CULTIVATING TECHNOLOGY USE THROUGH MENTORING

Laura J. Hercula
Coastal Carolina Community College
444 Western Boulevard
Jacksonville, NC 28546
herculal@coastalcarolina.edu

Study Background

Mentoring, a centuries old practice, is typically a dyadic relationship between two individuals working together in a collaborative relationship where a more experienced individual provides support and guidance to a less experienced individual (Carr, 2015; Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2014).

Faculty-to-faculty mentoring is an extremely personalized form of professional development that is currently gaining popularity in higher education (Galbraith & Cohen, 1996). Although mentoring programs are typically designed to facilitate the growth of new instructors, mentoring may be an ideal method for honing the instructional practices of the faculty mentor and lead to career-renewal (Poulsen, 2013; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine in what ways community college faculty mentors perceive that their participation in a formal mentoring program motivates them to implement effective instructional practices. This paper focuses on one of the major study findings, specifically how faculty mentors perceive that serving as a mentor has impacted their use of technology in classroom instruction.

Mentoring Others Can Teach Mid-Career Faculty New Technologies

Stage theory brings forth the idea that most employees exist in a constantly changing workplace. Super's (1957) theory of life stage and career development is based on the idea that

> Vocational preferences and competencies, and the situations in which people live and work, change with time and experience, making choice and adjustment a continuous process. This process may be described as a series of life stages, each which tends to be characterized by certain types of behavior. These stages are respectively, those of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline.... (p. 118)

One stress that all community college faculty constantly face is the ongoing demand of learning the latest emerging technologies (Walling & Smith, 2005). Perhaps faculty who are plateaued in Super's maintenance career stage might benefit the most from mentoring as it, "…may motivate them to avoid technological obsolescence, hone their interpersonal

skills and increase feelings of self-worth" (Noe, 1988 p. 476). With the fast speed of workplace technological changes, more junior employees have a great deal to offer mid and late stage career employees in terms of sharing updated information and knowledge (Allen & Eby, 1997). With this in mind, "…mentoring can serve as an avenue for continual skill development for senior employees" (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997, p. 87).

Study Methodology

This qualitative case study was conducted at Coastal Carolina Community College in North Carolina. The participants for this study consisted of faculty members who had served as mentors in Coastal Carolina Community College's formal faculty mentoring program and were selected through purposeful sampling. The primary data for this study came from individual semi-structured interviews with faculty mentors. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy so that only the researcher would know their identities. Secondary data consisted of meeting minutes recorded at mentor/mentee roundtable meetings.

Study Findings

The findings of this study suggest that serving as a mentor in a community college formal mentoring program influences the instructional practices of the mentor by inspiring mentors to become more effective users of technology.

Five of the six participants interviewed mentioned that as a result of their participation in the mentoring program they had used technology in a new way. The data suggests that by simply watching a mentee use technology in the classroom, mentors carry what they see forward into their own instruction.

One study participant, Rochelle stated

> For example, [names mentee], when I observed her, she was using the projector. This is almost embarrassing to admit. I'd just had never thought of it. We all use technology in different ways, but she was using PowerPoint slides with the projector, without using the screen and marking over the top of stuff with different colors of markers, and it just blew my mind! I just had a million ideas of how I could use that in the classroom. Just a little thing like that. So that's one thing. Just specific activities, ways to utilize technology…

Sheryl reported that she is not "a real big technology person." She said

> [My mentee] introduced me to opening up a g-mail account and using the cloud [instead of a flash drive]…Now I have a whole gallery and put all my lesson plans there, and I use that to find my lesson plans and any videos that I want to show. They [the mentees] are so smart in their own ways.

Sheryl also stated that a mentee taught her how to use a computer program called Socratic in the classroom.

For Kate, mentoring helped her to better utilize technology from a mechanical perspective. She shared that her mentee was

> …really good with networking, networks and also very good with hardware, which I'm not. I could pretty much figure out software but hardware, I'm not so good….she was always willing to give me suggestions, and I'd say, you know, 'Can you help me with this laptop', or 'Can you tell me anything about the monitors and why they are not working?' And so, she was really really helpful that way.

Kate specified that her mentee assisted her with the mechanics of keeping the classroom technology running smoothly. She stated

> It helped me run the class better. Not be stumped when I couldn't get the projector to work, or when some other instructor had come in there and switched things around and I can't figure out what they did. So, for the mechanics of the class, it helped me a lot, but not for the software.

Nicole stated that she has learned several uses of technology from her mentees. In particular, she learned how to incorporate YouTube videos as instructional examples as well as how to use Kahoot! and Jeopardy games to review material with students.

Jeffery stated that he is using some online instructional materials produced by the textbook publisher a little more as a result of seeing his mentees utilize these materials.

A major finding from the interview data for this study (the primary data) was that serving as a mentor increases the ability to effectively incorporate technology into one's classroom instruction. Secondary data (minutes from mentor/mentee meetings) corroborated this finding, as one mentor commented that her mentee "…has learned how to trouble-shoot and has become so skilled at utilizing the nursing program simulators that she now teaches other instructors how to use them."

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that mentoring may be an avenue for enhance the use of technology in the community college classroom. This may be of interest to instructional technologists and others tasked with helping faculty become more effective users of technology in their classrooms.

References

Allen, T. D., Poteet, M. L., & Burroughs, S. M. (1997). The mentor's perspective: A qualitative inquiry and future research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 51*, 70-89.

Carr, M. L. (2015). *Self-Mentoring: The invisible leader*. Middletown, DE: Edu-Tell.

Galbraith, M. W., & Cohen, N. H. (1996). The complete mentor role: Understanding the six behavioral functions. *Journal of Adult Education, 24*, 2-11.

Garvey, B., Stokes, P., & Megginson, D. (2014). *Coaching and mentoring* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Noe, R. A. (1988). An investigation of the determinants of successful assigned mentoring relationships. *Personnel Psychology, 41*, 457-479.

Poulsen, K. M. (2013). Mentoring programmes: Learning opportunities for mentees, for mentors, for organisations and for society. *Industrial and Commercial Training, 45*, 255-263.

Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007). *The handbook of mentoring at work: Theory, research, and practice.* Thousand Oaks, California, CA: Sage Publications.

Super, D. E., & Bachrach, P. B. (1957). *Scientific careers and vocational development theory.* New York, NY: Columbia University.

Wallin, D. L., & Smith, C. L. (2005). Professional development needs of full time faculty in technical colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 29*, 87-108.