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THE WELL-PREPARED ADJUNCT: PEER MENTORING, AUTONOMY SUPPORTS, AND VALUES-BASED PEDAGOGY

Dionne Clabaugh

Abstract

This mentoring program was developed to meet two needs in the School of Human Development: college alumni who applied for adjunct faculty positions lacked college teaching experience, and non-alumni applicants lacked pedagogical skill with nontraditional adult learners. This college is a Hispanic-serving institution with core values of inclusion, diversity, respect, and social justice. Their transformational, culture-centered pedagogy is grounded in seven faculty values that develop learner competence across five domains: development, diversity, communication, research, and growth.

The program meta-mentor describes how and why autonomy-supportive instruction (ASI), based on self-determination theory, is embedded into all elements of the adjunct faculty mentoring program structure: program design, implementation, assessment, and improvement. Two cross-generational and cross-cultural mentor-mentee pairs describe how they engaged with and applied ASI strategies in their relationship, teaching and peer observations, and reflective practice conversations. The case study concludes with lessons learned about the quality of faculty mentor-mentee relationships and its impact on their own professional learning and development.

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Acknowledgements

This chapter is dedicated to all the adjunct faculty mentors and mentees I had the privilege of working and learning with while working as a faculty member at the Northern California Campus of Pacific Oaks College. Most especially I acknowledge Marian Browning, MA; Bianca Rowden-Quince, EdD; and Christine Carducci, EdD, for their dedication to mentoring in higher education and their ongoing commitment to faculty development.

For over 40 years in education, I have been encouraged daily by all learners. They benefit across their lifespan when they have educators who teach in ways that reach them, mentor them through and for positive impact, and engage them in contextualized experiences that transform their approach to growing whole learners at all ages and stages.

Mentoring Context and Program Develop

The Need for the Program

The Adjunct Faculty Peer Mentoring Program began in 2014 to solve a problem: enrollment in our satellite campus was growing, and we needed well-prepared adjuncts. Half the applicants were Pacific Oaks College (PO) alumni who knew its pedagogy through experience but had no higher-education teaching experience, and the others were non-PO alumni who did not know the pedagogy and were already teaching in college.

Purpose and Objectives of Program

The mentoring program's purpose was to develop adjunct faculty. The primary program objective was to develop well-prepared new adjunct faculty through mentoring by seasoned adjunct faculty. Mentor-mentee pairs engaged in co-teaching and reflective practice (Dennison, 2009; Pollard, 2008) activities so that mentees could learn how to be adjunct faculty members who used autonomy-supportive instruction to facilitate the college's transformational pedagogy.

Organizational Setting and Population Served

Pacific Oaks College (PO) is a Hispanic-serving institution teaching primarily nontraditional, first-generation learners. Students' median age is 37, they often live in multigenerational households, and typically work in child development, education, nonprofit, or human-service sectors. PO pedagogy is transformative, interactive, culture- and student-centered, and dialogue-based. It is operationalized through seven core faculty values:

- The democratic classroom
- Inclusion, diversity, and social justice
- Caring
- Building on strengths through authentic assessment
- Learning through play
- Intellectual and moral autonomy
- Transformative learning

Mentors were successful, well-prepared adjunct faculty teaching human development courses in lifespan development, diversity and inclusion, communication, educational leadership, and thesis research courses, and most taught similar courses at other colleges. Mentees were pre-service adjunct faculty interested in teaching in the human development program. There was no guarantee of hire after completing the mentoring program. This program ran for 8 years, where 10 mentors worked with 18 mentees. It was designed and facilitated by a director who was skilled in adult learning strategies that ensured engagement and persistence. The program director mentored the mentors to ensure program quality and sustainability.

Organizational Support for Mentoring Program and Infrastructure

This program was appreciated and supported by campus and college leadership. The campus dean provided meeting space and budget for materials, refreshments, and training space. The campus faculty funds paid for the program director's mentoring conference attendance and travel, and regular work time was used for all aspects of program development, administration, and assessment. Most mentees were hired as adjunct faculty because they were well-prepared for a faculty role. The program director presented program assessment and improvements to the college community and at mentoring conferences over time, published academic and internal articles, and was interviewed several times about program structure and effectiveness. The program director's annual goals centered on mentoring program development, and her sabbatical project described the theoretical frames on which this program was grounded.

Operational Definition

The mentoring model was primarily structured to support developmental mentoring relationships (Dominguez, 2017) because the five elements of developmental mentoring were in place, and because mentors provided both instrumental and relational functions. The five elements were enacted as follows: mentors and mentees had to *qualify* for participation; *defining words* such as observing each other using ASI and having reflective practice (Dennison, 2009; Pollard, 2008) conversations were required program activities; *participants* were selected based on their funds of knowledge and their goals; the *functions* of in-service adjunct faculty and pre-service adjunct faculty co-planning and co-teaching; and specific program *activities* were required before, during, and after practice teaching sessions.

In this program, adjunct faculty mentored potential future adjuncts without a supervisory hierarchy; mentor activities did include instrumental and relational functions (Dominguez, 2012). Career support through skills development were instrumental functions; the relational functions were modeling ASI and providing psychosocial support during reflective practice conversations; sponsorship occurred when mentors guided their mentee's teaching skills. Mentees also developed both career skills and psychosocial skills (Kram, 1985), such as how to apply ASI and use the course management system, and how to facilitate group learning activities with diverse adult learners, respectively. There were several aspects of reciprocal mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2007) demonstrated as mentees and mentors learned from each other via observation and reflective practice.

Theoretical Framework

The program's primary theoretical frameworks were self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2002) and reflective practice (Dennison, 2009; Pollard, 2008). SDT describes the relationship between a person's level and types of motivation, regulation, and determination. Self-determined learners are intrinsically motivated by a desire to learn new information, gain skills and independence, and change and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The aspects of SDT are autonomy, belonging, and competence, viewed as three psychological needs. When these needs are satisfied, engagement increases because learners

use intrinsic motivation to promote their own engagement (Niemi et al., 2006; Niemi & Ryan, 2009). Learners thus become self-determined and self-directed and persist in meeting their goals.

Autonomy-supportive instruction (ASI) is an intentional strategy to promote self-determination. It has six teacher behaviors and classroom structures to promote learner autonomy by activating intrinsic motivation to build relatedness and competence. ASI increases learner engagement (Jang et al., 2010) and was selected intentionally to develop highly effective mentor-mentee interactions to develop well-prepared adjuncts.

Reflective practice conversations relied on reflection (Kolb, 1984) to discuss ASI observations and transformational pedagogy applied during instruction. Mentor-mentee pairs cooperatively deconstructed then reconstructed the value of ASI and transformative teaching as ways of making their teaching, thinking, and decision-making visible, which promoted their identity development as well-prepared adjunct faculty members.

Typology of Program

The mentoring program structure was based on peer mentoring with formal one-to-one pairs (Inzer & Crawford, 2005) (see Chapter 3 for more information on diverse forms of mentoring relationships) of mentors who were in-service, well-prepared adjunct faculty. Mentees were pre-service adjunct faculty applicants. Each cohort of mentor-mentee pairs and the program director formed a developmental network (Clabaugh & Dominguez, 2022) where everyone practiced and discussed transformational learning with nontraditional adult learners via autonomy-supportive instruction and reflective practice.

Mentoring Inputs and Resources

Curriculum Description

Mentoring curricula were developed based on the program director's expertise in learning and instruction, faculty development, ASI, adult learning theory, and culturally aware pedagogy for transformative education. The program director guided each two-semester cohort of mentor-mentee pairs through fall curricula on pedagogy, ASI, and learning activity development. In the spring semester curricula in Canvas, departmental policies, adjunct faculty expectations, grading and feedback, and classroom group dynamics were explained and practiced. Mentoring activities intentionally developed mentees' teaching and facilitation skills as scholar-practitioners through the faculty's pedagogical values. Mentors integrated mentees' relevant funds of knowledge into developing their teaching practice and content knowledge.

Funding

The program director used regular work hours for all aspects of program development, training, and administration. A small faculty grant was used to produce program training and assessment materials, the college funded conference participation, and the program director wrote a mentoring handbook.

Mentors were paid for their teaching, but they and mentees were not paid for mentor program involvement.

Mentoring Activities

Recruitment Activities

Well-prepared adjunct faculty with strong facilitation and communication skills and favorable student evaluations were recruited as mentors. They were invited to self-select based on their expertise with PO pedagogy and a propensity for being student-centered, not controlling. During adjunct faculty-hiring interviews, those who presented themselves as self-directed lifelong learners were invited to be mentees. They were either graduate student alumni who were unprepared for college teaching or adjunct faculty at other colleges who were unfamiliar with transformational pedagogy.

Selection Activities

Applicants who wanted to learn transformational pedagogy and ASI were selected. The program director provided a program overview and placed them on a waiting list, organized by hiring interview date. In early summer, four mentees and four mentors were invited to join a cohort to start in the fall semester. Those who agreed were scheduled to attend program orientation in mid-August. Those who preferred to start the following year were placed back on the waiting list.

Matching Activities

Matching occurred at the end of mentor-mentee orientation. During introductions, participants stated their mentoring goal, communication style, hobbies, educational background, languages spoken, and described themselves by stating, "I'm the type of person who _____" Opportunities for mentor conversations with each mentee included sharing perspectives and funds of knowledge for college teaching. Mentees identified a mentor, then time was provided for paired conversations. In most cases, spontaneous pairs became mentor-mentee pairs. Mentees self-selected a different mentor in the spring based on conversations, needs, and goals.

Training Activities

Program training and materials were developed by the program director and used by mentor-mentee pairs for ongoing learning throughout the program. During a summer session, mentors were trained on ASI strategies, transformative pedagogy values, and adult learning theory. After orientation, theory on ASI, transformational pedagogy, and adult learning strategies were discussed by each mentor and their mentee, then applied to teaching practice during a three-time sequence of program activities: instructional planning, teaching and observation, and reflective practice conversations.

During instructional planning, mentor-mentee pairs applied theory to planning instruction. Throughout teaching weekends, mentees observed and documented mentor use of ASI and transformative pedagogy with adult learners. In the first teaching weekend, mentees observed mentor instruction, and in the second and third teaching weekends, mentees co-planned instruction and

facilitated some activities. Mentors and mentees observed each other's use of ASI strategies. During reflective practice conversations they discussed their observations, decision-making, ASI strategy use, and instructional outcomes. Mentees applied these conversations to plan their upcoming practice teaching, to continue integrating ASI theory into their practice.

Mentors modeled examples and described experiences that linked theory to practice, giving their mentees direct experience with ASI and pedagogy. Therefore, mentee learning was grounded in ASI within the context of values-based pedagogy as they engaged in informational feedback, inquiry, and reflection.

Strategies to Monitor and Support Relationships

Mentor-mentee relationships were developed by collaborating to meet goals for learning. Belonging and competence were promoted through ASI strategy use. Trust and respect were the foundation for healthy collegial faculty relationships. The program director used ASI strategies in all communication to promote deeper learning and engagement. The program director distributed aggregated ASI documentation, which made ASI learning visible and showcased competence, engagement, belonging, and professionalism. Friendly communications modeled collegial responses to diverse perspectives. Bimonthly emails included resources on teaching adult learners and described mentor-mentee successes. Emails were written with ASI phrasing to model ASI in written communication with students and colleagues. Bimonthly reflective practice meetings between the program director and each mentor discussed instructional planning processes and mentee progress.

Formative and Summative Evaluation

The program director assessed ASI documentation, mentor-mentee focus groups, and student evaluations of mentor and mentee teaching effectiveness. Student evaluations used Likert scales to measure perspectives of mentor and mentee preparation, content knowledge, delivery, inclusion, and culture-centeredness. Students rated their own preparation, engagement, growth, and feelings of inclusion. Two recorded focus groups per semester captured mentor and mentee perspectives, progress, preferences, goals, and program improvement suggestions. Mentor-mentee pair focus group interactions were observed to assess role efficacy and compatibility.

Assessment results were used to inform improvements to program training, materials, and structure. ASI strategy use was tallied to provide evidence of mentors' ASI, tracked mentee skill development over two semesters, and documented a lexicon of ASI phrases used in written and verbal responses.

Mentoring Outputs

During 8 program years, 10 mentors worked with 18 mentees. Every mentor volunteered for between 6 and 12 semesters, leaving only to retire from college teaching or to move away. Fourteen of the mentees became adjunct faculty.

Mentoring Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Outcome of the Program

Program assessment qualitative data described how mentors and mentees applied ASI, how reflective practice impacted their development, and how ASI modeling improved their facilitation skills. Mentors described how they became better teachers by using psychosocial motivators to develop mentees into well-prepared adjuncts. Mentors said they want to positively impact mentee professional development and requested scholarly materials on adult learners, mentor-mentee relationship building, and strategies to teach writing skills. Mentors reported increased awareness about their professional skills and developmental needs in order to increase their own students' engagement and success.

Mentees were well-prepared for faculty positions and felt confident in their teaching skills. They engaged in campus activities, responded effectively to leadership communications, and were interested in academic affairs projects and opportunities. Students reported that having two faculty members in class promoted more conversation and built stronger relationships, especially for study groups.

Sustaining the Program

The program had a waitlist each year and was marketed by mentor and mentee word of mouth. Mentees described their own professional and personal growth, and mentors described feeling humbled and empowered to directly impact others' human and professional development. Mentors and mentees described personal benefits and professional improvements such as increased self-awareness during instruction and building professional relationships with colleagues and students. In-service adjuncts asked for informal mentoring, which demonstrated intrinsic motivation for professional development.

To sustain the program, the program director needed to learn more about successful mentoring faculty programs and mentoring program assessment. The program director attended annual mentoring conferences and was mentored to apply program assessment results in ways that "grew the program." She regularly presented program assessment results to faculty and administration to offer her and mentor-mentee suggestions for improvement, then invited their ideation and suggestions for scaling and success.

Lessons Learned

Mentoring with ASI to develop well-prepared faculty works for faculty, administrators, and students! Mentor engagement and mentee competence for teaching nontraditional, adult learners seemed to increase as they all became more competent, leading to increased student engagement and overall success (Jang et al., 2010; Niemiec et al., 2006; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Administrators appreciated adjuncts' loyalty to the college and low satellite campus turnover rates. Students taught by well-prepared adjuncts had better attendance, grades, participation, and persistence, and were more emotionally regulated when voicing concerns. These students were also observed to be more helpful to classmates, perhaps due to their competence and belonging.

Recommendations for Future Designers and Stakeholders of Academic Mentoring Programs

I recommend that adjunct faculty be mentored using this program's layered approach to faculty mentoring to foster mentor, mentee, and student intrinsic motivation for engaged learning and academic success. Mentors and mentees demonstrated efficacy and agency for their teaching due to the reciprocal nature of ASI strategy use, reflective practice, and intrinsic motivation for professional improvement.

I also recommend that faculty mentoring programs become exceptional by being grounded in autonomy-supportive instruction. Administrators can identify and then invite enthusiastic faculty to be their first cohort, then be mentored in ASI, and they can then develop ongoing cycles of mentor-mentee pairs who know how to develop well-prepared adjuncts over time. Unfortunately, ASI as a theoretical frame for faculty mentoring was thus far used only in this California college, so we need new studies to describe how ASI impacts adjunct faculty mentoring across a variety of programs. Importantly, this case study advances the mentoring field's understanding about how and why ASI strategies lead to effective faculty mentoring outcomes.

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