

Building Capacities For Change: Wellness Coaching As A Positive Approach To Student Development

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Abstract

Professional coaching has expanded rapidly, and is becoming more common within higher education. Coaching programs provide support for student health and academic success but do not operate from a consistent philosophical position. This article articulates a distinct philosophical framework and approach to coaching initiatives for higher education which is illuminated by a case study of a particular coaching program. Theories of wellness, positive psychology and student development are described, and a capacity building approach is identified as the critical factor for promoting positive student development.

Keywords: capacity building, coaching, health promotion, mental health, positive psychology, self-authorship, student development, wellness

Introduction

Professional coaching has exponentially increased on a global level, with research indicating that there are over 53,000 current professional coaches and industry earnings of over two billion dollars (ICF, 2016a). Coaching professionals have secured positions across a range of contexts including corporate organizations, medical systems, and privately maintained practices. Within these organizational domains, coaching services often focus on specific needs and outcomes including executive and leadership coaching, health and wellness coaching, and life coaching. In recent years, several of these diverse approaches to coaching have become more prominent within the field of higher education. One of the ways that coaching is made available

to college students is through external, for-profit vendors who provide brief interventions with a specific focus on academic preparation and performance (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). Conversely, institutionally-based coaching programs are housed in a variety of academic and student affairs departments, and generally focus on providing additional support for enrolled students during their time in college. Many of these on-campus coaching approaches are targeted toward students who have been deemed 'at risk' (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). These programs mandate students to engage coaching services for the purpose of addressing gaps in their preparation for learning or as sanctioned interventions for conduct violations. The focus of these programs is primarily deficit-oriented, as they are intended to remediate identified concerns.

By contrast, this article will focus on an emerging subset of coaching initiatives in higher education that are more closely aligned with the ICF (2016b) definition of coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (para. 3). These programs do not target specific student populations, but are instead intended to promote the holistic well-being of all students from a positive, growth-oriented, capacity-building perspective. They typically function as voluntary services for students who wish to develop personally, academically, and professionally. This emerging approach may be particularly salient given the growing importance assigned to the promotion of student success and healthy behaviors as critical factors for nationwide health improvement (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2016).

Promoting student success and healthy behaviors

Coaching initiatives in higher education focus on helping students succeed in their academic careers while enhancing their personal well-being. Academic retention and wellness are both constructs that can be addressed by coaching initiatives from either a proactive or a responsive lens. From the responsive perspective, coaching may be implemented to target a variety of health and wellness concerns that have been identified as significant public health issues on college campuses. A recent survey of student affairs professionals indicated that mental health, sexual violence, and various forms of substance use were all perceived as significant issues facing higher education (Sponsler & Wesaw, 2014). Additionally, findings from the ACHA National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA, 2015) found that a majority of students who completed the survey reported feeling overwhelmed

by all they had to do (71.2%), exhausted (68.9%), very sad (42.6%), lonely (40.1%), or overwhelming anxiety (39.7%) at some point during the past thirty days. It is clear that students are frequently facing a myriad of challenges and transitions, and this constellation of mental health concerns is substantial enough to warrant an institutional response.

However, coaching initiatives can also be framed from a more proactive perspective. ACHA (2016) developed *Healthy Campus 2020* as a guiding framework for college campuses to promote quality of life, healthy development, and positive health behaviors among student populations. *Healthy Campus 2020* parallels the *Healthy People 2020* policy agenda put forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2016a) that emphasizes the concept of social determinants of health (HHS, 2016b; World Health Organization, 2016). These aspirational frameworks promote health by considering social, economic, and environmental factors in addition to individual disease. Many institutions of higher education have made use of these proposals to shape programs that proactively support student health. Regardless of whether universities endorse coaching from a responsive or proactive rationale, research has demonstrated that efforts to promote health and wellness behaviors on college campuses support multiple outcomes, from instilling lifelong healthy behaviors to supporting academic achievement and student success (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson & Odes, 2009; University of Minnesota, 2008).

While many coaching initiatives have been created to address a broad range of student support (e.g. health, academic success, remediation), the theoretical and philosophical basis for coaching in higher education environments has not been widely explored in the research literature (Dalton & Crosby, 2014; Grant, 2003; Keen, 2014). Similarly, as colleges and universities across the country are being tasked with more fiscal responsibility and accountability, a thorough research and evidence base is warranted (The White House, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The purpose of this article is to explore the philosophical distinctions between coaching services and other approaches in a manner that will illuminate the opportunities inherent to this approach. To better understand the role of proactive coaching initiatives in promoting student health and academic success, one coaching program will be explored as a case study. At The Ohio State University (OSU) a coaching program has been developed as a component of a larger institutional wellness initiative. This coaching service was implemented to promote all dimensions of student wellness, with a particular focus on student mental health. Mental health has been identified

as the top health and wellness concern for universities (Sponsler & Wesaw, 2014), and coaching represents a new response for addressing student mental health. An exploration of the theories that support this service at OSU may provide a useful example of how coaching can inform and generate distinctive student programming capable of promoting student well-being and facilitating developmental growth. For the purposes of this discussion, the term *approach* will refer to the practice-based components of wellness, strengths, and goals that are core elements of the OSU Wellness Coaching service, and the term *framework* will refer to the theoretical bases and evidence-based research findings that inform and shape the OSU Wellness Coaching philosophy.

Mental health: treatment or promotion?

Staffing and services designed to support students with mental health concerns have been present on college campuses for some time, but demand for these services has grown significantly in recent years (Gallagher, 2012). Recognition of mental health as a primary concern has escalated the amount of attention and resources dedicated to institutional responses (Kitzrow, 2003; Sponsler & Wesaw, 2014). Most colleges and universities now house counseling centers, which have become accepted as necessary components of support for students. These units typically function according to a traditional medical model of diagnosis and treatment, which represents the predominant lens through which college student mental health is viewed (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2016; Reetz, Krylowicz, & Mistler, 2014). However, this approach is not without its limitations. The services provided by counseling centers are constrained by their staff-intensive structure, as they require licensed mental health professionals to provide individual and group services. These offerings serve a portion of the student population, namely students presenting with mental health impairments. Despite this limited service provision, student counseling centers are often overwhelmed with demand by students seeking support (Gallagher, 2012). Given the challenging economic climates faced within higher education, the need to respond effectively to student mental health concerns represents a significant challenge.

Beyond these constraints, however, there is a deeper organizational perspective that can be made apparent through examining this traditional, treatment-based response. The term 'mental health' generates a significant amount of stigma, and it has been well documented that stigma generates unfavorable biases toward individuals with mental health concerns

(Martinez, Piff, Mendoz-Denton, & Hinshaw, 2011; National Institute of Mental Health, 2013). It may also be the case that these inherently negative perceptions color institutional perceptions of mental health. When mental health is conceptualized as a concern or problem comprised of constellations of symptoms and diagnoses that impair an isolated individual's normal functioning, the proper response is to provide therapeutic, medical, or corrective interventions. These services protect the community while providing care according to a diagnostic treatment paradigm. Within this paradigm, the practitioner assumes the role of the expert, gathers information regarding the problem, and implements a treatment plan to help manage symptoms or improve functioning. The widespread endorsement of this approach for traditional college students may be part of the reason that emerging adults (i.e. persons 18-29 years of age) have a higher 12 month prevalence rate for psychiatric conditions than any other age range (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014; Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005). Additionally, given the demand on these services, the duration of treatment is frequently brief, which may limit the scope of intervention. As a result, a common experience for many students who seek support is to receive care primarily oriented toward immediate crisis response that may be augmented by coping strategies for ongoing symptom management (Kitzrow, 2003).

The goal of the Wellness Coaching program in the Office of Student Life Student Wellness Center at OSU is to provide services that are aligned with the philosophy, standards, and competencies for coaching articulated by the ICF (2016b, 2016c). By aligning with these principles, the Wellness Coaching program at Ohio State offers a dramatic reframing of institutional responses to college student mental health by focusing on solutions rather than deficits, by orienting more toward the present and future than the past, and by facilitating capacity building among students rather than solely focusing on symptom management. Theories and research from the traditions of wellness, positive psychology, and student development make up the framework for the OSU Wellness Coaching philosophy. Each of these disciplinary traditions is oriented toward the cultivation of human capacities that can facilitate different dimensions of personal and professional development. Together, they integrate with the practice-oriented components of wellness, strengths, and goals that make up the OSU Wellness Coaching approach to create a service that is growth-oriented and empowering. The remainder of this article will discuss how this framework and approach integrate in a manner that promotes student development and growth.

The wellness paradigm

Wellness refers to a multidimensional, synergistic construct oriented toward maximizing each individual's inherent potentiality (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). The philosophical roots of wellness can be traced back many millennia. Ayurvedic regimens, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and the roots of Western medicine in Ancient Greece are all based upon a holistic approach to health, oriented more toward prevention than treatment (Global Wellness Institute, 2016). In the fifth century B.C.E., Aristotle provided one of the first direct conceptualizations of wellness, describing *eudaimonia* as the state of flourishing that represents the ultimate expression of each person's ability to live well (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). Flourishing is a construct related to happiness which Witmer (2012) articulated as the emotional state that arises when individuals who understand their essential nature aspire toward their desired lifestyle.

The wellness paradigm transcends the treatment-based approach to health by promoting greater awareness and growth (Travis & Ryan, 2004). Educational interventions designed to build individual, organizational, and communal capacities for thriving support this orientation toward wellness. The wellness paradigm is distinctive from standard Western medical practice as its primary focus is to bring about behavioral changes that result in a higher quality of life. Therefore, a wellness-based approach to mental health cannot be premised on a model of diagnosis and treatment. It must instead be oriented toward developing capacities for well-being, including psychological, emotional, and social functioning. Keyes (2002, 2005, 2007) referred to these capacities as the primary components of flourishing, and advanced the proposition that mental health and mental illness should be considered separate constructs.

The separation of these constructs creates a dual continuum model. Within this model, the continuum for mental illness refers to the degree to which psychiatric disorders are present while the continuum for mental health describes levels of individual well-being ranging from languishing to flourishing (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Research conducted with the dual continuum model has indicated that the relative mental health for a majority of adults falls between languishing and flourishing in a range that Keyes (2002) refers to as moderately mentally healthy. From this perspective, students who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses (e.g. major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, substance use disorder) remain capable of accessing positive states of mental health. However, it is

equally true that students who do not meet criteria for a psychiatric disorder may still be struggling to function psychologically, emotionally, and relationally. Therefore, all students have the potential to move toward more optimal mental health and could benefit from individualized support.

The flourishing perspective that informs the Ohio State Wellness Coaching program is closely aligned with the field of mental health promotion, which is oriented toward facilitating each person's capacity to enjoy life, work toward meaningful goals, engage in healthy relationships, and navigate challenging transitions (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2008). Services intended to promote college student mental health are not primarily concerned with the presence or absence of mental illness. Instead, the purpose of services like wellness coaching is to facilitate solution-focused empowerment through the promotion of emotional and motivational qualities like hope, resilience, optimism, perseverance, and grit. This approach does not negate medically oriented services, but instead is intended to function preventatively, by proactively building capacities for managing difficult transitions, while also promoting mental health in a manner that facilitates students' ability to thrive in college (Schreiner, 2010).

Positive psychology and character strengths

Both thriving and flourishing are terms that are primarily identified with the positive psychology movement, which is "an umbrella term for theories and research about what makes life most worth living" (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004, p. 603). Within the field of positive psychology, there is a significant scientific research agenda to better understand human flourishing and to develop applications that optimize functioning (Seligman, 2002; Seligman, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Findings from the field of positive psychology are intended to promote and nurture the capacities for individuals to thrive (Positive Psychology Institute, 2012).

A common critique leveled at positive psychology is that the field as a whole views the human experience through 'rose-colored glasses' (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology, as positioned by Gable and Haidt (2005), acknowledges struggle and suffering while also emphasizing the potential for flourishing and growth. In other words, the philosophy underlying positive psychology proposes a more balanced perspective that does not solely focus on pathology and 'what goes wrong.' Instead, the positive psychology research agenda promotes the importance of understanding and resolving negative experiences while also identifying and enhancing those experiences

that positively impact human development (Seligman, 2002; Seligman, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, positive psychology aligns well with the fundamental orientation of wellness theory and serves as a major conceptual underpinning of the Wellness Coaching program at OSU by distinguishing itself from treatment models, and offers clients an opportunity to capitalize on their strengths and guide their own developmental trajectory.

One of the primary ways that the OSU Wellness Coaching program uses elements of the positive psychology tradition to build students' capacities for mental health is through the use of character strengths. Character strengths are defined as universal, learned human capacities for thinking, feeling, and behaving (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The identification and study of character strengths was one of the earliest initiatives in the positive psychology movement. Twenty-four character strengths were identified from a research initiative that explored diverse cultures both across the world and through time as fundamental human qualities, values, or virtues that make life worth living (Peterson & Park, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths include capacities such as hope, zest, love, teamwork, self-regulation, creativity, and perspective. They have been used and researched widely, including studies specifically oriented toward undergraduate and graduate college students (Fialkov & Haddad, 2012; Karris & Craighead, 2012; Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009).

Students who utilize the OSU wellness coaching service complete the VIA Survey of Character Strengths (Peterson & Park, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) prior to their first coaching session. Their results are reviewed during the first session, and continue to be utilized as an integral component of the coaching approach. Character strengths are offered as ways for students to see themselves as creative, resourceful, and whole people who are capable of identifying goals and growing toward the people they wish to become. Although students frequently begin coaching with a problem-centered and deficit-based worldview, the identification and discussion of their strengths often provides a powerful reframing experience for self, relationships, and behaviors. Over time, this strength-based perspective may facilitate a shift in mindset from a fixed orientation to one that promotes growth and well-being. Students who are capable of shifting to a growth-oriented mindset are more likely to invest greater effort, persist in response to setbacks, and learn from criticism (Dweck, 2006). Therefore, this fundamental reframing may cultivate students' capacities for altering their

outlook on their educational experience and becoming more confident, active participants in their own development.

One useful metaphor that the Wellness Coaching program offers students to better understand character strengths as capacities is to view these qualities as functioning psychologically, emotionally, and relationally in the same manner that muscles function physically. Every individual is equipped with both the same sets of muscles and the same twenty-four character strengths. The ranking of character strengths is similar to the relative development of different muscle groups in any individual. Highly ranked strengths are similar to highly developed muscles, which are those that an individual has utilized or intentionally emphasized more frequently. Lower ranked strengths are similarly aligned with less developed muscles, indicating that they are functional areas of strengths that may be drawn upon less frequently, but are still beneficial when employed. Coaches encourage the use of highly developed character strengths while also emphasizing that students can build new capacities for less commonly utilized strengths that may be useful for a given circumstance.

The primary application of strengths takes place through an aware-explore-apply model (Niemic, 2013). Initial coaching sessions focus on building students' awareness of their unique constellation of character strengths. OSU Wellness Coaches emphasize that these capacities are learned and developed through practice, and ranked based on what is most valued or preferred by each individual. The top ranked strengths are referred to as signature themes, which often feel very natural and provide a sense of authenticity when they are present in one's functioning (Niemic, 2013; Peterson & Park, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

For the purposes of wellness coaching at OSU, awareness of strengths is insufficient for promoting growth. Therefore, OSU wellness coaches work with students to explore how these strengths manifest in their lives. Of particular interest is the potential for overuse or underuse of strengths, either of which limits the ability of that quality to function as a strength for the individual (Fowers, 2008; Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Niemic, 2014; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Underuse of strengths occurs when individuals take their strengths for granted by minimizing or dismissing strengths that one possesses, which constrains one's ability to make use of these strengths in a beneficial manner. Conversely, when strengths are overused, individuals become so reliant on a particular strength that it often results in problematic functioning and inflexible behavior. Overused strengths can result in

decreased happiness, well-being, and performance (Fowers, 2008; Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Niemiec, 2014; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). For instance, it is common that those who overuse the strength of judgment (i.e. the ability to think things through and examine opportunities from all sides) become so reliant on their ability to consider different perspectives that they may experience ‘paralysis by analysis,’ reducing their ability to make decisions. Therefore, one of the goals of wellness coaching at OSU is to help students apply their strengths in a manner that facilitates progress toward self-identified goals. For that reason, it is common for coaches to work with students to identify times when they were at their best to see how their strengths contributed to those positive experiences. This nuanced understanding of strengths helps people to work toward a balanced utilization of these internal resources that facilitates growth toward their goals (Fowers, 2008).

One of the benefits of the strengths-based approach is that it can reframe students’ understanding of difficult transitions or challenging situations. Students can reconceptualize their own actions as well as the behaviors of others as the underuse and overuse of different strengths. For example, a coach may help a student who is struggling to study for an exam to reframe an initial self-perception of laziness as an underuse of their self-regulation strength. The awareness that they can build their capacity for this strength may facilitate their ability to set aside time to study leading up to the examination, and they may identify other strengths to support this potentiality. For instance, the student may decide to use their creativity strength to develop a study plan that will work for their unique individual needs.

The use of positive psychology and character strengths in wellness coaching at OSU promotes greater self-acceptance for students while encouraging greater appreciation for self and others. This philosophical framework emboldens students to reframe limiting self-perceptions into a more self-compassionate view of themselves as individuals capable of enhancing existing capacities and developing new capacities. This process is significantly related to the student development theories that represent the third component of the wellness coaching approach to promoting student mental health at OSU.

Student development through self-authorship

Student development theories are the conceptual foundation for work with college students, and provide a broad understanding of how students change during their time in college. The research that informs student development theories has explored a variety of factors, including biological, psychological, spiritual, moral, cultural, and social domains of functioning (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). While many of these theories offer applicable insights for student affairs practitioners, one particularly salient theory for wellness coaching at OSU is self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda, 2008; Baxter Magolda, 2009; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Self-authorship theory is an extension of Kegan's (1994) constructive-developmental theory of human capacities for meaning-making and cognitive complexity. The construct of self-authorship was defined by Baxter Magolda and King (2004) as "the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world" (p.xxii). Self-authorship articulates how learning and growth occur across epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains. Three primary questions illustrate the forces that inspire development across each domain. Epistemological development is linked to the inquiry "How do I know?" intrapersonal development is spurred on by the question "Who am I?" and interpersonal development is driven by considering "How do I want to construct relationships with others?" (Baxter Magolda, 2001). These questions typically arise when individuals encounter events that challenge their existing ways of making sense of and navigating experiences in life. Prior to these destabilizing events, most individuals function according to external pressures or authorities that influence or even dictate what they believe they should do with their life. When these external formulas are no longer sufficient or reasonable guides for new circumstances, students enter what self-authorship terms a 'crossroads' phase (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

At OSU, students often enter wellness coaching within this crossroads phase, seeking support because they are experiencing uncertainty regarding changes that they may want or need to make. According to the theory of self-authorship, successful navigation of the crossroads phase involves three developmental processes: learning to identify and trust one's internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Trusting the internal voice entails developing an awareness of one's capacity for making trustworthy decisions that generates a greater

sense of self-confidence. Building an internal foundation requires the development of a personal philosophy connected to one's values, which provides a greater sense of purpose. Securing internal commitments is characterized by the ability to express oneself in a fully authentic manner (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Each of the steps in this process is supported by the OSU Wellness Coaching program. Wellness coaches provide a safe holding space that honors student autonomy. Coaches ask reflective questions from a stance of curiosity and are non-evaluative and non-directive, which allows students to voice their internal interests and values. The goals that students set in OSU's coaching program are entirely self-identified, prompted by a version of the miracle question from the solution-focused tradition (De Shazer, Dolan & Korman, 2007) that asks clients to consider what would be different in their lives if they were able to make the changes they desired.

Students' successful navigation of the crossroads phase produces a greater capacity for self-authorship and the ability to intentionally select and operate from one's beliefs in the midst of conflicting external pressures (Baxter Magolda, 2001). This outcome is representative of a successful wellness coaching relationship, as students refine their ability to identify and incorporate a "solidified and comprehensive system of beliefs" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 155) consistently throughout different domains of their life. The ultimate aim of wellness coaching at OSU is to make students more aware of their strengths and empower them to align their goals with these personal values. This in turn enhances their ability to articulate the desired outcomes associated with the life they hope to create and to commit more fully to that life. Students' engagement in intentionally navigating transitions has been demonstrated to promote higher levels of sustained mental health and flourishing (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009).

Building self-authoring capacities through learning partnerships

Self-authorship theory provides a developmental framework for student development. In order to facilitate movement through this framework toward self-authorship, Baxter Magolda and King (2004) proposed a Learning Partnership Model (LPM). The core principles of this model include validating students as learners, situating learning within each student's own experience, and acknowledging the learning process as a mutually constructed experience by the learner and facilitator, in this case represented by the student and their wellness coach. Adherence to these three core principles generates learning experiences through which external pressures

and authorities become less influential in dictating students' sense of self (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

The tenets of the LPM align well with the ICF coaching philosophy that each individual is creative, resourceful, and whole. When coaches maintain this perspective toward students, it validates them as effective learners. The non-directive stance of coaching encourages students to share their story and recognize themselves as the expert regarding their own lives. These principles and practices firmly situate learning within each student's own experience. Finally, students who utilize wellness coaching at OSU do not rely on the coach as a trusted advisor, but instead as a facilitator who can help them to orient toward self-identified goals and desired outcomes. Therefore, the interpersonal dynamic between OSU wellness coaches and students creates a mutually constructed learning experience that is reinforced through the use of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2013), which honors students' autonomy while evoking their internal voice and affirming their capacity to grow and develop.

Programmatic outcomes

During the academic years between Autumn 2013 and Spring 2016, the OSU Wellness Coaching program provided approximately 3000 individual sessions for nearly 600 students. Students utilizing the service ranged from 17-43 years old. 87% identified as undergraduate students, and 13% identified as graduate or professional students. In terms of race and ethnicity, utilization closely parallels enrollment demographics. Programmatic outcomes related to wellness coaching at OSU have been assessed through the use of exit surveys. Qualitative data has been collected electronically through open-ended questions and analyzed using scrutiny techniques (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The data yielded three primary themes: self-discovery, navigating transitions in college, and self-acceptance. Each of these themes are closely tied to the theory of self-authorship and the themes of positive psychology, all of which have informed the practice and philosophy of wellness coaching at Ohio State.

Students described coaching as a space for self-discovery, particularly through the incorporation of strengths, which they described as transformative for their experience. For instance, one respondent stated:

Wellness coaching aimed at helping you discover what type of person you are and how you can improve any area of your life. Instead of information being fed to you about 'what you should do,' the sessions

led to self-discovery and unleashed the confidence through your strengths that you didn't know you had!

It seems likely that wellness coaching provided an opportunity for this student to shift their locus of control from dictatorial external influences to internal values connected to character strengths. This shift provided a greater level of awareness and self-confidence grounded in a greater level of trust in their internal voice. Another student responded that:

Discovering my strengths with a firm foundation and encouragement from the coaches was overall what helped me. It allowed me to see myself from others' perspectives and gave me a lot of confidence. With this confidence and encouragement, I found my place at Ohio State.

It is clear that coaching enhanced this student's self-confidence. Additionally, the sense of secure belonging, both within oneself and the larger college environment parallels the phases and experiences of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda, 2008; Baxter Magolda, 2009; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) and indicates that through coaching, the student successfully transcended the crossroads phase to become more self-authoring.

Additional qualitative feedback lends support to the alignment between the learning partnership model (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) and coaching philosophy. For instance, one student stated, "these sessions were so helpful for me and I never felt like I was being judged or in therapy." Similarly, another student identified, "having an open and judgment free space to be honest with myself" as the most helpful aspect of coaching. These data points reflect the fact that the distinctive coaching approach contains a unique ability to validate students as learners and to situate learning within their own experience. Students also described coaching as an arena where they could view learning as a mutually constructed experience. For instance, another student placed value in "knowing I was working through things alongside my wellness coach instead of being talked to. It was a journey together and it made me more comfortable and confident." This feedback illustrates the student's perception of coaching as a collaborative partnership. While strengths and wellness are primary topics of discussion during coaching sessions, explicit references are rarely made to self-authorship or the LPM. Even so, these reported outcomes are indicative that students experienced coaching as a learning partnership within which they could form meaningful connections with their coach. Coaching relationships can therefore be perceived as valuable assets for promoting mental health by

cultivating students' capacities for wellness, strengths, self-authorship, and flourishing.

Conclusion

As coaching initiatives become more prominent in higher education, it is critical to establish a firm philosophical basis to ground this distinctive approach to student programming. The establishment of services grounded in an orientation that is aligned with the ICF (2016b) definition of coaching offers the opportunity for coaches to provide an intentional, proactive, and developmental resource that orients students towards their inherent capacities, strengths, and agency while promoting a growth mindset and optimizing student well-being. Furthermore, coaching services operating from this philosophical perspective are capable of generating a paradigmatic shift in the manner by which institutions of higher education support student mental health. Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to promote healthy outcomes for all students while also responding effectively to student health concerns. Programs like wellness coaching at Ohio State expand the existing spectrum of student support by promoting psychological, social, and emotional capacities that foster student health and success while also acknowledging the need for greater institutional accountability and fiscal responsibility. Coaching initiatives which critically evaluate their philosophical basis and adopt a similar capacity building approach are capable of promoting students' ability to thrive in college and beyond by empowering them to become change agents for their own lives and the organizations and communities to which they belong.

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