

## **Mentoring Philosophy**

My mentoring philosophy is to make everyone the best that they can be- no matter if it is students, student teachers, or beginning teachers. Each of them have so much potential and so many opportunities ahead of them. I want to make sure that they are prepared for their specific task ahead and provide them with the opportunities and knowledge to be successful in whatever they do!

## **Overview of Mentoring Situations**

I have been the mentor to four student teachers and one beginning teacher. I also have a former student who is teaching agriculture that I mentor and three currently in school to be agriculture teachers. I have done countless classroom observations for the four student teachers. I feel that once they were my student teacher it is a lifetime commitment and I still regularly talk to them on the phone, email them constantly and occasionally text them with opportunities. I conducted classroom observations with the beginning teacher at their new school as well as invited them to ride along with me to meetings and conferences. Being a first year teacher can be overwhelming and by having someone guide them along and offer that support can make all the difference. The car rides we had to meetings was some of the best collaboration time talking about lessons, classroom management and just life in general. I have a vested interest when former students become agriculture teachers. A lot of what they know about agricultural education and FFA came from mine and my teaching partners classrooms. I want to see them successful and make a difference in the lives of students in the agriculture industry. I have helped them with decisions about the best classes to take to help them prepare for being an ag teacher. I emailed them internship opportunities that would help them gain more agriculture knowledge that would ultimately help them in the classroom. I have encouraged them to be judges at FFA events to gain more experience. I have even showed them where to buy “good ag teacher shop pants” so they can be comfortable and have long lasting pants in the shop. I have guided the students to which programs and teachers they should conduct their observations and students teaching. One of the former students and I make a point to go out to lunch every couple of months to catch up. She comes with a list of questions every time to ask about teaching, contests, and advice. It is the greatest feeling to see your students want to be teachers in the same profession.

## **Examples of Effective Mentoring**

### **Instruction**

Classroom instruction is a very important part of the Agricultural Education program. It is what the kids see and are a part of every day. It is important to make the lessons meaningful and exciting for the kids to be able to learn and more importantly want to learn. I encourage mentees to have an activity that is hands on or allows the students to better grasp the concept or idea of the lesson. At my current school we are on block scheduling which is 83m minute class periods. That is a long time for students to sit and listen to a teacher so by incorporating hands on activities not only will it engage the student more but it will also give them an activity that will reinforce what is being learned.

It is no secret in Missouri that I love entomology. I have developed my own curriculum on the subject along with lots of hands on activities and projects. I love sharing my passion for entomology with others. I have led workshops on entomology at state meetings, beginning teacher workshops, and have taught a college credit classes in the summers to fellow ag teachers. In addition I have also taught at a University on Insect Identification. A lot of masters ag education students take the class to earn masters credit as well as learn a new contest. I help them learn each and every insect on the contest and what to look for in identifying it. I will also help them at contests when going through the insects with their students on key characteristics because I feel that if they were once my student they are always my student.

When working with mentees, no matter whether it is a student teacher, practicum student, or beginning teacher I always start off for them to think what made them love agriculture classes because that is what they need to be doing for their students. If it made the mentee love the class then it would surely do the same for other students.

One key thing that I seem to find common in female ag teachers is a fear of teaching shop. I am the shop teacher at my high school. I always tell the mentees that if I can do it then anyone can do it. Each school is unique and the shop is going to be just like that. What works for one school in shop may not work for another. You have to find what works best for you and make what you do well awesome!

I love collaborating with student teachers on lesson ideas in the classroom. Two heads are always better than one and we can brainstorm on what needs to be taught and what activities can be used. There are also so many resources out there for teachers that they don't have to reinvent the wheel. They can check communities of practice, facebook groups, online curriculum and they can help with materials and activities.

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning occurs through the Supervised Agricultural Experience program. Each student has a project in which they invest both time and labor. The purpose of the project is to give the students hands on experience that will lead to control, confidence and responsibility. When a teacher is able to visit that student and their SAE project it really shows the student how much the teacher cares and often times as a result a bond is formed and classroom behavior is improved. I always make sure that my mentees understand this. It is easy to get busy with things but it is so important to make SAE visits. They can lead to so many good things. Agricultural Education is unique that we offer this opportunity to students and we have to make sure that we do a good job highlighting it so it doesn't ever go away.

Making sure that you take pictures is so important. With cell phone cameras it is easy to snap pictures. But what you do with those pictures is important. I always encourage my mentees to post them to social media. This brags on the students projects, shows the parents what their students is doing and shows administration that you are doing your job.

Several teachers are on 12 month contracts and it is important in order to keep those 12 month contracts that we do our jobs. I stress the importance to mentees that they conduct SAE visits to as many members as possible. It creates a great bond with the students, often parents, and can even lead to freebies such as vegetables, honey, etc.

## **Student Organizations**

Leadership development plays a big role in the student's learning objectives. No matter what industry or career the students pursue; leadership skills will allow them to better succeed. The FFA provides students with exceptional leadership and personal growth opportunities. Students are able to gain experience in decision making, networking and teamwork through their leadership development.

I stress to beginning teachers that success breeds success. New teachers are usually always worried about teams or speakers being a success. I encourage them their first year teaching to find the four best and brightest students to get on one team that the mentee is good at training. That team will do well and it will then create bigger things the following year because that team will see success and will want to do it again. Other students will see their success and want to be more involved. Once you have started that tradition it makes it easy to keep it going.

I always have student teachers train one team that is "their" team. They work it just like they were their full time teacher. This really shows them how to train teams because most likely they have never completely trained a team before. It shows the mentee how much work goes into training Career Development Events and gets them resources to help them train that team in the future. I also encourage student teachers to also find a team that want to learn that myself or my teaching partner train and act like they are on that team and learn it with the students. Go to practices, go through the contest after the practice contests and really learn that team so it can help you know it better for when the mentee trains it.

I often hear from parents that FFA is the reason their kid comes to school or stays in school. I stress this to mentees because as ag teachers we have this awesome opportunity to really shape relationships and grow passions of students. Being in FFA is usually what inspires students to become ag teachers so as teachers we have to remember that. If the mentees remember how much FFA made an impact on them they can keep that always at the back of their mind when they are planning activities for their FFA chapter.

## **Partnerships**

The Bolivar FFA Chapter has become a big part of the Bolivar community. Our chapter was started in 1929 the same year Missouri received a charter. We have a strong tradition of FFA. I stress that no matter whether you have a long history or a brand new chapter (which I had my first 5 years teaching) you can make things better for the chapter, students and community. If the mentees want that tradition they must first have support. No matter whether it is from parents, administration or industry, they are a key component to make a chapter successful. One way anyone can get support is by asking for sponsorships. Whether it is for events or awards at a banquet it is an easy way to get outsiders involved. And when they sponsor something always encourage them to attend that event. I have student teachers help us make the sponsorship letter so they can see first hand what goes into the letter and they get an example for their future school. Also having students write personal thank you notes is a great touch too. Our chapter does a Businessmans Breakfast that brings in all the businesses and individuals who support our chapter throughout the year and thanks them with breakfast. The officers each sit at different table to be able to interact with everyone. This is one of our most popular events that our student teachers get to see. They are involved in the planning process which helps them see how successful events are planned and how easy it is to say thanks.

It is also great to partner with volunteer organizations. Most people know that FFA students are great at volunteering and need volunteer hours for most degrees. You can do something as a chapter such as adopt-a-highway or as a class such as building garden boxes for a local community food pantry. We did just that this year. The student teacher and I both worked with the coordinator of the project and taught the shop classes how to build planter boxes. The greenhouse class grew vegetables to put in those boxes. It was a great partnership that the student teacher was able to be a part of.

### **Marketing**

The biggest marketing that the Bolivar FFA Chapter does in the Hermitage community is newspaper articles. It is a great way to spread the word out to the community of all of the great things that the chapter is doing and accomplishing. The goal of the chapter is to have at least two articles in the newspaper each month. It is important to me to show mentees that it does not have to fall upon their shoulders to do this. Every chapter has a reporter and it is their job to write news articles. By having great communication with a willing reporter the chapter can get great recognition in the newspaper for all the community to see.

Another really great and free way to promote the chapter is social media. I make it a point to encourage our student teachers and practicum students to like our Facebook page or follow us on instagram to see what we are doing. By them seeing how easy it is to promote the chapter they can do the same thing. Social media even makes it easy. You can post on instagram and it can automatically post to Facebook and twitter. In the summer the mentees can post SAE pictures that highlight what the students are doing. It is also important to use the schools hashtag so the school knows what you have been doing too!

### **Professional Growth**

The best way to stay up-to-date on with teaching techniques and professionalism is to be involved in professional organizations. Bolivar schools does provide professional days and workshops but the best way to stay involved is by joining Missouri Vocational Agricultural Teachers Association, ACTE, and NAAE. Mailings and e-mails keep you informed on events and latest trends in teaching. Meetings and events are the biggest way to improve professional growth. There are three professional meetings held per year plus a summer conference in July. At each activity I am able to learn more to better myself as a teacher and improve my program. I was able to attend the NAAE National Convention in St. Louis as a Teacher Turn the Key recipient. This was the best professional development that I have ever experienced. I walked away from the convention excited with new ideas and resources to teach my students. It also made me want to apply for the National Agriscience Teacher Ambassador Academy which completely transformed my teaching for the better. I have also been able expand my knowledge in agriculture by attending numerous Missouri Farm Bureau meetings and even attending the American Farm Bureau Conference early this year. I serve locally on the Polk County Fair Board and the Polk County Farm Bureau Board. My husband and I serve on the State Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee. I have been an area ag teacher officer and I am currently serving as District Ag Teacher Vice President. Being involved makes you a better teacher and better able to encourage students to get more involved.