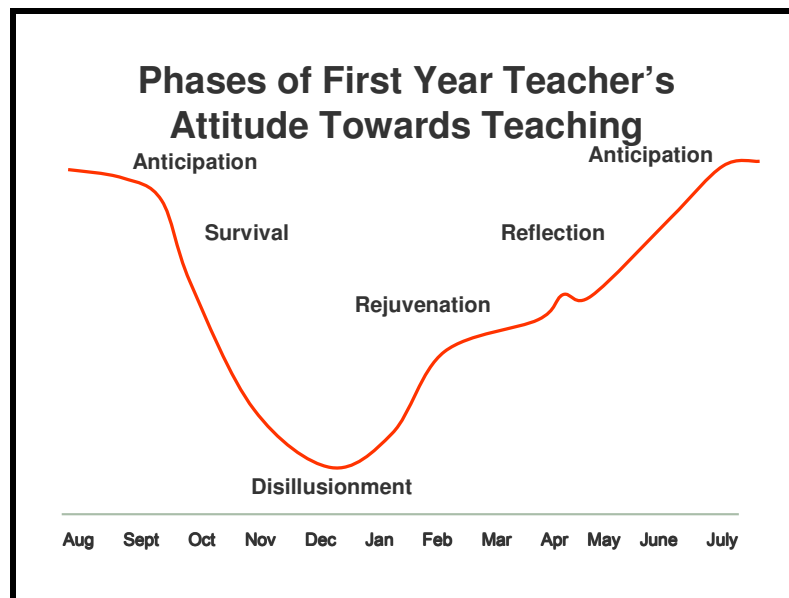


Promising Professional Support and Assistance Activities for Entry-Level Teachers: *What Agricultural Education Teacher-Mentors Can Do!*



Source: Moir, E. (1990, 1992)

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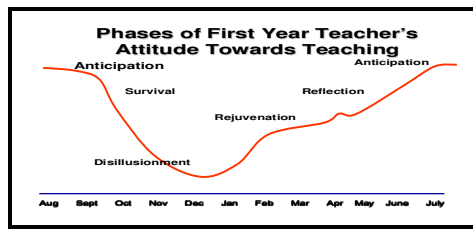
Introduction

Recommendation for support and assistance of ELTs following each phase of changing attitudes (Moir, 1992) were secured from 11 practicing agricultural education teachers from across the USA. The forms of assistance listed in the instrument for each phase of the attitudinal development were derived from interviews with 6 mentor agricultural education teachers from across the United States. Eleven mentor teachers of agricultural education completed an on-line or hardcopy of an instrument that sought how strongly they recommend use of selected forms of support and assistance by mentor teachers when working with entry-level agricultural education teachers.

The mentors who responded in this case study had an average of 18.5 years of teaching experience. The each had experience working with student an average of four teachers. Likewise, they each have formally mentored three teacher sand informally assisted 10 teachers.

What follows is an initial listing of the forms of support and assistance activities that the 11 agricultural education teachers *strongly or very strongly recommended* they and peers use at different phases during the attitudinal development of entry-level agricultural education teachers. The phases for which forms of assistance were developed in the instrument were anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation.

The characteristic feature of each phase will be initially presented; immediately following will be the forms of assistance that the mentor teachers strong or very strongly recommended mentors conduct in each phase of attitudinal changes of the ELTs.



Anticipation Phase. The entry-level teacher (ELTs) has a tendency to romanticize the role and position of the teacher. ELTs initiate their jobs with a tremendous commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how to accomplish their goals. Feelings of excitement carry the new teachers through the first few days to weeks of school. They often believe they are going to be the best teacher their program has ever had, and that they have the skills, attitude, and dispositions to complete the role!

As noted on the graphic below, the anticipation phase characteristically occurs from the time entry-level teachers sign their contract through the early days of teaching in the fall. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

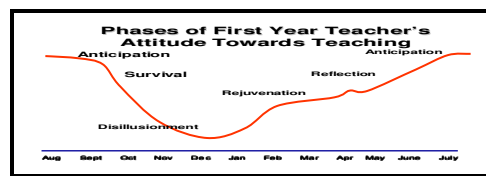
- Assist the ELT in creating course outlines
- Assist the ELT in establishing realistic goals for their first year of teaching
- Assist the ELT in identifying and evaluating teaching resources
- Assist the ELT in preparing for the first days of school of the fall term
- Assist the ELT in selecting a suitable in-school mentor or guide
- Contact the ELT during their first week of school to listen to their experiences and to offer encouragement, assistance and support
- Discuss how to work effectively with administrators
- Discuss strategies for becoming acquainted with community leaders and local business people
- Discuss the challenges and opportunities of the initial courses they will be teaching
- Discuss the merits of setting high standards for their work & behavior
- Encourage them to attend professional development workshops
- Encourage them to become acquainted with area agricultural education teachers in order that they can eventually select a suitable area mentor
- Encourage them to conduct on-site instructional visits to the FFA officers and other students
- Encourage them to conduct on-site instructional visits to the FFA officers and other students
- Encourage them to establish high standards for student work and behaviors
- Establish a personal level relationship with the ELT
- Establish a professional rapport with the ELT
- Establish communications links with the ELT (e.g., email, telephone, fax)
- Express the importance and benefits of being well-prepared for teaching, FFA advising, and SAE/WBL supervisory activities
- Introduce them to the state supervisor, NAAE affiliate officers, FFA executive secretary, university staff, and area agricultural education teachers
- Meet the ELT at summer events such as the NAAE state affiliate meetings, beginning teacher breakfast, and professional development events
- Provide an overview of the features, schedules, and benefits of the teacher induction program
- Provide ideas for helping the ELT effectively manage their time
- Provide the ELT with information about regional and state Ag Ed events
- Serve as an advocate for the ELT when interacting with faculty, administrators, community members and state staff



Survival Phase. Entry-level teacher (ELTs) learn a lot at a rapid pace. They are instantly bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated, and are caught off guard by the realities of teaching. They struggle to keep their heads above water and become very focused on the day-to-day routine of teaching, with little time available to stop and reflect on their experiences. They often report spending up to 70 hours per week on school-related work and activities. In addition, they are overwhelmed by a constant need to develop curriculum and instructional materials. They are not sure which instructional materials and strategies will work and many expend considerable effort thinking about and developing their instructional plans for the first time. Much to their disappointment, they experience the negative consequences of poorly-prepared lessons. ELTs are surprised by the amount of work involved in being a teacher. They usually are able to maintain a high level of energy throughout this phase. They report being hopeful the stress and strain will subside and maintain belief there is a ‘light at the end of the tunnel’. During this phase new teachers often feel alone and really desire that others will reach out to them.

As noted on the graphic below, the survival phase usually occurs during the early days of the fall teaching assignment. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

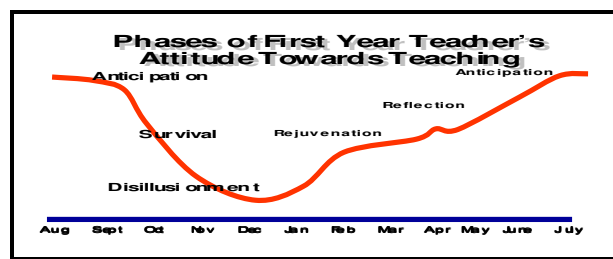
- Ask the ELTs about the nature of FFA activities including the preparation for CDEs
- Be positive and supportive
- Demonstrate concern, understanding, and sensitivity when discussing teaching events with the ELTs, especially those who have experienced limited success
- Discuss and celebrate their successes
- Discuss and offer suggestions for improving instruction and student management
- Discuss available resources and how to find resources in areas they are lacking
- Discuss their teaching challenges along with strategies to remedy
- Encourage the ELTs to attend fall seminars, workshops, and NAAE-affiliate meetings
- Encourage the ELTs to interact with other ELTs on a regular basis
- Encourage the ELTs to maintain objectivity when evaluating their personal performances
- Explore the benefits and limitations of employing student helpers
- Explore the types of support and assistance the ELTs receives from their local and area mentors
- Maintain weekly communications in order to accurately monitor changing performance and attitudes of the ELTs
- Meet the principal and in-school mentor/guide to discuss the progress and experiences of the ELTs
- Observe the ELT teach
- Plan and invite ELTs to small social gatherings of ELTs
- Provide clear responses to questions from the ELT; refrain from using philosophical jargon
- Provide ideas of how to network with other teachers and resource people
- Provide the ELTs with strategies of how to prepare for and profit from evaluative visits by the principal



Disillusionment Phase. The entry-level teacher (ELT) realizes things are not going as smoothly as earlier envisioned. Low morale leads to disenchantment with the job. They question their competence and commitment. The level of stress and worry often leads to bouts with illness. The situation is compounded by new events including back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and initial evaluations by the administrator. Many of the beginning teachers find that classroom management is more stressful than anticipated. The unexpectedly large time commitment brings complaints from family members and friends. Teachers in this phase express self-doubt, have lower self-esteem, and question their professional commitment. This is the toughest phase for many new teachers.

The disillusionment phase may during the later days of the first and may last until the holiday break of the fall teaching assignment. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

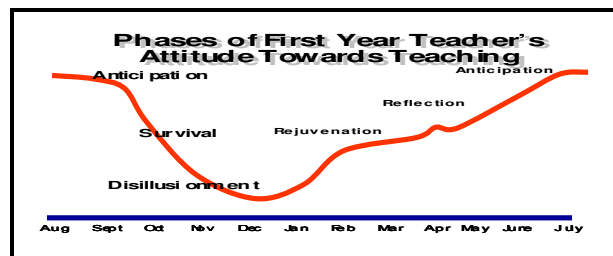
- Advocate for the ELT's when visiting with other stakeholders
- Assist the ELT in identifying, locating, and effectively using teaching resources
- Assist them in building a network of professional acquaintances at the local, regional, and state level
- Assist them in creating useful lesson plans
- Assure them that their experiences are typical of many ELTs
- Attend and participate in professional development events with the ELT whenever possible
- Discuss course and curriculum changes needed for the next semester
- Discuss things that have gone well and assist them in creating a reasonable action plan for addressing current challenges
- Encourage the ELT to meet with members of an existing advisory committee. If non-existent, begin to establish a local advisory committee
- Encourage them (ELT's) to attend NAAE affiliate meetings or district sponsored workshops
- Encourage them and provide them with ideas for conduction more hands-on/minds-on class activities
- Encourage them to continue to modify student and classroom management techniques
- Encourage them to invest time with their families, self, and significant individuals
- Listen and talk with them about topics of interest through email messages, phone calls, and personal visits
- Observe the ELT teach, then arrive together with concrete strategies for enhancing the instruction
- Provide support and encouragement
- Provide them with resources and ideas of how to conduct parent/teacher conferences
- Remind them of key FFA events that occurring



Rejuvenation Phase. During this phase, entry-level teachers experience a gradual improvement in their attitude toward teaching. They make an effort to prepare new and better instructional materials, and are ready to acknowledge their accomplishments while putting past problems behind them. Better understanding of the school system occurs along with an acceptance of the realities of teaching. Experience taught them coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many problems they are likely to encounter in the second half of the year. The teachers experience some sense of relief as they realize only half of the year remains before they can take a break. During the rejuvenation stage, novice teachers focus more on curriculum and instructional materials development, long-term planning and teaching strategies. This phase often lasts into spring. As the phase starts to come to a close, the beginning teachers become more concerned about getting everything (i.e., units, tests, competency exams) completed by year's end as well as student performance and levels of achievement on various assessments).

As noted in the graphic, this phase usually occurs after a holiday break, when new teachers find time to reflect and invest more time in planning curriculum and instruction. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

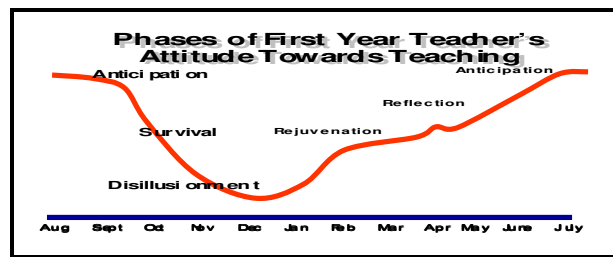
- Assist the ELT in identifying changes needed to strengthen the program in the upcoming year
- Assist the ELT in making changes during the second half that will ensure greater success
- Discuss grading; tell them that a good grade for less than optimum performance will not be a good long term solution
- Discuss strategies for ensuring a successful student registration for courses for the upcoming academic year
- Discuss the importance of finishing the year with success in the classroom, FFA, and SAE/WBL programs
- Encourage their attendance and participation at professional development events
- Encourage them to use a variety of instructional strategies to influence student learning and achievement
- Explore alternative approaches to effective student assessment
- If not yet created, assist the ELT with information and ideas for establishing an advisory committee
- Model and promote reflection
- Monitor email, voicemails, requests, and use alternate forms of personal contact when personal visits are curtailed
- Remind them of the importance of interactions with others in the school and community
- Respond to questions regarding the FFA Degrees and proficiency award, otherwise direct the ELT to a knowledgeable resource individual
- Suggest the ELT attend student activities outside of the Ag Ed program to show interest



The Reflection Phase. This is a somewhat invigorating time. During this phase the ELT can reflect upon the successful and least effective instructional strategies and activities. The teachers begin to think more about what they will do differently in the future with regard to management, curricula, teaching strategies, resources, and any intra or extracurricular activities. They start to anticipate what teaching will be like with all of the changes they are envisioning.

During the reflection phase the comments and feelings expressed in Moir's (1990) study reflected the personal assurance and satisfaction associated with the ELT completing the first period of teaching. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

- Assist the ELT in identifying changes that should be made in the program for the upcoming academic year
- Celebrate successes in all components of the agricultural education program
- Compliment the ELT about the successes they have experienced
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of staying in the current school for the upcoming academic year
- Encourage the ELT to reflect about all aspects of teaching, advising the FFA, and supervising the Seeps
- Encourage the ELT to be ready for next fall through revising courses, SAE programs, and the FFA program of activities (POA)
- Encourage the ELT to participate in the summer NAAE affiliate meetings and other professional workshops
- Maintain easy accessibility to the ELT
- Talk with the ELT about the development of a summer calendar of activities
- Visit, listen, and share reflections at the state FFA Convention, CDEs, or leadership conferences



Anticipation Phase II. As they finish their first year of teaching, entry-level teachers express a heightened sense of what they hope to accomplish in the classroom and laboratory settings. They have less concern for survival. They focus more on their impact on students, and less on themselves. They have greater concerns with quality instructional materials and teaching strategies than they did during the initial time of anticipation that occurred before and during the first couple of weeks of teaching.

As noted in the graphic, the end-of-year anticipation phase usually occurs toward the end of their first year of teaching. The ELTs express a heightened sense of what they hope to accomplish in the classroom and laboratory settings. The summarized ratings from the practicing mentor teachers involved in this case study suggest that they **strongly to very strongly recommend** that all mentor teachers implement the following forms of support and assistance with entry level teachers (ELTs) of agricultural education:

- Assist the ELT in ordering supplies, equipment, and textbooks, if needed
- Attend and visit with the ELTs at the state FFA convention and summer conference
- Discuss the plans of the ELT for improving classroom and laboratory instruction, SAE/WBL programs, and the FFA
- Encourage networking with other agricultural education teachers
- Encourage participation in the NAAE affiliate summer conference
- Encourage the ELT to visit other agricultural education programs to obtain ideas for strengthening their program
- Encourage them to evaluate classroom, SAE, and FFA components for the past year using data from the stakeholders
- Encourage them to take time off for themselves, their families, and other significant individuals
- Maintain accessibility
- Participate in an end-of-year celebration for all ELTs involved in the teacher induction program
- Share how the experiences of the first and second year are similar and different

