

Assessing Faculty Wellness: Critical Foundations for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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1. Abstract:

This paper highlights the importance of faculty wellness as a critical foundation for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it provides a reflective tool and holistic strategies, individually and collectively, to assess and enhance wellness in a faculty development context. Faculty wellness is embedded within the organizational, leadership and operating cultures of institutions, academic units and individuals. Faculty wellness is thus viewed as an institutional, departmental and individual responsibility.

Key Words:

faculty wellness, scholarship of teaching and learning, faculty development

2. Introduction

“We cannot become one of the best universities in the world – or rather, we cannot maintain our position as one of the best in the world – if we do not attend to our own good health” (Excerpt from President Toope’s UBC Health Symposium Speech, November 29, 2006)

The 8-month UBC Faculty Certificate Program was initiated in 1998 and hosts an annual cohort of 20-25 multidisciplinary faculty members from international, cross-Canadian and UBC settings. Central to this program is the notion of enhancing the culture of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in higher education, as well as examining optimal conditions for the facilitation of SoTL activities on university campuses. Despite the individualistic nature of institutional reward systems and traditional paths toward preparing the professoriate, faculty are increasingly expected to work effectively in teams and collaborate on issues of research, curricula planning, pedagogy and administration. Faculty learning communities provide an authentic forum through which to engage academics from diverse backgrounds to become more interdependent and mutually supportive in achieving institutional goals (Cox, 2004). Much has been written about the role and impact of faculty learning communities, however, very little research has examined the role of faculty wellness as a critical foundation for SoTL. We present the theoretical underpinnings of faculty wellness, a reflection framework for enhancing faculty wellness in the context of a faculty development workshop on SoTL, and finally, concluding remarks.

3. Literature review: Faculty wellness in a higher education context

Faculty wellness has its scholarly roots in the workplace health promotion and learning communities literature (Anderson, 2004; Catano et al, 2007; Cox, 2004; Gorin

& Arnold 2006; Greenberg, 1985; Green & Kreuter, 2005; Tytherleigh et al 2005). The benefits of workplace wellness have been espoused and researched since the 1980's (Green & Cargo, 1994; Lovato, Green, & Stainbrook, 1993; Pelletier, 1993). Despite well-documented student wellness initiatives, and more recently occupational stress in university staff surveys, very few studies have focused on the importance of faculty wellness strategies, individually or collectively, as a critical foundation for SoTL.

Currently, faculty wellness issues are particularly poignant since academics, at various stages of career, are all too aware of the growing and immense pressures that exist on many campuses (Cantano et al, 2007; Gurm, 2004). For example, academic workloads; stressful and often ambiguous tenure and promotion processes; widespread higher education and undergraduate program reforms; shrinking operating budgets; competition for student enrolments; diverse student learning needs; proliferation of technological and administrative demands; have resulted in various sick leaves, serious illness and even death of colleagues. Thus, it is argued in this paper that faculty members whom are better supported and able to cope with the significant challenges and growing complexity of higher education, are more likely to be able to respond effectively to the increasing research, teaching and service expectations of academic life, and engage in scholarly approaches to teaching and learning.

A 2005 UK study concluded that occupational stress in university staff is widespread and lends further support to the growing evidence that universities no longer provide the low-stress working environments they once did. In particular, Tytherleigh et al (2005), found that academic staff in the UK tended to be stressed by co-workers for not pulling their weight, a lack of control over decisions affecting their jobs, a lack of resources, not being informed about relevant job information, work-home-life balance, and the level of their pay. In a recent Canadian study, Cantano et al (2007), conducted a national survey on occupational stress with a sample of 1500 academic staff from 56 universities. They found very high levels of stress among academics stemming from workload, scheduling, role conflict, role ambiguity, work-life balance, fairness administration and fairness rewards. Thirteen percent of these respondents reported high rates of stress-related mental health problems, and 22% reported high rates of stress-related physical health problems, similar to those findings in UK universities. Several studies have called for a review of academic work with respect to the implementation of changes in policies and procedures that might lead to reductions in work-related stress and strain such as actions to increase trust and communication, fair and equitable organizational practices, and the monitoring of stress and workloads (Cantano et al, 2007; Gurm, 2004).

Essentially, faculty wellness is influenced by interconnected and critical domains of institutional and personal wellness. Institutional wellness occurs at a macro level and includes the organisational, academic and disciplinary culture; interdepartmental dynamics; educational leadership practices; and, of course, workload conditions and expectations on campus (Catano, 2007; Garnsworthy, 2003; Kluge, 2005; Plotnikoff, Poon, Prodaniuk, & Mc Gannon, 2004). Indicators of institutional wellness, for example, can be identified when faculty members respond to such questions as "what sorts of institutional and departmental practices facilitate or hinder faculty wellness (e.g., interdepartmental dynamics, educational leadership practices, and workload conditions

and expectations)?” as well as through surveys that reveal the provision of faculty wellness activities on campus (e.g., lounge and green space areas, recreational facilities, faculty social events etc).

Personal wellness occurs at a micro-level and includes physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, resourceful and environmental domains. *Physical wellness* refers to optimal levels of physiological functioning; *Mental wellness* refers to optimal levels of cognition and psychological functioning; Emotional wellness refers to optimal levels of self-control and contentment; *Social wellness* refers to optimal levels of interpersonal functioning; *Spiritual wellness* refers to optimal levels of inner peace and connectedness; *Resourceful wellness* refers to optimal levels of applied life skills; and, *Environmental wellness* refers to optimal levels of environmental engagement (Beard & Wilson, 2004; Gair, 1999; Hubball & West, 2007; McGowan, 2000). Thus, faculty wellness is viewed as an institutional, departmental and individual responsibility.

For the purpose of this preliminary study, action research (AR) methodology was employed to develop and implement a reflective framework to assess and enhance faculty wellness in the context of a faculty development workshop (Altrichter, Psch, & Somekh, 1993). AR methodology invites faculty members to internalise theory and practice through a systematic and cyclical process of inquiry that involves hypothesis testing, planning, observing, analysis, and action (Mills, 2000). The following research questions guided the development and implementation of the reflective faculty wellness framework:

- ❖ What are key wellness factors when developing a reflective framework to assess and enhance faculty wellness?
- ❖ How can a reflective framework be used to enhance awareness and discussion about faculty wellness in a faculty development context?

4. Method

Q1. *What are key wellness factors when developing a reflective framework to assess and enhance faculty wellness?*

A reflective faculty wellness framework was developed from qualitative data that were derived from three key sources:

- ❖ key concepts in the literature pertaining to faculty wellness issues (Green & Kreuter, 2005; Greenberg, 1985)
- ❖ faculty flip-chart responses about critical issues pertaining to faculty wellness and SoTL activities from three different workshop settings. The three different 2-hour workshops were held between 2006-2007 with approximately 25 participants in each. Two workshops were held as part of the eight-month UBC Faculty Certificate Program on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and one included the STLHE pre-conference workshop at the UofA, Edmonton.
- ❖ adaptation of a personal fitness lifestyle inventory (Reebok Professional Alliance Program, 1985).

Using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), qualitative data were analysed for both common themes and experiences pertaining to barriers and enabling factors, symptoms and actions associated with

faculty wellness. Convergent and holistic themes and experiences were then organized into a reflective faculty wellness appraisal questionnaire, with both qualitative and quantitative response requirements.

***Q2.** How can a reflective framework be used to enhance awareness and discussion about faculty wellness in a faculty development context?*

Faculty development workshops and seminars provide ideal forums in which to model good pedagogy and promote faculty wellness on campus. In November 2007, a 2-hour faculty wellness workshop was implemented as part of the orientation session for eleven 3M National Teaching Fellows in a retreat at Montebello.

Workshop goals - Faculty will be able to:

- ❖ Collaborate with colleagues to discuss connections between faculty wellness and SoTL
- ❖ Identify key frameworks and concepts pertaining to faculty wellness
- ❖ Think critically about diverse perspectives of faculty wellness on university campuses
- ❖ Develop institutional and personal strategies to enhance faculty wellness in the university workplace wellness

Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) stages of group development (i.e., forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning) provided a sequential format to achieve workshop goals and enhance wellness in this faculty workshop context. For example, the following sequence maps out the 2-hour workshop outline:

- ❖ Introductions, agenda, initial prior learning assessment questions – 5 minutes
- ❖ Find Someone' worksheet (speed dating concept focusing on wellness issues and SoTL) – 10 minutes
- ❖ Blindfold communication and trust building activities – 10 minutes
- ❖ Walking teams (theme names) and a problem-solving orienteering task to complete with questions to solve at each point (e.g., what is SoTL, readings, authors, institutional wellness barriers and solutions, case study vignettes of wellness experiences in academic units and personal wellness behaviours on campus) – 20 minutes
- ❖ Large group discussion/debrief activities, introduction of SoTL/Wellness frameworks, readings – 15 minutes
- ❖ Overview of faculty wellness appraisal – 20 minutes
- ❖ Refreshments together as a wellness activity, continue discussions – 15 minutes
- ❖ Action planner: academic workplace wellness and personal wellness contributions, goal setting and time management – 15 minutes
- ❖ Summary, large group discussion – 15 minutes

5. Results

***Q1.** What are key wellness factors when developing a reflective framework to assess and enhance faculty wellness?*

FACULTY WELLNESS APPRAISAL**Macro level.**

* *What sorts of institutional and departmental practices facilitate or hinder faculty wellness (e.g., interdepartmental dynamics, educational leadership practices, and workload conditions and expectations)?*

* *What are the short and long-term impacts of these institutional and departmental practices on faculty wellness?*

* *What sorts of institutional and/or departmental opportunities, strategies, supports, provisions (e.g., lounge and green space areas, recreational facilities, faculty social events etc) enhance faculty wellness in your setting?*

Micro level.

On a scale of 0-10, rate your current wellness lifestyle. Use the questions to help you to think of ways to add more balance to your academic life.

PHYSICAL

- Do I engage in regular and adequate physical exercise?
- Am I eating regular, well-balanced meals?
- Do I avoid using caffeine and/or other stimulants to "keep myself going"?
- Do I avoid eating "junk foods"?
- Do I avoid drinking too much alcohol or taking tranquilizers or other drugs?
- Do I avoid smoking?
- Do I make adequate time to maintain my physical appearance?

MENTAL

- Do I regularly initiate mentally stimulating tasks, problems, issues, and/or projects to solve?
- Do I use my mind effectively (e.g., imagery, self-talk, focusing, analysis techniques) to think through mental challenges?
- Do I set appropriate goals in order to successfully complete tasks, projects or challenges?
- Am I confident in my abilities?
- Do I employ adequate stress and time management skills?
- Do I have adequate sleep and relaxation each day?

EMOTIONAL

- Do I regularly express and receive love and affection?
- Do I feel secure?
- Do I smile, have fun, play and laugh regularly?
- Do I have a positive attitude toward self, others and life?
- Do I exercise appropriate self-discipline and self-control during anger or frustration?
- Am I content with my life?

SOCIAL

Do I generally get along well with others?
 Have I have established a good “support system” within my various communities of practice?
 Do I make adequate time with my “significant others”?
 Am I assertive in expressing my own needs in a group situation?
 Do I make constructive and positive contributions in a group situation?
 Am I able to express my strengths and limitations to others?
 Do I ask for help when I need it?
 Do I avoid continually comparing myself to other people to see if I’m “measuring up”?

SPIRITUAL

Do I make adequate time to contemplate ‘my connectedness with the natural world and/or a higher Being’?
 Do I make adequate time to contemplate ‘my connectedness with significant others’?
 Do I make adequate time to enjoy beauty in all its forms (music, art, nature, sunsets, self, others)?
 Do I make adequate time to regularly engage in introspection (who I am, is my life meaningful, where I’ve been, where I’m going)
 Do I make a positive contribution to the world around me (e.g., give my time and/or gifts generously)
 Do I live ‘true’ to myself?

RESOURCEFUL

Do I effectively access and critically evaluate relevant information?
 Do I have effective levels of self-reliance, energy, and self-management skills to cope well with everyday demands and to achieve my goals?
 Do I effectively adapt and make the most of different / changeable circumstances?
 Do I positively influence and/or mobilize others to achieve mutually beneficial goals?
 Does my net financial worth enable me to develop and/or maintain an appropriate standard of living?
 Does my financial earning capacity enable me to develop and/or maintain an appropriate standard of living?

ENVIRONMENTAL

Do I work and/or live in environmentally safe conditions?
 Do I regularly breathe fresh air in my work and/or living environment?
 Am I surrounded by aesthetically pleasing views in my work and/or living environment?
 Am I exposed to excessive noise and/or pollution in my work and/or living environment?
 Do I regularly engage in naturalistic settings?
 Do I live in a comfortable climate

Below are three further questions to guide your reflection and discussions as you examine your Wellness profile. Use these questions to guide your thoughts since this framework is a reflective and discussion tool, not a diagnostic tool with absolute measures and psychometric properties.

1. When you reflect on both macro and micro-level wellness issues, what sorts of relationships do you see between these two levels in your academic setting?

2. As you look at your micro-level wellness profile, do you recognize yourself in the descriptions of your high and low-scoring wellness domains? Might others in your Department see you in a similar light?

3. How might these “macro and micro-level wellness insights” help you to manage your wellness situation and set goals for further, individual and collective, wellness enhancement? Does it uncover or articulate anything that was previously not obvious to you?

Q2. How can a reflective framework be used to enhance awareness and discussion about faculty wellness in a faculty development context?

On completion of the 2-hour workshop, 3M National Teaching Fellow participants were required to provide written feedback responses and a follow-up discussion pertaining to their thoughts and experiences of the faculty wellness workshop. Preliminary findings from the debrief discussion suggest this framework provides a useful reflective tool to assess and enhance an array of critical faculty wellness conditions and behaviours. Furthermore, it stimulated opportunities for goal setting for faculty wellness activities on campus (e.g., regular and lunchtime walk breaks with a colleague, park car and walk to and from office, going to green spaces on campus where possible for relaxation, time management and life planning strategies, ensuring non-work periods of the day, contributing to faculty wellness initiatives, departmentally or institutionally). Responses on written feedback forms corroborated the discussion points although feedback tended to address the combined impact of the reflective framework and workshop experience without differentiating between the two:

Despite the attractive workshop description, I had never really given much thought to the relationship between faculty wellness and SoTL,...I can see now how wellness provides a positive culture for SoTL activities and how it can impact programs as well as teaching and learning...great experiential way and setting to address topic...administrators on campus should attend this workshop – actually it should be on the agendas in all departments!...I guess I do quite well on the micro level although I do need to find more relaxation time, however, our department leaves a lot to be desired at the macro level!...would have liked more time to explore institutional challenges and to discuss ‘best practice’ examples around campus...there should be institutional awards and recognition for gold star departmental wellness communities on campus...I hadn’t really thought how wellness affects productivity...Really enjoyed the teamwork activities and discussion...I’ll start walking more on campus at break times and lunch with my colleague...I now realize I have to attend more specifically to my spiritual and emotional wellness activities....our department is pretty positive but I do not seem to make time to attend to my own wellness enough...I can see where I need to create more balance in my family-work-leisure lifestyle!...Great way to get to know each other on topic related tasks....I learned useful things about SoTL and wellness that I wasn’t aware of – thank you!...Great introduction to 3M colleagues – I already feel bonded with our cohort.

6. Conclusion

In the present climate of significant higher education reform, faculty wellness is viewed as an essential foundation for developing responsive and integrated learning-

centred curricula; for enhancing the quality of teaching and student learning experiences; for positive and productive learning communities; and, for effective communications and problem-solving at the institutional, departmental and individual levels. Furthermore, attention to faculty wellness is likely to reduce the degree of isolation, workplace stress, scepticism, and marginalisation felt by many faculty members on North American campuses. This paper highlights the importance of faculty wellness as a critical foundation for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it provides a useful reflective tool and holistic strategies, individually and collectively, to assess and enhance wellness in a faculty development context. Faculty wellness is thus viewed as an institutional, departmental and individual responsibility.

The reflective tool and workshop process, however, is not a panacea for facilitating faculty wellness. Faculty wellness is embedded within the organizational, leadership and operating cultures of institutions, departments and individuals. Thus appropriate priorities have to be established in each domain for it to be practiced and reinforced. Furthermore, when assessing and facilitating faculty wellness on university campuses, facilitators need to be realistic, grounded and not get caught up in elevating faculty wellness to an elitist or self-righteous level. It should be emphasised that the holistic items in the wellness framework are intended to guide reflection and conversation only, and are not intended or designed as a diagnostic tool with psychometric properties. As such, this framework does not identify absolute 'strengths' or 'weaknesses', nor does it mean to imply that dominant wellness domains are better than low or mid-range ones, since no one wellness domain is inherently 'better' than any other, but is simply different. Seven wellness domains were identified in the reflective framework at the micro level, however, the actual number of wellness domains and their complex interactions is not yet known from the research literature. These preliminary findings are also limited by a relatively small case study workshop experience. Further studies are required to investigate the efficacy of the faculty wellness framework in various SoTL contexts in higher education. Moreover, research is required to examine the short and long-term impact of faculty wellness initiatives on the quantity and scope of campus-wide SoTL activities. Research on faculty wellness and SoTL is an evolving scholarship in higher education, and provides a critical and significant contribution to the quality of life on university campuses.

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