

**A State Mandated Induction Program: Mentorship Experiences  
for First Year Agricultural Education Teachers**

**Robin L. Peiter, University of Kentucky  
Robert Terry, Jr., University of Missouri  
D. Dwayne Cartmell II, Oklahoma State University**

**Abstract**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine perceptions of mentoring within a state-mandated first year teaching program of first year agricultural education teachers and their assigned resident committee members. The following objectives were formulated to accomplish this purpose: 1) Describe the personal characteristics of first year teachers and committee members appointed within the program; 2) Determine the perceptions of residency committee members concerning mentoring the first year agricultural education teacher; 3) Describe the mentor relationships that exist between the first year agricultural education teacher and his/her committee members; 4) Compare perceptions among committee members of the program; and, 5) Determine if the participants in the program favor its continuance.

The data collection instrument was a researcher-designed survey composed of two parts. The first part provided demographic information regarding the participants of the resident teacher program. The second part of the instrument was designed to identify perceptions of mentoring within the resident teacher program of first year agricultural teachers and their committee members.

The results indicated that the residency committee members believed they did provide mentoring to the first year teachers in agricultural education. First year agricultural education teachers perceived the mentor teacher to be the committee member who provided the most assistance during their first year of teaching. To the contrary, mentor teachers believed they did not assist these teachers with agricultural education issues or technical agriculture areas. Committee members and the first year teachers felt the first year teacher asked for assistance from each committee member 1-5 times during the new teacher's first year. Mentor teachers, administrators, higher education representatives, and first year agricultural education teachers favored the continuance of the state-mandated program; however, some improvements could be made to strengthen the mentoring component of the program.

It was recommended that efforts be made to better involve teacher educators as higher education representatives, and expand the residency committee to include an agricultural education mentor teacher and program specialist with the department of education. Members serving on committees should make a special effort to develop rapport with these first year teachers beyond the mandatory meetings and scheduled observations. Informal mentoring by all professionals must continue to meet the needs of first year teachers of agriculture.

## Introduction

The process of becoming socialized into teaching is one of the most difficult stages in the professional development of teachers. Indeed, experiences during the first year are often pivotal in the eventual success or failure of the beginning teacher. Beginning teachers are usually expected to assume all responsibilities of teaching as if they were veteran teachers (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles & Niles, 1992). Unlike most other professions, where the job becomes more challenging over time, in teaching the most challenging situations are given to the new teacher (Glickman, 1990). The transition from student to first year teacher is traumatic for many. It is no wonder that “beginning teachers frequently report stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy” (Joyce & Clift, 1984, p. 6). Fifteen percent of all new teachers never recover from this initial experience and leave the profession after the first year (Hulling-Austin, 1992). More than 50 percent of all beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Olson & Rodman, 1988).

According to Wildman & Niles (1987), it has been long recognized that beginning teachers need support to help them through the first year. Recently, other researchers reinforced this concept of survival for new teachers and offered assistance in this area (DePaul, 2000; Nichols & Mudnt, 1996; Stedman & Stroot, 1998). Induction is the broad process by which beginning teachers are socialized into the profession. Camp and Heath (1988) identified the induction process as a transitional period when beginning teachers move from the role of students to experienced teachers. This assistance ranges from informal friendships to very formal and structured programs. It is during this time through assistance, beginning teachers develop competence in knowledge, skills, and values. This assistance ranges from informal friendships to very formal and structured programs. Yee (1990) found teachers with positive early first year experiences, reasonable assignments in terms of course loads and subjects, and adequate feedback and personal support from colleagues and supervisors are more likely to become competent and skillful teachers who remain in the profession.

First year agricultural education teachers especially need a positive induction process as these teachers have additional responsibilities. Agricultural education teachers are not only responsible for the activities of a normal subject teacher, but also they are responsible for an entire agricultural education program. Debertin and Priebe (1984) and Grady (1985) found experienced agriculture teachers have higher levels of morale or job satisfaction when compared with beginning agricultural education teachers. Specifically, when compared to national morale norms for junior and senior high faculties, beginning agricultural education teachers rank consistently below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (Flowers & Peple, 1988).

In the early 1980s, programs were developed to serve as a vehicle for connecting theory and practice for beginning teachers. Since inception, resident teacher programs have created “new ways for colleges and school systems to work together around instructional reform, creating greater common ground, and leveraging improvements in both settings” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 80). One aspect of the induction process is the development of formal or informal mentoring relationships. In fact, one of the recommendations in What matters most: Teaching for America’s future (1996) was to “create and fund mentoring programs for beginning teachers” (p. vii). Kram (1985) stated that when a

relationship provides both career and psychosocial functions “it best approximates the prototype of a mentor relationship” (p. 42).

In 1980, a state mandated induction program was implemented for all first year teachers in Oklahoma. The stated intent of the legislation that created the program was “to establish qualifications of teachers in the common schools of this state through licensing and certification requirements” (HB 1706, Section 4). Few changes have occurred with this induction program during its history.

In almost every state in America, induction programs are established to provide mentoring to beginning agricultural education teachers. Is this state mandated program, the Oklahoma Resident Teacher Program, providing a mentorship experience for the professional development of agricultural education teachers?

### Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to determine perceptions of mentoring within a state mandated first year teaching induction program of first year agricultural education teachers and their assigned resident committee members. The following objectives were formulated to accomplish this purpose:

1. Describe the personal characteristics of first year agricultural education teachers and their committee members assigned to the residency committee.
2. Determine the perceptions of residency committee members concerning mentoring the first year agricultural education teacher.
3. Describe the mentor relationships that exist between the first year teacher and his/her committee members.
4. Compare perceptions among committee members of the residency program.
5. Determine if the participants in the residency program favor its continuance.

### Procedures

The population for this study consisted of residency committees for first year agricultural education teachers in Oklahoma during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 academic school years (N=37 committees). This state-mandated program for first year agricultural education teachers, and enforced by the Oklahoma state department of education, was used as the population frame. Descriptive in design, data were collected from a census of the population.

A telephone questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. The instrument was modified from studies by Barbee (1985) and Barrera (1991) and contained two parts. Part I

was designed to gather selected demographic data of first year agricultural education teachers and their committee members. Part II was designed to gather respondents' perceptions of mentoring between the first year teacher and the committee members. Items used throughout the instrument were closed-ended questions, with participants ranking those items from greatest to least. One open-ended question was in place to gather respondent's description of mentoring within the residency committee and current program.

As suggested by Tuckman (1978), to ensure validity and reliability of the instrument, a panel of experts was used. The selection of the panel of experts was based on knowledge of agriculture, agricultural education, and research methods. The instrument was pilot tested with agricultural education teachers who went through the induction year program during the 1998-1999 academic year along with the persons who served on their residency committees. Members of the pilot group completed the telephone questionnaire, answered questions related to the clarity of the instrument, and made other suggestions. No major changes were made to the instrument as a result of this process.

The researcher administered the instruments to all participants. First year teachers and committee members were contacted by telephone to explain the purpose of the study and describe the process of completing the instrument in addition to scheduling an interview appointment. This preliminary call allowed participants time to gather their thoughts regarding their mentoring experience in the resident teacher program and to ensure a more accurate response.

A total of 97.3% (N=144) of the population completed the questionnaire. All responses were usable for data analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were used for all variables. Chi-square was also computed for comparative data between the studies. No analysis for non-respondents could be made, as four administrators could not be located. Therefore, as non-respondents they also could not be located.

## Findings

### *Personal Characteristics of Respondents*

Nearly 90% of the first year agricultural education teachers, administrators, and higher education representatives were male. As shown in Table 1, most committee members serving as mentors had more than 15 years of experience in education. Few administrators and mentor teachers had an agricultural education background; however, 37.8% of the mentor teachers possessed a vocational certification. Most administrators serving on the residency committees were high school principals (84.8%) and almost 88% held certification in an academic subject matter.

Table 1  
Participant Profile of the Residency Program

	Resident Teacher (n=37)	Mentor Teacher (n=33)	Administrator (n=37)	Higher Education Representative (n=37)
Gender	Male (89.2%)	Male (70.3%)	Male (89.2%)	Male (89.2%)
Educational Level	Bachelors (97.3%)	Bachelors (67.6%)	Masters + 15 (54.5%)	Doctorate (89.2%)
Certification Area	Agricultural Education (100%)	Secondary Vocational (37.8%)	Secondary Academic (87.9%)	Agricultural Education (94.6%)
Total Years in Education	0-5 (100%)	Over 15 (73.0%)	Over 15 (87.9%)	Over 15 (87.9%)
Total Years Teaching	0-5 (100%)	Over 15 (73.0%)	Over 15 (42.4%)	0-5 (87.9%)
Years in Higher Education	--	--	--	11-15 (43.2%)
Years in Administration	--	--	6-10 (33.3%)	--
Type of Administrative Experience	--	--	High School Principal (84.8%)	--

*Committee Members' Perceptions of Mentoring*

Committee members and first year agricultural education teachers perceived mentoring did occur through the state mandated residency program. As illustrated in Figure 1, first year agricultural education teachers perceived the greatest assistance came from their mentor teacher (49.0%). However, mentor teachers perceived they did not provide technical or agricultural education assistance to the first year teacher.

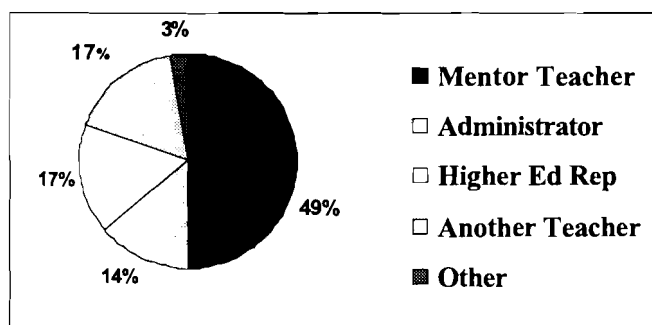


Figure 1. Comparison of individuals providing mentoring as perceived by first year agricultural education teachers.

Both first year agricultural teachers and the committee members perceived the first year teacher asked for assistance 1-5 times throughout the academic school year. Figure 2 shows that first year teachers (78.4%) believed the mentor teachers spent the required amount of time serving as their mentors.

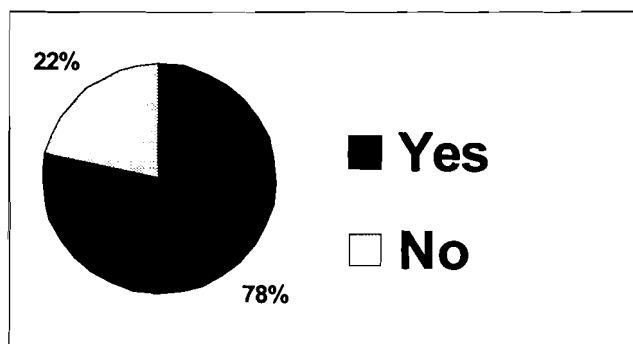


Figure 2. An analysis of required time spent by the mentor teacher as perceived by first year agricultural education teachers.

### *Mentor Relationships Described*

Information was solicited about the relationship of committee members to the first year agricultural education teachers through open-ended questions. As displayed in Figure 3, both positive and negative themes were identified. In many instances the higher education representative and the mentor teacher were identified as having provided great assistance and mentoring, especially when the higher education representative was an active part of the pre-service teacher education program. In this instance, the teacher educator serving as a higher education representative had a feel for the program's mission, goals and community needs. However, each group also identified areas where the mentoring offered through the higher education representative committee member could have been improved.

Mentor teachers identified that the success of mentoring within each committee was dependent on the committee members. The administrators added that the personality of the first year agricultural education teacher was also important for effective mentoring to occur. For example, the first year teachers' ability to listen to feedback and take constructive criticism and adopt and implement changes in their teaching style and program is vital. If a first year teacher's personality is one that he or she will not listen to the mentor assigned, the program will not be effective.

### **First Year Agricultural Education Teacher Comments**

Positive Comments

Mentor teacher provided assistance  
Higher Ed Rep was of assistance  
Administrator provided assistance

Areas for Improvement

Mentor teacher – no assistance  
No understanding of ag education program  
Program is Evaluation instead of Mentoring  
Just a process to go through-no meaning

### **Mentor Teacher Comments**

Positive Comments

Success depends on people in committee  
Program is needed for new teachers  
Teaching areas are similar - "vocational"

Areas for Improvement

Higher Ed Rep – no tie to community  
No technical ag or ag education assistance  
Time to provide assistance was difficult

### **Administrator Comments**

Positive Comments

Program effectiveness relies on personality  
Other committee members did a good job

Areas for Improvement

Mentor teacher is not aware of technical ag  
More involvement with Mentor Teachers

### **Higher Education Representative Comments**

Positive Comments

Higher Education Rep. provides support

Areas for Improvement

Often a rush to get process finished  
Uneven assistance given - Higher Ed Rep.  
Improvements need to be made in system

*Figure 3.* Themes from open-ended questions describing the relationships formed through residency committee.

### *Respondents' View of Continuing the Residency Program*

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents stated they would strongly favor the continuance of the residency program. In fact, the most frequent response for each type of committee member was "strongly favor." However, 20 (13.8%) of the respondents were either uncertain or opposed to continuing the program. First year agricultural education teachers were unsure of the effectiveness of the mentoring component within the program, as eight (21.6%) were either uncertain or opposed to its continuance. Twenty (50%) of the committee members having a negative view were higher education representatives, with 8.1% of the higher education representatives strongly opposed to the continuance of the program.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions were formulated based on the results of this study.

1. Committee members in the residency program typically have 15 or more years of experience in the educational system.
2. Few administrators and mentor teachers assigned to the residency committee have a technical agriculture or agricultural education background.
3. First year agricultural education teachers perceive they receive mentoring from their residency committee.
4. First year agricultural education teachers rarely ask their committee members for assistance in their first year of teaching.
5. The mentor teacher provides the greatest assistance to the first year agricultural education teacher, however mentor teachers believe they do not assist first year agricultural education teachers in technical or agricultural education areas.
6. First year agricultural education teachers and their mentors appointed through the induction program believe the function of the residency program is related more to evaluation than mentoring.
7. Most higher education representatives are familiar with the first year teacher, agricultural education, and the agricultural education programs in this state; however within some committees this did not occur.
8. The residency program helps to create a feeling of security for the first year agricultural education teacher.

9. The residency program in this state should continue because some mentoring of the first year teacher does occur by his/her committee members.

#### Recommendations

1. Because few members of residency committees have experience in technical agriculture, committees for first year agricultural education teachers should be expanded to include a mentor agricultural education teacher and an agricultural education program specialist from the state department of career and technical education.
2. Collaboration between the state department of education and the university teacher education program should occur to improve the current resident teacher program or develop a new mentoring program specific to first year agricultural education teachers.
3. One of the main functions higher education representatives bring to the induction year teacher committee is their familiarity to the resident teacher and the teacher preparation program where the teacher recently graduated. Thus, higher education representatives appointed should be only those teacher educators who play an active role in the pre-service program.
4. Very few first year agricultural education teachers seek assistance from their committee members, therefore committee members should make a special effort to develop rapport with these first year teachers beyond the mandatory meetings and scheduled observations.
5. Induction year committee members come from diverse backgrounds and great experience as educators. However, results of this study indicate that first year agricultural education teachers rarely seek assistance from them. These new teachers must ask their committee members for assistance when needed, beyond the scheduled committee meetings.
6. Program specialists, teacher educators, and other experienced agricultural education teachers should continue to informally mentor first year agricultural education teachers.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

1. The mentorship experience of beginning agricultural education teachers must be further assessed. This could include analysis of teachers in their first 5 years.
2. A longitudinal study should be conducted to measure these participants' perceptions of the residency program throughout their career.
3. Further investigation should be placed on experienced agricultural education teachers regarding their views of serving as mentors for beginning agricultural education teachers.
4. Further research needs to be conducted to learn why first year agricultural education teachers do not seek mentoring assistance from their assigned mentors.

## Discussion/Implications

Induction programs, such as the one in Oklahoma, are not a new phenomenon. The concept of induction in regard to teachers is decades old, while popularization of the term is fairly new. More formalized induction programs were established in the early 1980's and still are in place. However, today numerous first year agricultural education teachers still encounter many of the same issues. Still, the profession still battles the attrition issue. It is our responsibility as agricultural educators to continually re-evaluate what is current practice and make adjustments to the hopes to improve the quality of the first year teachers' experience and the education of those students in their classrooms.

As classroom teachers become more accountable for student learning, teacher educators, program specialists in state departments of education, administrators, and other teachers within the agricultural education profession must also become more accountable. Through mentorship within and outside of established induction programs, new agricultural education teachers will become more prepared to meet the challenges in the classroom and the demand for accountability with student learning.

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What is mentoring? Why be mentored or mentor another educator? Does mentoring happen just because people are assigned to mentors? Is it really needed? Can people successfully navigate throughout their first years as they become fully or partially socialized to the teaching profession within an institution? These are important questions that have been partially answered by investigators and theoreticians from and outside of agricultural education. Findings of earlier investigations and this study are important for individuals responsible for creating, implementing and evaluating effective programs.

The authors are commended for identifying a need for investigation that may have implications for a number of stakeholders including state department of education staff, beginning teachers, teacher educators, and legislators. The profession further commends you for furthering efforts to develop research skills that are necessary for developing professionals who produce quality scholarship for the profession.

Ideas for enhancing your final paper are provided for your thoughtful consideration. Recall that a strong theoretical and conceptual framework based upon recent references and seminal works provide the foundation for a substantive purpose and related objectives. More will be stated about that later in the comments. Informed by clear objectives, the corresponding methods of conducting the research result in fully-developed descriptions that allow a complete understanding of how the investigation was completed. It is critical to disclose the details relating to each measure or set of measures. Inform the reader of the processes used to create a valid and reliable instrument.

As noted, this paper can be further strengthened by having a well-developed conceptual framework that is supported by related theory and research. *There is an extensive body of literature about mentoring* outside of agricultural education that is very useful for framing the questions of interest to the authors. Expand in greater detail upon the theories and literature relating to each objective of the study. In addition, disclosure of the requirements of the original legislative documents that mandated the Oklahoma Resident Teacher Program (ORTP) would be useful. Pattern the report after exemplars identified in earlier NAERC proceedings and/or issues of the Journal of Agricultural Education, Journal of Vocational Education Research, and/or the Journal of Career and Technical Education.

Use your conclusions for each objective to support or refute the outcomes of other studies. Likewise, propose recommendations for practice and research that do not extend beyond the objectives of the study. Given what you learned from this study, discuss what additional questions come to mind about mentoring and the ORTP? Upon what basis would you argue for its continuance? Discontinuance?