Mentoring Future Education Leaders: Mentor Perceptions of an Educational Leadership Doctoral Mentoring Program

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Mentoring programs for education doctoral (EdD) students are unique due to the scholar-practitioner nature of the degree program. This paper utilizes mentor perceptions of a mentoring program in its second year of implementation to inform the design of the mentoring program in the future. Mentors were interviewed to discuss their experiences. Four themes emerged related to: (a) mentor education doctoral experiences and challenges as inspiration for their mentoring presentations; (b) mentors as a resource through networking and building connections; (c) mentor and mentee reflection through relatable experiences; and (d) mentor recommendations for improving the EdD mentoring program. Results indicate mentors benefit from personal reflection and networking opportunities.

Keywords*: education doctorate, EdD, mentoring program, mentors, doctoral students*

When it comes to supporting students through the successful completion of a doctoral program, mentoring is an often-used and successful tool. Mentoring can assist students through the academic and personal challenges of completing a doctorate, and in the case of leadership education doctoral programs, can lay the groundwork for a successful education leadership career (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013; Holley & Caldwell, 2012). The process of mentoring can also lend itself to leadership identity development in mentees, who learn both about leadership identity from mentors, and learn the importance of outside supports in the development of leadership (Crisp & Alvarad-Young, 2018). There are seemingly limitless ways to structure and organize mentoring programs; however, successful and sustainable mentorship often depends upon creating and supporting strong mentoring relationships (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Geesa, Lowery, & McConnell, 2018; Geesa, McConnell, Elam, & Clark, 2020).

While much of the existing mentoring research focuses on traditional doctoral programs, mentoring programs for education doctoral (EdD) students have received little attention in research. Crow and Whiteman (2016) identified mentoring and coaching as an important element of effective educational leadership preparation programs, but also drew attention to the lack of research in this area. Mentoring in EdD programs is unique due to the scholar-practitioner nature of the degree program. As scholar-practitioners, EdD students often balance full-time careers in the education field while simultaneously pursuing their education doctorate degree (Holley & Caldwell, 2012).

Pursuing a higher education degree and a career, often while balancing other life and family demands, may place additional stress on scholar-practitioner students (Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016; Mullen & Tuten, 2010). Such unique education requires unique forms of mentoring support. Clayton, Sanzo, and Myran (2013) suggest mentoring between experienced school leaders and school leaders-in-training has the unique benefit of allowing the school leaders to discuss and compare leadership styles and techniques, benefitting both mentors and mentee alike. Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2006) similarly suggest that one of the hallmarks of educational leadership readiness is support from leadership mentors already in the field. Due to these considerations, we concluded that EdD students have unique mentoring needs and may benefit from a mentoring program molded specifically to their needs.

During the 2016-17 school year, we designed and implemented an EdD mentoring program that was the first of its kind in our Department of Educational Leadership at a mid-sized Midwestern university (Lowery, Geesa, & McConnell, 2018; McConnell, Geesa, & Lowery, 2018). This EdD program is a hybrid program designed for practitioner-scholar students where students attend on-campus course meetings once per month while also completing coursework online each semester. Course topics during the first two years of the EdD program typically focus on organizational leadership, facilities, finance, law, school superintendency, superintendent internship, and research methodology.

The first mentoring program modeled a one-to-one mentor-mentee relationship for first-year education doctoral students (mentees), with the purpose of the relationship being for each mentee to receive guidance and support from a more experienced student or graduate (mentor) of the EdD program at our institution. After the first year of the EdD mentoring program, we recognized one-to-one mentor-mentee pairings during the first year of the education doctoral program may not be sustainable due to the disproportionate number of mentors available to pair with incoming first-year students during the next school year. We determined mentees may benefit by attending EdD mentoring presentations by mentors during the first two years of their doctoral program. While mentoring is typically dyadic in nature, Hackmann and Malin (2018) suggest that

alternate forms of mentoring, such as group mentoring, may be beneficial for certain mentees. However, there is little research on this form of mentoring in academic settings. As such, we were interested to see how shifting our mentoring program from a one-to-one mentoring model to a group presentation model was perceived by mentors and mentees.

Mentors' perceptions of the mentoring program are valuable to the process of continual evaluation and improvement, as the mentors are familiar with the EdD program and can identify topics relevant to the needs of current students. Education doctoral faculty, EdD mentoring program facilitators, researchers, and mentors may benefit from this study and find significance in how to better guide and support doctoral students in education doctorate or scholar-practitioner doctorate programs.

Within this paper, we (a) review literature related to mentoring and considerations we made as we redesigned and implemented the mentoring program for education doctoral students; (b) examine the redesign, implementation, and evaluation of our EdD mentoring program, which focuses on mentor presentations during the first and second years of students' doctoral program; and (c) investigate mentors' perspectives and perceived benefits of the mentoring program through qualitative data collected from individual interviews and focus groups to improve our EdD mentoring program in the upcoming school year.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

In an effort to create a more sustainable system, the mentoring program was redesigned to a mentoring pathways approach through the utilization of two specific frameworks. Initially analyzed through the conceptual framework developed by Yob and Crawford (2012), the redesign process required additional perspectives to ensure a viable and supportive structure for the doctoral students. Further research and analysis substantiated a connection to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) – a theoretical framework that models the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals (Curtin, Malley, & Steward, 2016; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Through the utilization of both frameworks, we are able to employ the adaptability necessary to ensure an individualized and productive approach, which satisfies both our mentors and their protégés.

Within the initial context of EdD mentoring program development, mentoring was regarded in two domains described in the "mentor behavior and characteristics" conceptual framework: academic benefits and psychosocial benefits (Lowery et al., 2018; McConnell et al., 2018; Yob & Crawford, 2012). The attributes of competence, availability, induction, and challenge are addressed through the academic domain. The psychosocial domain of Yob and Crawford's conceptual framework (2012) complements the academic domain through three specific attributes: personal qualities, communication, and emotional support. Consideration of each mentor's ability to meet the requirements within these domains was essential to the success of the education doctoral students participating in the mentoring program, as mentor expertise is most valuable when shared as a learning partnership (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2010).

The combination of the academic and psychosocial domains creates an environment in which both mentors and their protégés can grow professionally and personally. Research supports the idea that effective mentoring increases the probability of professionals staying within their field, especially in the teaching profession, while also validating mentors' expertise (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Ewing et al., 2008). Missing from this approach, however, is the consideration of

one's level of self-efficacy and their level of choice (or commitment) regarding participation in the mentoring program.

This further analysis of our data allowed us to recognize a connection that extended into the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Brown, Geesa, & McConnell, 2020; Curtin, Malley, & Stewart, 2016; Lent et al., 1994; Schunk & Mullen, 2013). Rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1979), SCCT posits that people are more likely to pursue new opportunities and be more successful in that pursuit if they possess self-efficacy, have access to a support system, and develop outcome expectations. It is within this context that we apply the foundations of SCCT to our mentoring program approach.

Grounded in SCCT, the mentor serves as the source of self-efficacy through affirmative interactions. As a result, it is expected mentees will experience an increase of confidence in their own ability to pursue an academic interest or specific career path, while also increasing the mentees' interest in a desired outcome. This is accomplished through a mentoring approach, which is focused in three social learning domains: instrumental, sponsorship, and expressive (Curtin et al., 2016). While not identified as components of SCCT, each domain aligns with the social learning context and provides a foundational approach to mentoring.

Literature Review

The mentoring needs of EdD students in an educational leadership program are unique. In this review of literature, we focus on definitions related to mentoring, design processes, and redesign processes of mentoring programs.

Defining Mentoring

Mentorship is often viewed as a supplemental, but vital, aspect of successful completion of a doctoral program. The design and implementation processes differ amongst programs due to candidate preferences and needs, program culture, and sustainability options. Likewise, *how* mentorship is defined also varies (Geesa et al., 2018; Mullen & Tuten, 2010). The defining elements of who serves as a mentor and mentee within a doctoral mentoring program is crucial to the development and success of a sustainable mentorship approach (Geesa et al., 2018).

In general, mentors are defined as faculty or administrators who provide professional guidance within a given context (Lunsford, Crisp, Dolan, & Wuetherick, 2017; Mullen & Tuten, 2010; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Peer mentoring is another common choice for graduate mentoring programs in order to provide more informal psychosocial support to students in comparison to the often formal, academia-focused support of a faculty mentor (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Webb, Wangmo, Ewen, Teaster, & Hatch, 2009). Mentoring is frequently viewed as a relationship between "a more-experienced mentor and a less-experienced protégé," which changes over time and involves support in the areas of career/academics and psychosocial knowledge (Schunk & Mullen, 2013, p. 362; Yob & Crawford, 2012). Although typically experienced as a dyadic, two-person relationship, different variations of mentoring may be utilized based on the needs of the mentee, such as one mentee having multiple mentors or a group/cohort of peers mentoring one another in tandem (Couchman, 2009; Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts Bannister, 2009; Hackmann & Malin, 2018; Preston, Ogenchuk, & Nsiah, 2014).

No matter the form it takes, the mentoring relationship is typically designed and implemented with the purpose of supporting the mentee through education or career processes.

Mentoring gives mentees an opportunity to discuss stressors, work-life balance, future plans, and goals, and to receive feedback, advice, and psychosocial support from their mentor (Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Lowery et al., 2018; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). In leadership development programs, such as EdD programs, mentoring can serve as a mechanism of leadership identity development, as mentees learn about leadership from their mentors, as well as witnessing first-hand the benefits of outside support within leadership (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018). Mentoring also serves leadership development by giving mentees a guide who shows them the norms and customs of an organization, and gives mentees more confidence in their place within an organization or program (Roupnel, Rinfre, & Grenier, 2019).

While traditionally conceptualized as a top-down relationship in which mentors impart guidance and knowledge to mentees, mentoring has evolved and been reconceptualized as a reciprocal, two-way relationship wherein both mentors and mentees benefit and experience growth (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Lyons & Perrewe, 2014). As mentors share, teach, and advise, they are able to hone their professional skills and reflect upon their own practices (Budge, 2006; Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; McConnell et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2009). Particularly in the case of peer mentoring, mentors may receive positive benefits from the social support and peer interaction of the mentor/mentee relationship (Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007; Webb et al., 2009).

Recently, research on mentoring models has turned its focus to self-regulated learning within the context of SCCT, a model developed by Lent et al. (1994) in an effort to analyze how individuals affect their own career progress. Via this model, the role of a mentor is to guide and influence an individual's self-regulated learning. A mentor may also benefit through situations where reaching a mutual outcome or developing self-regulated capabilities requires collaboration of knowledge and skills (Schunk & Mullen, 2013). This supports the eventual goal for mentors and protégés to move from a top-down relationship to regarding each other as collaborators and peers. Thus, in an ideally designed mentoring program, all participants find benefit and personal/professional growth from their involvement within the mentoring relationship.

Designing a Mentoring Program

Several approaches to designing and implementing a mentoring program in a doctoral context have been steadily researched over the past decade, with the majority of research recognizing early contributions by Kram (1983), and resulting in the Mentor Relationship Theory (Lunsford et al., 2017; Mullen & Tuten, 2010; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Schunk & Mullen, 2013; Yob & Crawford, 2012). Research conducted by Pifer and Baker (2016) suggests stages in how to develop a purposeful mentoring program for doctoral students: (1) Knowledge Consumption, (2) Knowledge Creation, and (3) Knowledge Enactment. The first stage focuses solely on establishing the needs of doctoral students through conducting a needs assessment in conjunction with faculty and administrators, with the expectation that this will be a repeated process throughout the mentorship experience. The involvement of faculty and administrators helps guide doctoral students through this identification process as "students don't know what they don't know, particularly in the novice stage" (Pifer & Baker, 2016, p. 19).

The second stage addresses knowledge creation through coursework, competency exams, and development of the dissertation proposal and defense (Curtin et al., 2016; Yob & Crawford, 2012). Vital to progress through a doctoral academic program, this phase can be overwhelming to students who are learning to balance their personal and professional lives with program demands

(Fenge, 2012; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; McDaniels, 2010; Pearson, Cumming, Evans, Macauley, & Ryland, 2011). Faculty and administrator involvement through both professional and social events can assist in easing the stress often associated with this stage (Pifer & Baker, 2016).

The third and final stage reported by Pifer and Baker (2016) focuses on the final writing stages of a dissertation. Strategies regarding time management and writing habits are vital at this time, but social networking for both personal and professional gain are also needed. Building on relationships formed in the second stage, students can vocalize their experiences and alleviate potential feelings of isolation. Additionally, building on professional relationships with the department can assist in research and publication opportunities, as well as job searches (Pifer & Baker, 2016).

Redesigning a Mentoring Program

An essential part of designing an effective mentoring program is to ensure that the program is regularly being evaluated for both strengths and growth areas, and then adapted to best suit the needs of the participants. By allowing mentors, mentees, and other involved parties such as faculty to provide feedback, and then making efforts to make adjustments and changes based upon the feedback, mentoring programs can continue to grow and benefit the best interest and development of those involved in the mentoring program (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Holley & Caldwell, 2012).

Ongoing evaluation is a critical part of doctoral mentoring, both to uncover what elements of the program are working, as well as what elements are not working and need to be phased out or changed (Mullen & Tuten, 2010). In the creation of their own mentoring program, Hall and Jaugietis (2011) made the collection and harnessing of feedback from mentees and mentors an integral part of the program, and used this feedback to make real changes such as improved mentor training and making mentors available on a more flexible schedule for mentees. Farmer, Stockham, and Trussell (2006) implemented a formal evaluation and revitalization campaign for their mentoring program, with the assertation that continual changes based upon participant feedback, whether large or small, is vital to keeping mentoring programs effective and beneficial. As suggested in the stages set out by Pifer and Baker (2016), designing a mentoring program is not a one-time, linear process, but rather a cyclical process wherein program creators should regularly circle back to the first stage, knowledge consumption, to continually assess the needs of their target population and adjusting accordingly.

Methods

As part of a larger case study of a mentoring program, our research methods focused on gaining mentors' perspectives in the second year of an EdD mentoring program at the Midwestern university where the mentoring program took place. In an effort to understand mentors' perspectives of this specific mentoring program, the research design of a case study approach was appropriate (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). According to Villarreal Larrinaga (2017), "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 150).

We examined the following research questions in this study: a) *How does the EdD mentoring program impact mentors*?; b) *How do mentors' own doctoral experiences influence their approach to mentoring?;* c) *How do mentors determine the resources or support mentees*

need most to complete the EdD?; and d) *How have mentors' perspectives of the EdD mentoring program changed in the redesigned model?*

Research collection was conducted by the three authors, who include two faculty members who are also alumni of the EdD program, and a graduate assistant within the department. Two of us, a faculty member and graduate assistant, were a part of the advent of the mentoring program in its first year, while the third author was a doctoral candidate and mentor herself during the first year, moving on to a leadership and research role after graduating. The three of us assisted with various aspects of the mentoring program, including mentee and mentor recruitment, mentor training, arrangement of mentoring meetings, conducting of interview/focus groups, and transcription and coding of interview/focus group data.

At the beginning of the second year of the EdD mentoring program in 2017, we collected information from each mentor about their career position, education, research interests, location, and future goals (see Table 2). With this information, we created mentor profiles for the mentees to review and refer to later in the EdD program. All eight mentors participated in a one-hour training via WebEx during the first month of the development of the mentoring program. We led the training that focused on the definition of mentoring for the program, purpose of the EdD mentoring program, mentor participation in the mentoring program, and mentor presentation topics and schedules. After the training, each mentor agreed to design and deliver a 30-minute presentation to mentees who are in their first or second year of the EdD program (see Table 3) and committed to working with the mentees as needed for one school year.

Participants

Participants in this study included eight individuals who served as mentors in the EdD mentoring program in the Department of Educational Leadership. One mentor was an education doctoral student who was further along in the degree program and seven mentors were graduates of the EdD program from this department. Three of the eight mentors were female, and five mentors were male. Of the eight participants, four mentors participated in the mentoring program during the previous academic school year as mentors, one mentor participated in the mentoring program in 2016-17 as a mentee, and three mentors did not participate in the mentoring program during the past year. The participants had full-time professions related to educational leadership in schools, district school offices, higher education institutions, and tech-based organizations.

Data collection

During the 2017-18 academic school year, each mentor prepared and delivered a 30-minute presentation to mentees who were in their first two years of the EdD program (see Table 3). Individual interviews and focus groups were held via web conferencing and audit recorded. We facilitated the interviews with specific questions for the mentors (see Table 4) at the end of the first year of mentor presentations in May 2018. Focus group questions were refined after we discussed findings from individual interviews (see Table 5). Focus groups took place one month after individual interviews in June 2018

Data analysis

Interviews and focus groups were our qualitative data in this study. We transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interview and focus group data for themes with structural coding methods (*Saldaña*, 2009). After the first author transcribed interviews/focus groups and completed first-level coding, the transcripts were shared with the other two authors for review and consensus. After discussing and agreeing upon the first-level coding, the first author compiled a more detailed Excel spreadsheet of codes and themes, which was once again shared with the other authors and discussed until consensus was reached. We assigned pseudonyms to all participants in order to ensure confidentiality. Four themes were identified through first and second cycle coding. These themes are further discussed in the findings below.

Findings

All eight mentors (*N=8*) participated in individual interviews and focus groups. Individual interviews occurred at the end of the spring semester in May 2018, approximately one academic year after the mentor presentation format of the mentoring program had begun. One month following individual interviews, focus group interviews took place. From data collected, four themes emerged and are examined in the following subsections.

Doctoral Experiences and Challenges

When speaking about how they approached their presentation topic and constructed mentor presentations for the mentoring program, all eight mentors expressed that their own challenges from their education doctoral studies inspired or influenced the material they presented to the mentees. The challenges the mentors faced were varied, from time management and work-life balance as a scholar-practitioner to dissertation perseverance. "The biggest challenge for me was just staying that course [to dissertation completion]," said mentor Nathan. "Writing and sticking to my plan and schedule that I had created for myself became a personal challenge," shared Alex. "It just feels so impossible and overwhelming when you're in the place," expressed another mentor, John. "I remember how many times I wanted to quit [pursing a doctorate] and say 'Is this really worth it?'"

Although many mentors chose presentation topics from a provided list of topic ideas, each mentor used her or his own experiences as scholar-practitioners in the EdD program to tailor their presentation to their mentee audience. As found in our theoretical framework of SCCT, mentors act as a source of self-efficacy for mentees by providing affirmative interactions, which increase mentees' self-confidence in their ability to pursue their academic and career path (Curtin et al., 2016; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). By sharing their own challenges and how they overcame those challenges in the educational doctoral program, mentors sought to encourage the mentees in their own academic challenges, as well as displaying their competence to be mentors, as found in the academic domain of Yob and Crawford's (2012) conceptual framework. Mentor Cathy's motivation was to share with the mentees what she would have liked to hear herself as a doctoral student:

> It would have been nice to know, or to hear from other people that [the EdD] will open doors for you. […] That was kind of the message I want to give to those students. Keep your head up because it's going to be trying, but it's going to be worth it when it's done.

Also trying to approach doctoral challenges from an inspirational angle, Henry shared his personal perspective as the one mentor this year who was still a doctoral candidate within the program; he shared with his mentees that while academic deadlines need to be met, mentees should not "lose who they are during that time frame."

Networking and Building Connections

When asked how the EdD mentoring program contributes to development of professionals, six of the eight mentors mentioned networking and building connections. Mentor John spoke of how the EdD mentoring program gave students "access to talk to people that ordinarily they wouldn't," while Jamie referred to the mentoring program as a "cross-pollination of people going through the program and past people who have gone through the program" who may not otherwise cross paths. The benefit of such shared connection is, as Mentor Diana stated, "there's only so much we can learn from books before you have to start learning from experiences and learning from people who walked the walk." In other words, as mentees interact with advanced education doctoral students and recent graduates, they are able to learn from the mentors' real-world experiences, as well as established professional connections that may be of future use. The use of networking in their interactions with mentees ties in with SCCT's domain of sponsorship, wherein mentors introduce mentees into their own professional network and advocate on their behalf (Curtin et al., 2016; Lent et al., 1994).

Establishing these potential professional connections does not benefit the mentees alone. Nathan, who was working as a principal at the time of his interview, but who aspires towards district administration, shared, "I've always tried to operate personally under the idea I never know who my future boss will be. And if that's the person I'm mentoring, heck, this person may set the world on fire." John shared that fostering connections was one of his primary reasons for participating in the program: "The whole point of doing this besides bettering ourselves is to make connections and to move up in our careers and become more intimately involved with people as we try to work to change education in the state." These results reflect previous research indicating mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship by building their own professional experience, being able to discuss and compare the experiences of working within the mentor's and mentee's mutual field, and networking (Clayton et al., 2013; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; McConnell & Geesa, 2021; McConnell et al., 2018).

Reflection and Relatable Experiences

Mentors expressed a collective belief concerning the relatable experiences they shared with the mentees, suggesting it led to reflection amongst both mentors and mentees. For mentees, mentors speculated hearing first-hand accounts and advice would give the mentees something to reflect upon as they moved forward in their education doctoral process. "I would hope that it helps them kind of proactively put some structures in place to think through," said Henry. "And then when they finish with each semester, maybe give that opportunity to […] just review the advice that's been given from mentors to get reset for the next semester so that it doesn't continue to grind on them and wear them down." Cathy, who aspires to work in higher education, shared a strategy of starting conversations with mentees in which "you can ask questions of your mentee and get them to think in a different way" in the interest of "being able to have different perspectives working toward a common goal." These strategies of fostering and encouraging reflection in mentees

reflects the "challenge" attribute of the academic domain of Yob and Crawford's (2012) conceptual framework, as well as SCCT's instrumental domain (Curtin et al., 2016; Lent et al., 1994).

Much of the reflection for mentees may come from being able to relate to the struggles of their mentors, as well as aspire to their successes. Jamie described mentoring as "just showing people who have gone through the process, allowing them to share a little bit that, yes, there are struggles. And, yes, what you're going through right now is normal, but it's going to be okay." Jamie also discussed the importance of seeing other scholar-practitioners who survived the EdD process, sharing, "They're not the first to hit these walls or these issues, and they're going to make it past them one way or another."

On a similar note, Alex perceives mentees learn "there's at least something or someone that they could relate to and make them think about and reflect it with their own path that they're taking." By encouraging mentees with the idea that they are not alone in their challenges, mentors show their competency in the psychosocial domain of the Yob and Crawford (2012) framework as well, particularly in the attribute of emotional support.

The experience of talking to new students about their experiences initiated much reflection in the mentors themselves, who even found some of their prior beliefs and habits challenged. "It's pushed me a little bit out of my comfort zone and my bubble," shared Nathan. "It's also push[ed] me and made me reflect on 'wow, I need to learn more about this,' or 'this person said this,' or 'this person said that.'" Henry shared that being a mentor forced him to re-evaluate his own practices as a doctoral candidate and school principal: "As I was reflecting on it, [I] really needed to make sure that my practices were aligning with what I was trying to share with the others in terms of life balance." Reflection is a two-way process in mentoring, according to Dan, who described it as "you're giving but you're getting." He went continued, "It allowed me to have a fresher look at how I kind of got through [the doctoral program] and what experiences I had, both positive and productive." Mentors found they were not only giving to their mentees, but receiving, as well in the form of personal and professional reflection and growth (Booth et al., 2016; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Lowery, Geesa, & McConnell, 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; McConnell & Geesa, 2021). This echoed results from a mentor-focused study of the first year of this EdD mentoring program where mentors cited self-reflection as one of the primary benefits of acting as a mentor (McConnell et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Program Improvement

Although this EdD mentoring program started in its first year as a dyadic, one-on-one mentoring format and was well received by both mentees and mentors (Brown et al., 2020; Lowery et al., 2018; McConnell et al., 2018), changes were made in the second year to ensure sustainability of the program when not enough mentors were available to continue to match on a one-on-one basis with mentees (Geesa, Brown, & McConnell, 2020). Considering the change of format from the first year of the EdD mentoring program to the second, we were interested in obtaining feedback from the mentors on the redesign of the program and any further changes or improvements that could be made due to our belief that participant-informed feedback is integral to continual program improvement (Farmer et al., 2006; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Overall, mentors had a positive opinion of the mentor presentation format for education doctoral students. Diana, who had participated as a one-on-one mentor in the first year of the program, stated, "I liked making a presentation this year. I certainly think that it gives you a wider span of who you can provide information to." Henry,

another previous one-on-one mentor agreed the new format "seemed to be much more effective." While Cathy found the presentations "fun," she also expressed her belief regarding one-on-one mentoring having its place, as well. "I think maybe a mix between the two," she recommended.

The idea of combining mentor presentations and one-on-one mentoring was a common topic of discussion amongst the mentors. Alex, a former mentee herself shared, "There at the end, when I was trying to finish up, it was very beneficial for me." Suggesting such an intimate mentoring relationship was not for every student, she articulated some students "may be more personable and need that one-on-one contact." Another suggestion was for the format of mentoring to change depending on the year or stage of the EdD program. "As [the students] move towards the dissertation […] I think you're building towards where having an individual mentor would actually feel useful," suggested John. Cathy also weighed in, stating she thought presentations were useful during the coursework phase, but "conversations and the check-ins are way more beneficial during the dissertation process, to kind of keep them [students] on track and on pace and accountable." These reactions and ideas from the mentors closely reflect the idea of a three-stage mentoring program as suggested by Pifer and Baker (2016) wherein the nature of the mentoring relationship changes and evolves as the needs of the mentee change along the academic process, as well as research by Lochmiller (2014), which suggests that strategies to support educational leaders should change depending on the growth stage and challenge they are experiencing.

What mentors seemed to desire most of all out of future EdD mentoring program involvement was better feedback after presentations. Many mentors expressed the concern regarding whether their presentation had a positive impact or what the mentees wanted to hear from them. "I felt like [I was] in a little bit of a vacuum," shared Jamie about his presentation experience. "Something I would have appreciated greatly would be just some feedback saying, 'Hey, that was horrible. What were you doing?' Or vice versa. […] What would be most beneficial to those students? What resonated, what didn't?" Dan, a first-time mentor this year, shared similar concerns about getting accurate feedback because, "I think one thing that I'm guilty of in my professional position is making assumptions just because I've been a teacher or a principal, that I know what their needs are." Instead, Dan shared, "really trying to take the time to identify what their needs are and then matching us with what they need" was what was desired. The requests for feedback from mentees would appear to show mentors have the desire to improve upon their role in the academic domain of mentoring by ensuring they are competently addressing the needs of mentees, communicating clearly with mentees, and appropriately available to mentee's questions and concerns (Yob & Crawford, 2012).

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the limited time frame to study the effect of redesigned program, as well as the small pool of participants. However, although the redesign of the program was less than a year old, we believe that it is imperative to the success of mentoring programs to continually evaluate and modify the mentoring program so as to be the most efficacious to the intended audience, the EdD student-mentees (Farmer et al., 2006; Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Additionally, as the authors are involved with the doctoral program in question (as a former graduate assistant, current faculty, and former student, respectively), there is potential for bias in the research process. This potential bias could be addressed in future studies by recruiting outside researchers to audit the research process and coding.

The most prevalent limitation to the mentoring program itself is the availability of mentors. While several expressed interest in participating, the lack of flexibility in presentation times and dates often competed with the work requirements and responsibilities of the mentors. This is one of the weaknesses of using full-time professionals and administrators as mentors, as their busy professional schedules combined with the busy academic and professional schedules of mentees makes arranging convenient meeting times challenging. It is possible this issue could be addressed in future implementations of the mentoring program by recruiting a wider selection of mentors or making mentors accessible in other formats, such as by email, video conferencing, or pre-recorded sessions.

Discussion

In this case study, our aim was to answer our four research questions. In addressing the first research question, *How does the EdD mentoring program impact mentors?*, we discovered through our interviews and focus groups that the participating mentors found the EdD mentoring program to be an overall positive experience. Although some mentors wished for more personal connections with mentees, most expressed that they enjoyed the presentation format of the program because it allowed them to feel they were distributing useful information to a larger audience than they would be able to give to an individual mentee. Mentors largely drew upon their own challenges and experiences from their doctoral programs when designing and presenting their presentations; this allowed mentors to reflect upon their practices, challenges, and successes they had experienced in their academic journeys (Booth et al., 2016; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; McConnell et al., 2018). Additionally, mentors felt the mentoring program was a good networking opportunity, not only for the mentees, but for the mentors as well. They enjoyed getting to know future professionals from their field and making professional connections that may be of use in the future. The mentors' experiences connected to our theoretical and conceptual frameworks as the mentors acted both as academic support and emotional support to mentees and used their own experiences to encourage and inspire confidence in mentees, while also introducing them into their own professional networks (Curtin et al., 2016; Lent, et al., 1994; Yob & Crawford, 2012).

In addressing the second research question, *How do mentors' own doctoral experiences influence their approach to mentoring?* we found all mentors, without exception, used their own experiences and challenges from their doctoral programs to inspire their mentor presentations. The presentations became an opportunity for mentors to share their experiences and challenges, as well as, how they overcame those challenges and what tools and methods they used to succeed in their education doctoral programs. Reflecting on their own EdD journeys, mentors constructed their presentations around what would have been useful for them to hear as a new doctoral student, from concrete tips and tools to simple encouragement and empathy. In doing so, mentors demonstrated the psychosocial domain of Yob and Crawford's (2012) conceptual framework of mentoring by creating a sense of trust with mentees and providing emotional support. These presentations also conveyed mentors' belief in the mentees' ability to succeed since the mentors had been in their shoes and understood their struggles (Curtin et al., 2016).

Considering the mentors themselves have either recently graduated from the EdD program or are close to doing so, we were interested in the third research question, *How do mentors determine the resources or support mentees need most to complete the EdD?* The mentors agreed that offering the mentoring program was a good step towards offering new EdD students more support, with some mentors expressing the wish that they had access to supportive individuals

available to give advice and answer questions during their own EdD programs. While most mentors agreed a simple presentation model was appropriate for the first two years of the doctoral program, some mentors also expressed the belief that more personalized support may be useful to mentees as they move into the comprehensive exam and dissertation stages of their EdD work in order to give them additional encouragement and accountability as they complete the required coursework for the degree. Pifer and Baker's (2016) mentoring model reinforces the mentors' perspective that students' needs change as they move from establishing competency, to knowledge creation, to dissertation writing, and that support should look different at each of these stages.

Finally, we addressed the fourth research question, *How have mentors' perspectives of the EdD mentoring program changed in the redesigned model?* Of the eight mentors who participated in the program this year, four had participated in the prior year when the program had consisted of one-to-one mentor/mentee pairings (Lowery et al., 2018; Lowery et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2018). While these four mentors had mixed reactions to the first-year model of the mentoring program, at times finding it beneficial and at other times feeling like they were bothering the mentee, all agreed the new presentation model felt beneficial to mentees. Many mentors, both those who had participated the first year and those who were new to the mentoring program, expressed the presentation model made sense for students who were still in the coursework phase of the EdD program, and that if one-on-one pairings were still to happen, they should occur later on in the education doctoral program. The primary criticism or concern mentors had about the redesigned mentoring model was the perceived lack of communication and interaction. Mentors were enthusiastic in their desire to connect with and assist mentees, and some felt offering a single presentation per mentor may not be enough exposure to understand and meet the needs of mentees. The primary suggestion given by mentors was to obtain more feedback from mentees and give more opportunities for mentors and mentees to communicate and connect.

The data gathered in this study provided several insights into the mentoring approach specific to this program and to scholar-practitioner students, but it can also offer an additional perspective to other mentoring programs designed for doctoral students: *In establishing a relevant mentoring experience, honesty and vulnerability should be both expected and valued.* By sharing and reflecting on their doctoral experiences and challenges through real-time interactions, mentors not only engaged in productive interactions with the mentees, but also created an atmosphere of both academic and psychosocial support for all stakeholders (Yob & Crawford, 2012; Lent et al., 1994). This positioned the mentors as competent among their scholar-practitioner peers, allowing for reflective growth and networking to take place. The shared learning experience between mentors and mentees validates mentor expertise and continues to support self-efficacy and professional advancement after degree completion (Curtin et al., 2016; Lent & Brown, 2013; Holley & Caldwell, 2011). This benefit assists with sustainability as mentors continue to participate in the program and adapt mentoring programs for student needs.

Conclusion

Education doctoral students must overcome challenges and pass many phases to achieve their degrees. Scholar-practitioner students, in particular, juggle a unique combination of academic, professional, and personal responsibilities, often leaving them feeling overwhelmed and isolated (Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016; Mullen & Tuten, 2010). Mentoring may be one avenue through which scholar-practitioner doctoral students or other education leaders may find additional emotional support, academic advice, and professional connection (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Pifer & Baker,

2016; Yob & Crawford, 2012). As a reciprocal relationship, mentoring serves to benefit not only the mentees but the mentors as well. Mentors may find opportunity for personal and professional growth, networking, and self-reflection through the experience of forming mentoring relationships (Budge, 2006; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; McConnell et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2009).

   This study is important as a case study utilizing mentors' perspectives in an EdD mentoring program for scholar-practitioner educational leaders. While research about doctoral mentoring programs exists, few studies focus specifically on the needs of EdD students and the unique benefit of mentoring in EdD programs where students are scholar-practitioners typically maintaining a full-time education-focused career while taking doctoral-level courses (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Additionally, few research studies look at the effects of non-dyadic mentoring and how group mentoring may meet the needs of certain populations of mentees (Hackmann & Malin, 2018). This study shows the benefits of such a program for both mentees and mentors, as well as the importance of continual collection of feedback to inform regular improvements to such programs (Farmer et al., 2006; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Further research is needed to continue our efforts to create and provide equal educational opportunities and support for all EdD students along the developmental continuum.

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