

Stop, Drop, and Roll: Equally Prioritize Mentoring Program Leadership Wellness

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During the summer of 2024, founders and co-directors of a successful university mentoring program simply stopped, rested, and engaged in critical reflection from which they concluded: Our program is grounded in William Glasser's choice theory, ensuring mentees' five basic needs are met, however, we have failed to include the program leadership's basic needs. This paper will study the paradigm shift inclusive of mentoring program leadership wellness. Minimal research is available supporting leadership wellness; however, literature exists finding that occupational wellbeing improves when mentor leaders have mentors. Most research studies support outcomes for mentoring K-12 school administrators and improving mentoring in higher education. A theoretical framework supporting mentoring program administrators will be proposed with an emphasis on developmental networks for wellness based on five basic needs. As program founders and administrators of the university mentoring program, we are celebrating the mentoring program transitioning to an official university educator preparation program launching Fall 2025, but at what cost? After four years of running a successful program with minimal funding, the program founders and administrators were emotionally and physically spent. Program leaders have developed a theoretical framework for supporting the wellbeing of mentoring program administrators. The mentoring program administrators and authors of this paper will share a theoretical framework for building mentoring programs supporting all stakeholders, including the administrators. Mentoring program administrators must model building developmental networks for wellness that adapt and respond to the needs of mentoring program administrators as well and show the interconnectedness with mentor and mentee support. The leadership inclusive mentoring model supports individual and organizational performance and growth leading to positive outcomes.

Keywords: Leaders, leadership, administrators, wellness, wellbeing

Introduction

Program founders and co-directors developed a mentoring program in 2020 born from a conversation with two young African American undergraduate teacher education students. These undergraduate students were former university students. During this conversation, questions were asked regarding how they were feeling, their experiences on campus, and resources necessary for their academic success. The mentoring model developed from asking questions focused on students' basic needs. A representation of some of the many questions asked is shown below:

1. How are you?
2. How are you feeling?
3. Tell me about your living situation...Do you have stable housing?
4. Tell me about what and how you have been eating?
5. How are your friends and family?
6. What are you doing for fun?
7. What is happening with work and classes?
8. What might you need to have a successful semester?

Based on the answers to our questions, we

decided to begin to meet as many of students' basic needs as possible. As the program evolved, program founders noticed a pattern; students were successful once their basic needs were met. Respecting scholarship and research, the founders began to intentionally build the program using Glasser's five basic needs: survival, belonging, freedom, power, and fun as the framework.

The program founders created a program where teacher education students, including students from first-generation and marginalized populations, thrived. They thrived socially, academically, and professionally. The mentoring program's success-rate is more than 95% due to the founders running the program on their own time with a generous award from the College of Education's dean to cover program costs.

During the spring of 2024, the founders finished the 2023-2024 school year physically and mentally exhausted as each had full-time jobs outside of running the mentoring program. One of the founders was a tenured track professor and the other, a full-time high school mathematics teacher who also worked part-time as a university student teaching supervisor. Our program required weekly three hour meetings which included

professional development for our participant. Meetings included such topics as training by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) regarding lawfully supporting the immigrant K-12 student population with whom our mentees work as paraprofessionals and substitute teachers through the local intermediate school district. Program planning by the co-directors took place in the evenings and weekends after their full-time job commitments were met. Until the spring of 2024, a graduation ceremony and summer institute with a focus on family and community engagement were coordinated and planned by the co-directors.

Spring of 2024, the co-directors cancelled these important events to rest for their personal wellness and for the wellness of the program. The demanding schedules required of working a full-time job as well as running a successful program were not sustainable going forward.

As the founders reflected upon their experiences and the impact the program was having, they realized that no one was going to check on them to make sure they THEY had what was needed in terms of wellness. Leaders are often neglected regarding wellness checks and balances. As the co-directors found themselves burned out, they understood that they could not serve the students in a manner that would be on the level that produced successful program graduates, thus possibly negatively impacting the program leading to it ending. The program founders took the first step toward addressing their need for support by reaching out to their local Intermediate School District (ISD) for program financial support and gratefully entered a partnership that provided much needed support.

Like the founders did with the mentoring program, they looked for research that included a mentoring model integrating leadership wellbeing. No model exists that integrates leadership wellbeing into the mentoring model, until now; the Leadership-Inclusive Mentoring Model (LIMM) grounded in Glasser's Five Basic Needs (Glasser, 1998). The purpose of this model is to address the wellness of program leaders. The following Research Question (RQ) was developed: How can the mentoring program's theoretical framework be expanded to include leadership wellness?

Literature Review

Minimal research is available supporting leadership wellbeing, however, literature exists finding that occupational wellbeing improves when mentor leaders have mentors (Connery & Frick, 2021.). The vast majority of research studies support outcomes for mentoring K-12 school administrators (Bertrand et al., 2018). Anderson, 2020; Connery & Frick, 2024 find that lack of institutional support is the primary cause for program leader burnout, which reduces program sustainability. Leaders also report feeling invisible despite their commitment, which leads to positive program outcomes. Recommendations included institutional support including protected

time and funding. Anderson & West (2020) also find that program audits specifically focusing on leadership wellness as the work of mentoring program leaders is often "hidden". Finally, the Eby et al. study shows that mentor leaders' wellbeing is crucial to program success thought the use of developmental networks and institutional support for mentors.

Program

Program sustainability is dependent on program leadership wellbeing and the framework should be based on the same framework as the mentees. The LIMM uses Glasser's five basic needs as a framework supporting mentor leadership wellbeing.

LIMM Components

The LIMM's most important factor is institutional support, which includes funding and policies. Funding in terms of compensation for program administration duties including but not limited to release time for faculty; funding to hire a full-time program director, assistant director, and program coordinator; and institutional recognition for program's positive outcomes based on program goals such as improved graduation rates and successful program completion.

Processes supporting consistency, commitment, and accountability include regular assessment of the needs of mentor leadership. The assessment should include qualitative data allowing leaders to express themselves in their own words. Peer networks such as the University of New Mexico's Mentoring Institute and the International Mentoring Association allow scholarship and theory to collectively collaborate with the practicing community. The final component of our model is protected time and mental health support for mentor leadership. Figure 1 shows the LIMM framework.

Results

A bridge between mentor leadership and mentees is created as the mentor leadership actively engages in the practice of operating within Glasser's five basic needs (Glasser, 1998).

Survival

Mentor leaders with institutional support, protected time, and compensation are able to survive personally and professionally by administering a successful mentoring program with their wellbeing included in the program's mission (Eby et al., 2013).

Belonging

Mentor leaders utilizing peer and developmental networks to connect with the mentoring community, including researchers and practitioners (Anderson, 2020; Connery & Frick, 2024).

Freedom

Given the time and funding both for the program networks to connect with the mentoring community, including researchers and practitioners (Anderson, 2020; Connery and Frick, 2024).and mentor leadership compensation, mentor leaders are free to imagine, plan, implement, and sustain successful mentoring programs (Anderson, 2020; Connery and Frick, 2024).

Power

As mentor leaders empower mentees with

improved self-efficacy, leadership's self-efficacy is also improved which is applied to program sustainability (Anderson, 2020; Connery & Frick, 2024).

Fun

Mentor leaders when provided with required institutional support have the time and space to enjoy the honorable responsibilities associated with mentor leadership (Anderson, 2020); (Connery and Frick, 2024).

Figure 1.



Discussion

Kutsyuruba and Godden (2019) distinguish wellness from wellbeing by emphasizing that wellness is focused on health and falls under wellbeing which is more holistic and purpose driven. Our framework focuses on wellness which will eventually lead to wellbeing. The founders and authors of this framework were experiencing exhaustion and feeling like they may not be able to continue the mentoring program. This leadership fatigue is described by Anderson (2020) and Eby et al. (2013), as a result of the lack of institutional support in terms of time release and program funding. Once institutional support was received through the local ISD partnership and the dean's support, the mentor leaders demonstrated resilience, thus, continuing to build the mentoring program that exceeded expectations. Leader resilience results from programming receiving the institutional support necessary for leadership wellbeing (Connery & Frick, 2024).

Although all Glasser's five basic needs were met beginning fall 2024, the primary needs that apply to our L IMM model include survival which is our funding and prioritized time as well as belonging which was met by the participation in developmental networks such as the New Mexico Mentoring Institute and the International Mentoring Association.

Conclusion

The mentoring program co-directors and founders officially implemented L IMM and took the time and space to re-imagine the program through a successful partnership with their local ISD, and two neighboring public-school districts. The partnership resulted in students receiving full tuition and fees, working as substitute paraprofessionals and substitute teachers, which allowed students to earn enough money to support themselves during their undergraduate experience. By applying Glasser's five basic needs to our leadership mentoring framework, L IMM developed, allowing the program founders and leaders time and space to not only rest during the spring of 2024, but to also improve their quality of life. The improvement of their quality of life resulted in a mentoring program that will officially launch as an educator preparation program.

Future improvements in the program include both qualitative and quantitative testing for model

efficacy. The wellness and wellbeing of mentor leadership is the key to sustainable mentoring programs.

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