

We encourage all educators and concerned individuals to become proactive, especially professional counselors, in identifying students in need and strive to provide them the necessary services.

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An Examination of New Counselor Mentor Programs

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Introduction

Mentoring is defined as “the process of one person supporting, teaching, leading and serving as a model for another person” (Buell, 2004, p. 56, as cited in Armstrong, Balkin, Long, & Caldwell, 2006, para. 2). This type of guidance is particularly important for beginning school counselors. In some settings, a counselor may begin his/her career without the presence of other counselors in the work place (Armstrong et al., 2006).

These situations may become overwhelming as counselors must adapt to the various aspects of school counseling to be addressed such as classroom guidance, parent communication, teacher collaboration, and meeting administrative expectations (Armstrong et al., 2006). These descriptors are most ideally modeled by a person who has experience in the profession with the willingness and availability to answer questions and address concerns. This manuscript examines the structure of four new counselor mentor programs.

Literature Review

Available literature regarding new counselor mentor programs is limited. Nonetheless, there are similarities throughout the research. In particular, a significant need for programs that provide support for beginning counselors is consistently addressed (Duncan, Svendsen, Bakkedahl, & Sitzman, 2009; Loveless, 2010; Armstrong, et al, 2006). Mentors can be instrumental in assisting new counselors

Abstract

An analysis of current new counselor mentor programs reveals the need for such programs, but information regarding established programs is limited. A review of the literature addresses program characteristics and data obtained from existing mentor program participants. An overview of four programs explaining the framework outlined for mentoring new counselors is provided. Each counselor mentor program uses various strategies to implement their framework. This analysis highlights the benefits of participation in new counselor mentor programs.

with becoming acclimated to the culture of an unfamiliar environment as well as helping them become familiar with role expectations (Loveless, 2010).

Loveless (2010) conducted a qualitative study with new elementary school counselors that examined perceptions of their experiences in a mentoring and induction program. Three mentors and eleven new counselors, either first year or new to the district, were selected for the study aimed to determine program effectiveness. The program participants attended mentor led monthly meetings that covered various topics related to the profession, and mentors were available to address the individual needs of new counselors as they arose (Loveless, 2010).

Learning strategies from experienced mentors improved classroom management and decreased lesson preparation time for some mentees.

In this study, data was collected through the use of interviews, observations, and document review. The program studied by Loveless (2010), was found to be helpful to mentees “through sharing of resources, demonstrations, consultation, exploration of materials, and mentor support” (p. 28). Classroom guidance is another area that mentees found to be positively influenced by program participation. Learning strategies from experienced mentors improved classroom management and decreased lesson preparation time for some mentees. Other benefits included

“networking opportunities with other new counselors, advice from mentors, case consultation, peer support, and motivation” (Loveless, 2010, p. 30). Although overall positive perceptions of the program were obtained from the data, there were inconsistencies among responses to interview questions about the peer consultation component.

Participants were also asked to share their perceptions of a highly effective program and program areas in need of improvement. Mentees were relatively pleased with their experiences in the mentoring and induction program. Their ideal program would be structured, with access to resources and consist of support from mentors. While their program entailed these descriptors, some suggestions included extending the program to two years, separating mentees who were new to the district from those new to the profession, and increasing mentor participation (Loveless, 2010).

Duncan et al. (2009) described a different type of mentoring program which was implemented at the University of South Dakota for counseling students as opposed to those who were new to counseling positions. It was designed to pair “school counselors-in-training with professionals in the field” (Duncan et al., 2009, para. 8). Counseling students, who were selected for the program based on interest, were paired with select, experienced school counselors. Responses to a survey instrument were utilized in determining the pairs. The authors state that benefits of the program include helping “to reduce the student’s frustration and anxiety, while increasing motivation

and confidence” (Duncan et al., 2009, para. 16). A structured system was developed to evaluate the program including the use of contact logs, a program effectiveness survey, a questionnaire, and individual interviews (Duncan et al., 2009).

Peer support can be crucial for new counselors who are uncertain about role expectations. A study that examined factors related to role stress among practicing counselors in various school settings found that “peer consultation added to lower role incongruence” (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, and Solomon, 2005, p. 64). For middle school counselors, specifically, data suggested lower role ambiguity was predicted as a result of participation in peer consultation (Culbreth et al., 2005). Not only are mentors for new counselors recommended, but peer consultation for school counselors with varying levels of experience has also generated positive feedback (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996). In general, programs designed to nourish the professional growth of counselors, including beginning and experienced counselors, are strongly supported in the literature. Table 1, on the following page, provides an overview of new counselor mentor programs that exemplify some of the effective components discussed previously.

Comprehensive Overview of a New Counselor Mentor Program

Like some of the programs already discussed, the state of Delaware’s New School Counselor Mentoring Program (NSCMP) is a program that formally pairs new school counselors with experienced school counselors for a period of three years. For this state, the NSCMP must be completed in order to obtain a license as a school counselor. The program is modeled after the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) National Model. Goals of the program include acclimating the new counselors to state and local expectations and available opportunities, preparing new counselors to successfully complete the state’s evaluation process, guiding

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Table 1. Overview of counselor mentor programs

	Missouri Career Education Mentoring Program for New Counselors <small>(Missouri Center for Career Education, 2011)</small>	NCSCA Mentoring Program <small>(The North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2013)</small>	OCA Mentoring Program <small>(Ohio Counseling Association, 2013; Ohio Counseling Association, 2011)</small>
Mentee Description	New and returning school counselors	New school counselors (0-3 years of experience)	New OCA members and new counselors
Mentor Identification Process	District mentor chair identifies and trains mentors	Application required	Application required
Type of Mentor/Mentee Assignment	Individual	Individual	Individual
Number of Required Contacts	-One on site visit -Regular communication throughout program	-Minimum of two times per month (in person, by phone, or through email)	-Contact determined by the mentor and mentee
Contact Hours Documentation	-Use of quarterly logs -Four mentor experiences completed per year to be documented on a mentor review form	Unknown	Unknown
Program Characteristics	-2 year commitment -Individual Mentoring Plan is developed (may include mentor sharing resources, tips for guidance lesson plans and classroom management, attending a workshop)	-1 year commitment -Possible activities include "attending professional conferences/development activities together, sharing resources, insights, career path decisions, meeting for coffee/lunch when available, sending motivational/inspirational stories" (The North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2013, para. 8)	-1 to 3 year commitment -Some recommendations include providing resources, defining goals, and monitoring progress through communication
Determining Program Effectiveness	Online evaluation for all participants	Mid-year evaluation and final evaluation	Semi-annual review and end of mentoring relationship review forms

new counselors to self-assess their job performance and recognize potential areas for growth, and assisting new school counselors in operating a guidance program based on the ASCA National Model and the needs of the students (Delaware Department of Education, 2013a).

Each district has a lead mentor to oversee implementation of the NSCMP at the local schools. The lead mentor undergoes training each year and disseminates that information to the local mentors. They also play an integral role in pairing new school counselors with their mentors. The lead mentor must work for a minimum of 45 hours in ensuring the program is executed with fidelity. For their role as a lead mentor, counselors are paid a stipend of \$1500 (Delaware Department of Education, 2013a).

Both lead mentors and school-based mentors are charged with three main roles in the NSCMP. Each is expected to act as a "role model," a "helper," and a "colleague." Mentors train mentees to assess their own performance and make evidentiary decisions based on that assessment (Delaware Department of Education, 2013a).

School-based mentors are assigned up to three new school counselors. They are responsible for meeting with their mentees and documenting those meetings. Progress goals are written based on feedback received from initial observations. After an appropriate amount of time passes, the mentor observes their mentee again and provides feedback based on their goals. A minimum of 30 contact hours must be documented for each mentee. A stipend of between \$750 and \$1250, depending on the number of mentees a mentor has, is paid to the mentors upon submission of necessary documentation (Delaware Department of Education, 2013a).



The NSCMP is divided into four cycles. During the first cycle, the mentor assures their mentees become familiar with "the themes of the ASCA National Model, Foundation and Management Systems, ...school counselor program standards and state binder requirements" (Delaware Department of Education, 2012a, para. 1). After they are acclimated to these policies and procedures, the initial observation takes place. Goals are set based on feedback provided and reassessed a short time later. Once the mentor pair decides the counselor is prepared to progress, cycle two begins (Delaware Department of Education, 2012a).

Literature on mentoring in related fields suggests that while women tend to mentor both men and women, male professionals tend to mentor same gender mentees. An advantage of a structured program could be the promotion of diversity. In addition, there is considerable literature on mentorship in psychology, which may help guide questions for the research of mentoring in counseling.

In cycle two, the ASCA National Model's Delivery and Accountability components are reviewed in depth. In addition, the mentor reviews the Making Data Work process of data collection, Design, Ask, Track and Announce. The Delaware State Binder Requirements are discussed and the Verification of Services Form must be completed prior to the completion of cycle two. Once the first four components listed are addressed, another observation takes place. In their post-observation meeting, the pair discusses the status of the new school counselor in successfully completing the second component of the Delaware Professional Appraisal System II (DPAS II). The mentor provides constructive criticism and assistance to his mentee. One of the goals of cycle two is for the new school counselor to become more introspective in his professional progress (Delaware Department of Education, 2013a).

Cycle three typically takes place during the new school counselor's second year. The mentor gives the new school counselor a reading task to highlight "leadership advocacy for a growth directed opportunity" (Delaware Department of Education, 2012b, para. 1). Mentors assign appropriate activities for mentees to complete in conjunction with their reading task. The new school counselor is responsible for completing 30 hours independently in relation to this assignment and must turn in a log documenting their activities (Delaware Department of Education, 2012b).

The final cycle is characterized by a focus on refining the new school counselor's self-analysis skills. Based on discussions with their mentor and the lead mentor, mentees develop an official "professional growth plan" that outlines long-term goals (Delaware Department of Education, 2013b, para. 2). In order to identify their goals, the new school counselors work for a minimum of 30 hours to complete activities addressing goals of the Department of Education Annual School Review and the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). Once all four cycles are complete, the new school counselors are eligible

for a permanent certificate in the state of Delaware and should be well equipped to continue self-analysis of their professional progress in implementing an effective school counseling program (Delaware Department of Education, 2013b).

Conclusions and Implications

As stated earlier, mentees have indicated helpful strategies of new counselor mentor programs include "sharing of resources, demonstrations, consultation, exploration of materials, and mentor support" (Loveless, 2010, p. 28). Research on the efficacy of mentorship in counseling, both formal and informal, should be more widely conducted, disseminated, and promoted, while existing research in related disciplines could be used as a guide for new counselor mentor programs. As time progresses, further data on the efficacy and longer-term outcomes of mentor programs should become available. This data could provide the evidence necessary for counselors to advocate for their profession and for the development of new counselors in the future.

It is important to note the ways in which a mentorship can be rewarding for the mentors as well. From a developmental perspective, serving as a mentor allows one to give back to the profession and feel a sense of fulfillment (Borders, 2002; Studer, 2007). As both a mentor and a mentee, school counselors are uniquely positioned to benefit from mentorship initiatives that bring experienced and novice counselors together.

Recommendations for Further Study

As a field dominated by women, discussion of cross-gender mentor pairs in counseling is relevant (Burxe, McKeen & McKenna, 1990). Literature on mentoring in related fields suggests that while women tend to mentor both men and women, male professionals tend to mentor same gender mentees (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). An advantage of a structured program could be the promotion of diversity. In addition, there is considerable literature on mentorship in psychology, which may help guide questions for the research of mentoring in counseling. Over time, more data will likely become available on the benefits of mentoring for stakeholders, mentees, and mentors across disciplines and site placements.



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people seldom
IMPROVE
when they have
no other
MODEL
but themselves
to **COPY**

A mentor
empowers a
person to see
a possible
future, and
believe it can
be obtained.

~ Shawn Hitchcock,
Professor of Chemistry

~ Oliver Goldsmith,
Irish Writer (1728 - 1774)