. This text was chosen by the department chairperson who saw promise in our ability to use it to both formatively and summatively evaluate our mentoring relationship. The five major areas we extracted from this text were: (a) Impact of the mentoring relationship; (b) Efficacy of the mentoring program; (c) Mentor effectiveness; (d) Summary of what the mentee learned in preparing for tenure; and (e) Overall reflection on the Mentee/Mentor experience and future implications. Elizabeth and I found these scales served our reflective purposes well by allowing us to ponder our perceptions of the mentoring relationship we had formed. These areas are discussed below:

Impact of the mentoring relationship

This area was crucial for understanding how much of an impact Elizabeth perceived the mentoring program had on her in terms of her mentor, the learning community (LC), and her own growth on a number of criteria, using a 5-point scale where *0 = no impact to 5 = critical impact*. Her perceptions are provided here:

Elizabeth's Responses:

	Mentor	**LC** (no response)	**Self**
Connected with faculty across campus	0 1 2 3 4 **5**	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 **2** 3 4 5
Managed time for work & life	0 1 2 3 4 **5**	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 **3** 4 5
Adequately prepared for engaged teaching	0 1 2 3 4 **5**	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 **3** 4 5
Planned research schedule	0 1 2 3 4 **5**	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 **2** 3 4 5
Integrated teaching & research agendas	0 1 2 3 4 **5**	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 **2** 3 4 5

Perceived efficacy of the mentoring program

Three open-ended questions were posed for both Elizabeth (mentee) and I (mentor) to evaluate the efficacy of the program structure. These questions and their responses are below:

Q1: In retrospect, how did the mentoring pair selection process work out for you?

Elizabeth: "Great! Victoria has extensive institutional, professional, and real-world knowledge and insight that she readily shared. This information is invaluable."

Me: "Excellent - Elizabeth and I co-taught prior to her appointment as an assistant professor which gave us an opportunity to see what a collaborative relationship would look like."

Q2: Was the program director accessible? Did you contact [your mentor/mentee] during the year? Was the contact helpful?

Elizabeth: "Yes, Victoria maintained an open-door policy. She was always available and quick to respond to any questions/concerns/mental musings I had."

Me: "I really tried to be available whenever and wherever. I recall how difficult it was for me without a mentor and how my most urgent questions were often put on hold for days at a time. I never wanted anyone else to – especially new faculty - to experience that kind of isolation."

Q3: Was the availability of mentoring a factor in your choosing to work at this university?

Elizabeth: "Knowing that our department chair had a plan for a mentoring program was a factor of consideration. This indicated to me that new faculty development was a departmental priority."

Me: "I long bemoaned the lack of a mentoring program, not just for my own development as a faculty member, but for those new to the university and our department. I valued mentorship and described my desire to either initiate or be involved in a mentoring program within our department on three annual faculty reviews prior to the establishment of our current program. Luckily our department chair was in agreement, advocating for, and supporting the development of the mentoring program we now have."

Perceived effectiveness of the mentor

Elizabeth and I were asked to calculate the proportion of time spent with one another in the following areas:

	Elizabeth (mentee)	Victoria (mentor)
Teaching	30	30
Research	30	40

Service	30	10
Work/life balance	10	20
Total	100%	100%

Elizabeth was then asked to describe other kinds of contacts that she and I had, to which she replied, "Victoria (mentor) made herself available via all forms of contact and was always quick to respond. She and I attended and presented at an international conference!"

In response to a question asking how her mentor helped her connect with new colleagues on or off campus, Elizabeth replied, "She encouraged me to reach out to others with similar areas of interest and to participate in activities geared toward new or junior faculty," adding what she valued most about the mentoring relationship was "openness and honesty!" 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, which Elizabeth and I both felt were present in our mentoring relationship.

When asked how my advice helped Elizabeth in the following areas using a 5-point scale where *0 = no impact to 5 = critical impact,* she indicated (see bolded score):

Campus Culture	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Negotiating your departmental needs	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Annual review preparation	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Tenure strategies	0 1 2 3 **4** 5
Teaching	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Research	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Service	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Student course evaluations	0 1 2 3 4 **5**
Life/work balance	0 1 2 3 4 **5+**
Self-care	0 1 2 3 4 **5**

Finally, when asked whether there were any unexpected outcomes of the relationship, Elizabeth wrote, "A friendship that extends outside of this mentorship. Someone I can always go to who will give me an honest opinion and have my best/personal interests in mind."

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, as was the case here. 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).

Perceptions on preparing for tenure

This section, which enabled both of us to indicate which action items we believed had been done and those which we still felt needed to be addressed, was eye-opening for us both. Among those action items Elizabeth believed she had addressed as a result of the mentoring program were: (1) developing an understanding of the culture of the department and school; (2) considering and clarifying the message and direction from departmental chair; (3) talking directly to tenured faculty members in the department to elicit their advice and suggestions for initiating a successful career; (4) exploring the need to apply for an internal and/or external grant; (5) clarifying what are considered acceptable forms of publication for the department; (6) checking to see whether other colleagues are conducting research on areas similar to her own research interests and asking another colleague to collaborate on a research project; (7) considering preparing publications based on doctoral dissertation data; (8) developing a research and writing plan that will work and be followed; (9) determining the usual time required for manuscript review by journals in the field; and, (10) knowing herself and making sure she considered what else is needed to be promoted and tenured in addition to all the above points.

Among those action items Elizabeth still felt she needed to focus on were: (1) carefully considering who has been successfully tenured in the department in the past and examining their accomplishments during that time; (2) asking to view other departmental colleagues' tenure dossier materials; (3) asking directly how many publications are expected to be considered ready for potential promotion and tenure consideration; (4) using the writing lab on campus and/or outside reviewers to read and edit early manuscripts; and, (5) planning breaks from research and writing, but remaining committed to returning to a previous schedule.

All but two items separated Elizabeth's responses and my own in the top column (action items addressed), and those were items that I would have taken out of the "still needs to focus on" column and placed in the "already addressed" column. They were: (1) asking directly how many publications are expected to be considered ready for potential promotion and tenure consideration, and (2) planning breaks from research and writing, but remaining committed to returning to a previous schedule.

Future hopes

Probably our favorite assessment exercise, which we both completed, was a "Dear Mentoring Mentee/Mentor" letter. This exercise provided insight into the future of the relationship and the mentoring program in the department. A number of sentence starters were part of this section of

short answer questions designed to allow us to express our authentic feelings toward one another and offer our hopes for mentoring programs in the future.

To the prompt, "*I have really enjoyed being with you because…,*" Elizabeth indicated,

> *you've provided me with a time committed in order to help me plan/set/meet professional goals. You've always been honest and open and allowed me the space and time I needed to vent and troubleshoot.*

Elizabeth went on to say, "In particular, I found you helped me prioritize, organize, and execute teaching, research, and scholarship."

My response was,

> *I have really enjoyed being with you because you were so easy to work with and readily accepted advice and recommendations. That is not something new or early career faculty are always open to…you showed your propensity for learning the ropes in this environment.*

To the prompt, "*At this time I intend to follow through with my goal/plan of…,*" Elizabeth replied, "continuing to complete teaching, scholarship, and service commitments in order to achieve P & T and be a vital, contributing member of this department." My response was to follow through with my personal goal of "continuing to mentor new faculty with an eye toward not only helping them become self-sufficient, but becoming a progressive force in the department, college, and university."

In response to *"Because of this mentoring relationship, I am planning on continuing to obtain support as a new faculty member from…,"* Elizabeth wrote, "You!" followed by "as well as other departmental colleagues." Answering from the perspective of Elizabeth's mentor, I wrote, "I am planning on continuing to obtain support as a mentor from learning from you, my mentee."

Finally, Elizabeth responded to the last prompt, stating, "I hope that we continue to work together and grow this friendship and mentorship," which reflected my own sentiments, namely: "I hope we continue to collaborate together as colleagues and friends."

Discussion

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). These criteria were essential to providing a working environment

where Elizabeth felt she could take risks, discuss delicate issues, and become empowered within the department.

The lessons we have learned in building what we agree was a strong mentoring relationship include: (a) finding satisfaction with the partnership and mentoring process, (b) sense of camaraderie, (c) trust in one another and the process, and (d) growth realized. In terms of the impact on their mentoring relationship, Elizabeth confirmed that my impact was critical to her ability to connect with faculty across campus, managing time for work and life, preparing for engaged teaching, planning a research schedule, and integrating the teaching and research agenda.

In terms of the efficacy of the mentoring program, both Elizabeth (mentee) and I evaluated the efficacy of the program structure and agreed that our collaboration yielded an invaluable experience – Elizabeth from the perspective of being on the receiving end of my real-world knowledge and insight, and mine in terms of our preparedness for working jointly. Both of us indicated how key accessibility and contact was, with me stressing how important it was to keep Elizabeth in the knowledge loop to avoid isolation from creeping in. The availability of mentoring within the department was another area that was highly valued by us both.

Our perspectives regarding the proportion of time that was allotted to teaching, research, service, and work/life balance were similar in the area of teaching; I however, perceived more time was given to research and work/life balance when we spent time with one another and less time was devoted to service. Trust was a significant theme in our relationship, as was friendship, openness, and honesty.

Fountain and Newcomer (2016) assert 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 and tenure, annual review and faculty performance), practical advice they need to be successful on the surface. We applied this principle by discussing which professional skills (e.g., presenting, writing, teaching, leadership) Elizabeth felt that she had a good handle on and which she felt were areas that require attention (before discussing 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.

Elizabeth articulated that she had gained a long list of skills based on action items that were originally formulated by me and then revised and honed by both of us. As a result of the mentoring relationship, Elizabeth indicated that she felt prepared for tenure (i.e, Promotion and Tenure, as defined by her current institution), pointing out her ability to develop an understanding of the culture of the department and school; talk directly to tenured faculty members in the department to elicit their advice and suggestions for initiating a successful career; and explore the need to apply for an internal and/or external grant. I added to Elizabeth's list of readiness skills, indicating her ability to (a) ask directly how many publications are expected to be considered ready for potential promotion and tenure consideration, and (b) give herself planned breaks from research and writing, but remaining committed to returning to a previous schedule. "Learning the ropes" in these areas and others (e.g., acclimating to a new

space, communication conventions, setting up passwords, etc.) helped Elizabeth gradually assimilate to the departmental culture. Despite having fairly strong content and pedagogical knowledge in special education, she was nonetheless dependent on mentoring for clarifying expectations and criteria for annual reviews and promotion and tenure.

Our responses to the "Dear Mentoring Mentee/Mentor" letter, which provided insight into the future of the relationship and the mentoring program in the department, indicated our sense of camaraderie, as well as our hopes for continuing mentoring programs like this in the future. Evidence of professional growth was referenced by Elizabeth in terms of her ability to plan and teach effectively, engage in meaningful scholarship, and provide service on her way to being considered for promotion and tenure and to becoming a vital, contributing member of the department. Developing professional skills goes back to Carnethon et al.'s (2012) ultimate metric of a successful mentoring program for new and early career faculty, and that is in demonstrating "excellence in research, teaching and service resulting in promotion according to the standards established for their career track" (p. 4). As a final reflection, Elizabeth and I both indicated a desire to continue and deepen our relationship moving forward.

Implications

Our reflections suggest the following implications for establishing and nurturing a mentoring program for new and early career faculty to support high quality teacher preparation and include establishing a research agenda, building a professional network and monitoring progress, and preparing department chairpersons and deans for their role in promoting a mentoring-rich environment.

Nurturing A Mentoring Program to Support High Quality Teacher Preparation

As a teacher preparation program of consequence in our state, we have long acknowledged the critical role that our faculty and clinical faculty play in producing high quality teachers locally, regionally, and nationally. Whether it be the hard skills, i.e., developing skills, increasing pedagogical knowledge, or learning the perfunctory ropes as a faculty member; or the soft skills, i.e., grasping the inter- and intra-personal meanings of one's role in higher education, our intention has been to mentor, advise, and counsel new and emerging faculty to take the torch forward as they prepare our pre-service teachers for tomorrow's challenges. We believe that improving our craft involves examining, measuring, critiquing, and reflecting on the way we mentor others while providing space for us to learn reciprocally from our new and early career faculty.

Research Agenda

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 assist mentees in identifying 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. In this study, Elizabeth was given support early in her professional and journal writing. Elizabeth was also encouraged to seek out collaborators within the department and the college for collaborative writing endeavors.

A strategy that our department has 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 mentors can assist new faculty who have previously published, or wish to publish, in finding appropriate faculty with whom to write. And while Elizabeth came to our department with some grant-writing experience under her belt, it was in collaboration with seasoned faculty who served as mentors that she has been able to co-write two successful grants, both of which were funded. Mentoring, whether direct or indirect is paramount for new and early career faculty in academe.

Building a Professional Network

Mentors should consistently 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 are amenable to scholarly collaboration. This is assurance that 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. I encouraged Elizabeth 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 such endeavors. As we indicated in our last paper, 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). We asserted that mentees who 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 increase the mentee's professional profile and provide them with opportunities to get feedback on ongoing work from people outside the institution, but also play an important role in the promotion and tenure process in terms of outside letters of recommendation. Elizabeth will be calling upon her early experiences in building her professional network to frame and justify many of her scholarly activities in future promotion and tenure reviews.

Monitoring Progress

Like their colleagues, mentees are responsible not only for annual reviews but also progress toward promotion and tenure. As previously indicated, mentees in our department can receive feedback as soon as 3-6 months following their hiring date. I had the opportunity to work with Elizabeth early on in terms of observing her teaching and related activities, gauging her progress, identifying her needs and assisting her in determining her career objectives, prior to the department chair's review. As the literature suggests, 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), a critical "hard skill" for new and early career faculty.

Recommendations for Department Chairpersons and Deans

We assert that 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 and early career faculty for stronger support and better connections with seasoned faculty. We have been fortunate that our department chairperson has valued mentoring, new faculty, and faculty mentors, and, in doing so, reflects the extant literature which finds the chairperson as the strongest predictor of mentees' finding mentoring useful for academic career planning (Fountain & Newcomer, 2016, p. 499).

Conclusion

This manuscript is a follow-up to an earlier publication in which new and early career special education professors participated in a newly established mentoring program in the Inclusive Education department located within the school of education of a public research university. In keeping with the format for a reflection paper, we presented information related to our mentoring plan and program, identified ourselves as mentor and mentee, examined and evaluated our mentoring relationship, presented ways in which we could enhance our program, and discussed our overall perceptions of the mentoring relationship itself.

We discussed our mentoring plan and mentoring program to be evaluated on several criteria, many of which Carnethon, Kim, and Lloyd-Jones (2012) identify as: (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). Most of these elements were discussed and incorporated into the reflection process that Elizabeth and I chose to use to evaluate our mentoring relationship.

Importantly, we presented a targeted literature review which was initially used to endorse our assertion that mentoring is a critical support mechanism for developing and supporting high-quality teacher preparation (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014; Benson, Morahan, Sachdeva, & Richman, 2002; Mayer, Blair, Ko, Patel, & Files, 2014; Tareef, 2013; Thorndyke, Gusic, & Millner, 2008). Eventually we would discover that the literature which supported our perceptions would become emblematic of our relationship as mentor and mentee and serve as valuable guidelines for enhancing future mentee/mentor relationships.

It could be argued that the questions in Phillips' and Dennison's (2015) rating scales were stacked in a positive direction; however, had the process been anything but positive, our perceptions would have led us down a different path. We acknowledge that our journey in investigating the efficacy of our mentoring program and its impact on new and early career special education faculty development remains in its embryonic stage. There exist many avenues for formal and informal investigation into how effectively we can provide the stepping stones for protégés to become successful, productive, impactful, and confident members of the academy. Our work is just the beginning.

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