"There is no guru:" Mentoring maps for intentional agriculture teacher growth

Misty D. Lambert
108 Strand Agricultural Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
541-737-2661
misty.lambert@oregonstate.edu

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

Mentoring has traditionally been used to support beginning teachers in a one-on-one way (Greiman, 2010). Greiman and Covington (2007), building on the work of Kram (1985), posited mentoring was conceptualized as providing both professional and psychosocial support. In fact, Podsen and Denmark (2007) said a mentor was a role model and expert.

As we worked to find mentor agriculture teachers in Oregon, we found mentoring requests to be an intimidating proposition. Our state has a 100% volunteer mentoring program. Everyone we have asked to serve as a mentor has been willing to serve, but almost always offered some version of the caveat "but I am not an expert". Veteran teachers are willing to help, but do not feel they have all the answers. In thinking about the outcomes we hoped for from a mentoring program, we wanted to nurture the idea that agriculture teachers are a community of problem solvers. While thinking about these challenges, we ran across the work of Rockquemore (2010; 2011; 2016) who was speaking to the same problems in the mentoring of higher education faculty. Specifically, Rockquemore identified some concrete issues with traditional mentoring including varying definitions of mentoring (2010), large time commitments for what is largely "time intensive, invisible, and unrewarded labor" (Rockquemore, 2016, para. 7) and the fact no one is an expert in all areas which may require mentoring (2010).

Rockquemore (2011) offered the concrete solution of using a modified approach to mentoring. By shifting from a person-based approach to a needs-based approach, mentees are responsible for figuring out what they need and asking someone who already knows how to get it or knows the answer. Under this model, "there is no guru", but rather a network of people who can help get those needs met. She suggested this shift in approach leads to shortened time commitments for the information holders and creates a model where the young teacher would be in-charge of their own success in getting their needs met (Rockquemore, 2016).

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps:

Prior to this year, the mentoring program timeline was:

Late summer: Pair all first year agriculture teachers with a mentor

Every 4-6 weeks during the school year: Send an email to mentors and/or mentees prompting communication between the pairs

Summer Conference: Assess mentoring experience and receive feedback about the year

Within our existing mentoring structure, we implemented two resources to attempt to shift the system to a more needs-based approach and eliminate the pressure for a mentor to be the "guru". First, we wanted to solve the problem of how do I (as a new teacher) know who has the knowledge to meet my needs. Through a Qualtrics survey, we created the Oregon Teachers Experts List. We use the term "experts" loosely and have defined this as a teacher who has useful information to share in a specific content AND would be willing to share. Areas span a wide range of agriculture teacher responsibilities. For example, a teacher might be listed as an "expert" in "sheep curriculum", "showing and fitting animals" and "managing student shop projects". Being an "expert" is entirely voluntary and this list is not vetted. If a teacher offers himself or herself as an expert, they are added to the list. Combined with our state teachers' directory, a teacher would be able

to reach any other "expert".

The second resource we have compiled is the mentoring map. This map idea was borrowed and adapted from National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, run by Rockquemore and colleagues. The young teacher is listed in the middle. Around the outside are areas in which an early career teacher might need assistance. There are fifteen categories including FFA, community partnerships, SAE, curriculum, social support, FFA Alumni, and advisory committees. Early career teachers now sit down with their assigned mentor to assess their needs and identify people who can help meet that need.

As of 2015, the mentoring program is structured:

Late summer: Pair all first year teachers with a mentor (second year teachers can opt-in)

Early October: Complete mentoring maps (mentors work with mentees). The mentor's role is only to help mentees discuss needs and complete their map of experts.

Every 4-6 weeks during the school year: Send an email to mentors and/or mentees prompting communication between the pairs and encouraging them to consult their map and/or the experts list to meet their current needs.

Summer Conference: Assess mentoring experience for previous group and collect data to update experts list for the next year

Results to date/implications

This system was first implemented in Fall 2015 and all early career teachers were paired with a mentor and created a map. We have comments from the early career teachers who feel like the conversation is positive and they are being empowered to solve problems. Mentors are indicating less pressure to "know everything". We have been surprised at the number of experienced teachers who are using the "experts" list to contact other teachers and gain access to new information or resources. The map, experts list and specific quotes will be shared during the poster presentation.

Future plans/advice to others

The expert list has been a critical component to implementing the mentoring map. Without the list, mentees do not know who can meet their needs and they will resort to asking their known network, which may not be able to help at the same level. The mentor's role is now that of a gatekeeper to help the young teachers make connections to others in the profession. We have dedicated a session at fall agriculture teachers' conference to allow for time to construct their map with their mentor. This structured time was essential to rolling out the program year 1. We think the map idea holds promise for all experience levels.

Costs/resources needed

We are running the program in Oregon at no direct cost. The only indirect costs are the time of one past president of the teachers' association working with one teacher educator from Oregon State University to manage the program and send emails to the pairs. The highest work demands are in late summer, after teachers are hired, arranging mentor pairs. We use Qualtrics to update the "experts list" and are thinking of transition this list to a GoogleDoc so that teachers can update themselves anytime.

References

Greiman, B. C. (2010). Continuing professional development. In Torres, R. M., Kitchel, T., & Ball, A. L. (Eds.), *Preparing and advancing teachers in agricultural education.* Columbus, OH: Curriculum Material Services.

Greiman, B. C., & Covington, H. K. (2007). Reflective thinking and journal writing: Examining student teachers' perceptions of preferred reflective modality, journal writing outcomes and journal structure. *Career and Technical Education Research, 32*(2), 115-139.

Kram, K. E. (1985). *Mentoring at work*. Boston: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Podsen, I. J., & Denmark, V. (2007). *Coaching and mentoring first year and student teachers (2nd edition).* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Rockquemore, K. A. (April 19, 2010). There is no guru. *Inside Higher Ed.* Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/winning/winning14

Rockquemore, K. A. (October 3, 2011). Don't talk about mentoring. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/mentoring/debut_of_new_column_on_mentoring_in_higher_education_careers

Rockquemore, K. A. (February 3, 2016). Why mentor matches fail. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/02/03/most-mentoring-today-based-outdated-model-essay