Can Being a Mentor–coach Increase Experienced Teachers' Wellbeing?

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The Context
A mentoring, coaching and induction program was introduced in 2009 to:

1. Retain effective teaching fellows
2. Provide leadership and professional growth opportunities for veteran teachers
3. Improve teaching and learning across district

Composition:

- 2 years
- High-stake context
- Mandatory
- TIP team
- 3 Pillars: PL, MCF, Evaluation

2018-2019

7298 Students
450 Teachers
55 Year 1 Teaching Fellows
55 Year 2 Teaching Fellows
50 Mentor-coaches
Defining the terms

Positionality
"They are boundary spanners who live in the thinking world of observing, reflection, questioning, criticism, and seeking clarity while also living in the action world of pragmatic practice, doing, experiencing, and coping” (Walker, p.2).

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**Pragmatism**

**Socio-constructivism**

Figure 1: The pracademic inquiry wheel
Source: Adapted from Susskind’s (2001) Circle of Engagement
The research question

- In what ways (if any) did the well-being of experienced teachers increase as a result of being a mentor–coach?

The project: A Patchwork Quilt

- **Research method:** A qualitative case study (Yin, 2014)
- **Theoretical framework:** Social learning theory- a ‘landscape of practice’ perspective which consist of many different communities of practice and the boundaries between them (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014)
- **Data Collection:** documentation, questionnaires (4 stakeholder groups), focus groups (6 stakeholder groups), 2 semi-structured interviews (8) January and June in 2016
- **Analysis:** Abductive Analysis (Tavory and Timmermans (2014), The framework method (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003)
Seligman’s (2011) PERMA Framework

- **P** = positive emotion
- **E** = engagement
- **R** = (positive) relationships
- **M** = meaning
- **A** = accomplishment

Properties of PERMA Elements

1. It contributes to well-being;
2. Many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements; and
3. It is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity)

Seligman, 2011, p. 16
Findings

Positive emotion

- High job satisfaction
- Passion
- Excitement
- Pride
“IT’S NOT EVEN A JOB, IT IS FUN. I LOVE THIS STUFF!” WINNIE

“I FEEL LIKE I AM GETTING MORE OUT OF THE PROGRAM THEN I AM ACTUALLY GIVING.” VALERIE

“I THINK IT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE GREATEST HIGHLIGHTS OF MY CAREER.” LAURIE

“IF YOU LOOK AT THIS ROOM, YOU ARE ALL SO POSITIVE AND GLOWING WITH ENTHUSIASM AND HAPPY [...] YOU COULDN’T HAVE PICKED A BETTER GROUP TO VOLUNTEER! BUT REALLY YOU CAN HEAR THE ENTHUSIASM AROUND THE ROOM AND THE OWNERSHIP OF THIS PROGRAM AND PERSONAL OWNERSHIP AND YOU THINK, WOW!”

-MC focus group
Engagement

Ongoing and job-embedded PL
intrinsic motivation

focus on reflexivity

“It has tremendous value. I have challenged myself in ways that I have never been challenged before. I have also learned a lot about myself. It’s almost like a reminder to yourself to reflect and grow constantly. It also keeps me on my toes and keeps me accountable. I like that I have to better myself and challenge myself constantly.” (Questionnaire)
“It keeps you fresh and challenged [...] For me it was a learning experience and now I will know what I will do different next time because it is not like you can get more PD on how to get along with someone you don’t get along with.”

-Cathy

Trust
Safety
comfort
vulnerability

(Positive) Relationships:
Relationships

“The relationship(s) I developed with my mentee(s) was / were positive” 100% respondents

“The most valuable aspect [of the MCF] is the relationship that is built and hopefully lasts as a reciprocal professional support.” (Questionnaire)

“It is the job of the mentor–coach to really give their teaching fellow the confidence to show their fallibility.” (Alice)

Challenge & support

“There were some tears but I think that I had established a really caring relationship with her so I could do that and I had to do that, because I thought – wait a minute [...] I have grown into being able to do that over the years. To trust that they know that it is coming from a place of caring and affection and respect for them and for their students – those little people are counting on you.”

-Laurie
Meaning

“Belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self”
(Seligman, 2011, p. 17)

It is “a really honoured role and it helps me feel like I am doing something greater than just working within my own little classroom.”
(Laurie)

“to pass along best practices that helps to build sustainability within the school and ultimately within the board.”
(Valerie)

Ideally all students get attention and support but when I go into another class and I see the way some of these students are treated, it breaks my heart [...] we are losing and failing those students. [...] so getting [my TF] to recognize that is really important.”
(Cathy)
“We are educators and tasked with teaching the curriculum. As critical educators, we have to question it too [...] It is an activist pedagogy, but I think that helps new teachers understand that questioning is part of being a critical thinking educator which I think we all have to be.”

- Laurie

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**Influence**

**Success of TF**

**Achievement or achievement**

**Competence as an effective MC**

**Influence in school community**
“My teaching fellow’s classroom management has improved drastically. We are not having any more issues with violence in the classroom so that is really good. The kids in the class are happy in the end and they are not being sent to the office and there aren’t fights breaking out in the class; nobody is getting stabbed. So that’s nice.”

-Winnie

“The most significant impact for our school community has been the more teachers we have here who have gone through the program, the better the quality of teaching is [...] Talk about the ripple effect. When you see they have been supported and have had best practices modelled and then the whole school starts to change, right? When you know these kids are being taught well and treated well [...] it is kind of neat – it is really humbling in a way.”

- Laurie
Not a panacea

True picture?

“If you get the right person and pairing and it works – then it is good.” (WQTA)

“We have [MCs] in our board who feel that they can’t honestly say that I am done with this program. They feel like there will be ramifications from administration or from the board.” (WQTA)
Stress & workload (MCF Relationships)

“It invades a lot of personal time because of the worry. You worry about the children, you worry about the influences of other [colleagues] the decisions [leaders] will make that will impact [your TF], you worry that [your TF] may not make the right decisions, and you worry that it is going to impact you.” (Valerie)

“It took up a lot of my time. And I questioned the profession and who is coming out of university [...] it was so negative. It was not a good experience [...] one struggling teacher has a huge impact [...] it was scary for the kids taking that class!” (Mary)

Conflict

“I find at the school level people feel like they are stepping on other people’s toes. They are not holding that [MC] title [...] and you know when you are a more seasoned teacher and you have been overlooked, I know that has definitely caused some ripples at our school”

-WQTA
Mini me/Group think

“You might only be getting one perspective as a new teacher. You are being told this is how you do it and then all of a sudden it is turned into a cookie cutter approach” (WQTA)

Role model that teachers “always learning and changing and growing and working within the system and pushing against it at the same time.” (Laurie)

Key take-aways

- Clarity & transparency
- Role of administrators
- PL activities
- Supportive MC community
- Open to critical feedback
References