



THE LINK

VOLUME I • EDITION V

IN THIS EDITION

We are pleased to bring you The Link, the IMA's membership newsletter. This month features an article by members Carol Radford and Shonna Ryan, as well as updated information about proposals.

The Link is released between issues of Connect Magazine and keeps you up to date with the latest IMA news updates and the mentoring community. If you would like to promote your work or business in our featured members section, submit a short article, or share news and events, contact Holly at hcaulder@mentoringassociation.org.

CAN MENTORS BE TRAINED EFFECTIVELY ONLINE?

BY MEMBERS CAROL PELLETIER RADFORD AND SHONNA RYAN

For any profession, training mentors can be an experience that is both time consuming and costly. My experience of mentor training has been in a classroom setting where I could access the understanding of the mentors in training and verify that they are indeed ready to mentor a novice teacher. Because it became more difficult to bring mentors together for face-to-face trainings, I decided to explore an online option. While the online setting is a potential way of solving logistical concerns of bringing people together, one critical question for me was; can mentors be trained effectively online?

Background

In 2011, Project SUCCESS was developed for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to meet the districts' needs to provide a mentor for novice teachers in their induction year. When the state received Race to the Top funds in 2011 online mentor training was included as one aspect of the program that would be funded.

I was initially very hesitant to engage in creating an online model for mentor training. As a former teacher and a higher education program director, I did not see how an activity as personal as mentoring could be taught online. In my experience leading mentor trainings, I observed that mentors-in-training tend to have a variety of needs and questions, making a face-to-face model for mentor training effective. I knew the mentoring content, had taught many mentoring courses for graduate credit and hundreds of workshops, but I was an online course drop out. Truthfully, I found online classes boring and I was not engaged as a learner using technology.

My graduate assistant, Shonna Ryan, did not share my opinion of the use of technology as a teaching tool. I voiced my concern that an online platform could not effectively replicate the value of any face-to-face training. Her response was encouraging when she said, "Just think about what you want to teach. Focus on your content and let the technology be secondary to your goal. I will help you figure out the delivery." I trusted her and we began to work together to find ways to develop an online program that would still reflect critical aspects of face-to-face learning.

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Together, Shonna and I launched Project SUCCESS as a graduate credit course that included 15 modules with my mentoring content delivered through online learning tools. Over the course of the grant we trained three cohorts of over 400 Lead Mentors in more than 75 school districts. This “train the trainer” model provided Lead Mentors with the content and pedagogy to sustain their own district mentor training programs. The ripple effect across the state provided more novice teachers with mentors who had been prepared for their role.

We learned many things over the four years of development and implementation of this new online approach to training mentors. We offer these seven recommendations to programs considering online mentor training.

Connect with the Audience

The start and end of each online module featured a short video which allowed me to introduce myself as the course instructor and provide an overview of the module content. The ending video summarized the module and emphasized the Key Understandings we hoped they had gained from completing the module assignments. Evaluations showed that mentors appreciated seeing the instructor at the beginning and hearing what they were supposed to “take away” at the end of the module.

Align Course Content with Current Standards

The content and context for mentoring needs to be meaningful to both the mentor and the mentee. We were preparing mentors to support novice teachers to become proficient on the newly required teacher evaluation. Evaluations from course participants confirmed that by aligning our mentoring course content to the evaluation standards the course became far more relevant

and engaging to the mentors and their mentees.

Focus on the Needs of Districts.

We learned that districts had varied knowledge bases about mentoring and some had not revised their programs for decades. We offered topics that were relevant for districts beginning a mentoring program, those who had started but needed some refresher ideas, and districts that felt experienced but wanted to enhance their mentoring activities. The development of a District Action Plan as a course requirement was rated highly because districts said it made them focus on their needs and develop at their own pace.

Design a Predictable Format.

To ensure that each module was easy to follow we created a consistent format for delivering the content. We received high marks on organization and delivery of content based on our clearly defined key questions, key understandings listed in each module, a color-coded calendar with due dates, and checklists to help participants keep track of their assignments.

Differentiate the learning activities

In a face-to-face classroom instructors can respond in real time to the needs of their students. In an online setting we had to plan a variety of learning activities to encourage interaction and engagement. Instead of just using discussion boards, which our previous evaluations had noted as boring and confusing, we used online dialogue journals with assigned partners, phone appointments for office hours, and Skype. These interactions expanded the online environment for those learners who needed more explanation. We even required a practicum where course participants had to apply what they learned in the course to their classroom and share it with video or photos.

Respond to All Written Assignments

We hired Master Mentor Evaluators (MMEs) to read all written reflections and provide feedback in a systematic way. Their main role was to “make it personal” and get to know their students. Anonymous posting of assignments was not a program component. This system of grouping gave the training program a human touch and the MMEs got to know each mentor in their group personally. All evaluators were former teachers who were trained to use a consistent system for responding so there was a consistency across evaluators. The responding to reflections was our highest rated component of the course.

Ask for Feedback and Provide Support

We regularly asked for feedback through email and electronic surveys. We would make changes immediately if an issue came up. We had many participants who had never taken an online course who found the online learning environment

challenging, so we offered them tutorials and phone appointments. This customer service support was rated highly.

Concluding Thoughts

Through this experience, I learned that online mentor training can actually be more effective than classroom sessions in many ways. Because course participants had to write their responses to every assignment and an MME would read and respond, we could truly see the evidence of the mentor’s learning. Often, in class sessions participants turn to a partner to reflect and we don’t know exactly what they said. I saw more accountability than I did in my face-to-face groups because it was easier to monitor discussions and learning outcomes.

I believe a hybrid course with some face-to-face sessions where students can meet and interact with each other and the course instructor is the best model for training mentors. However, if distance and time for meetings is a problem, I can answer from my experience with Project SUCCESS that mentors can be trained effectively online!

Carol Pelletier Radford

Carol is the founder of MentoringinAction.com, an online website for mentors, novice teachers, and mentor trainers. Carol received her Ed.D. from Harvard University where she focused her studies on teacher preparation and professional development. Her teaching includes more than 20 years as a public school teacher and 20 years as a higher education administrator, clinical professor, and program designer. She is the author of three books, *Mentoring in Action - A Month-by-Month Curriculum*, the companion book, entitled *The First Year Matters: Being Mentored in Action*, for the novice teacher, and *Strategies for Successful Student Teaching*. She is currently piloting three online courses with these books.

Shonna Ryan

Shonna received her Master’s degree in Professional Writing in 2011 from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and since that time has worked in various consulting roles for online instructional design. Shonna currently works at Providence College as an instructional technologist. She is also the co-founder of Civic Support, a 501c3 nonprofit organization that specializes in helping community organizations with their technological and business needs.



2016 IMA CONFERENCE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The IMA is now accepting proposal submissions for the 2016 IMA Conference, to be held April 13 – 15, 2016 at the Auburn University Hotel and Conference Center in Auburn, Alabama. The IMA proposals must explicitly connect to the conference theme “Mentoring Excellence: From Preparation to Practice,” and demonstrate both subject-matter expertise and a broadening of the field of knowledge related to mentoring.

Additionally, the IMA seeks proposals across all professions in any of the following categories:

- Reports of innovative programs that demonstrate replicable ideas of “what works” for preparation or mentors/ protégés or the practice or mentoring
- Presentation of practical tools, resources, or strategies for evaluation and assessment of mentoring programs
- Reports/examples of successful mentoring and protégé preparation training methods or materials
- Examples of the use of mentoring for the development of talent in organizations
- Analysis, interpretation, or creation of policy at the programmatic and/or legislative level that demonstrate implications for programs and practice
- Reports of mentoring program success with diverse cultures and contexts and under-served populations
- Sound academic research that contributes to the body of knowledge and offers implications for programs and practice

Please prepare your proposal with the following sections:

- Title of Session
- Type of session [you may have a combination of these—please specify]: a) mentoring program overview/report of success, b) mentor practitioner tools/strategies, c) mentor or protégé training preparation/program/materials d) mentoring innovation e) creation/analysis of policy/legislation, f) tools, resources for evaluation/assessment of mentoring program, g) mentoring program success in diverse cultures/ contexts, h) mentoring for talent development in an organization, i) academic research with implications for mentoring programs/ practice.
- Presenter(s) Work Context: a) higher education, b)

K-12 education, c) youth mentoring, d) government, e) business/corporate, f) legal, g) medical, h) non-profit, i) consulting j) other – please specify

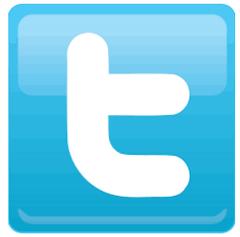
- Presenter(s) statement of qualifications/ background that would demonstrate subject matter expertise on the topic of the session – 150 – 200 words as a guideline
- One paragraph description of the content of the session – 250 – 400 words as a guideline
- Short statement of how session aligns with the conference theme of “Mentoring Excellence: From Preparation to Practice.” 100 words or less.
- Clear statement of the presenter’s objective for what the audience will take away from the session. 250 words or less.
- Presenter(s) Bio(s): 75 words or less.

Presenter Requirements:

- 45 Minute Presentation: Each presenter/presentation team will have a 60-minute slot to present (45 minutes for presentation, 15 minutes for Q&A and session evaluations) during the concurrent sessions at the conference.
- Presenter Registration Fee: \$275. Each presenter must pre-register for the conference and pay the presenter registration fee by the deadline for regular registration or the session may be cancelled. The presenter registration fee is the same as the early-bird registration fee, even if the presenter has not registered early.
- Presentation PDF/ Power Point: Each presenter/presentation team must submit a PDF or Power Point of their presentation by Friday, March 25 to be included in the conference proceedings. Formal papers are accepted, but not required. Power Points will be accepted. Please put your contact information in the Power Point or Paper.
- The IMA will provide a PC laptop (not Mac) and LCD projector/screen in each concurrent session room; Presenters are welcome to bring their own, as well, but should be conversant with how to attach the appropriate cables. No additional AV equipment will be provided by the IMA; wi-fi is free.

Submission Process and Deadlines:

The deadline to submit proposals is **January 15, 2016**. Submit proposals to conference@mentoringassociation.org. Notification of acceptance will be made by **February 12, 2016**.



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1716 Las Lomas RD NE
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For questions, comments, or to submit an article for consideration, please contact Holly Caulder at hcaulder@mentoringassociation.org.

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