The role of mentorship and coaching in supporting the holistic well-being and ongoing development of educators
Guest Editors: Benjamin Kutsyuruba and Lorraine Godden

Volume 8 Number 4 2019

229 Guest editorial
235 Virtual mentor partnerships between practising and preservice teachers: helping to enhance professional growth and well-being
Patricia Briscoe
255 The well-being of the early career teacher: a review of the literature on the pivotal role of mentoring
Vicki Squires
268 The benefits of mentoring newly qualified teachers in Malta
Michelle Attard Tonina
285 The impact of mentoring on the Canadian early career teachers’ well-being
Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Lorraine Godden and John Bosica
310 Educators’ perceptions of the value of coach mindset development for their well-being
Kendra Lowery
325 “I love this stuff!” : a Canadian case study of mentor–coach well-being
Trista Hollweck
345 Mentorship for flourishing in schools: an explicit shift toward appreciative action
Sabre Cherkinski and Keith Walker
361 Not a solo ride: co-constructed peer mentoring for early-career educational leadership faculty
Benterah C. Morton and Elizabeth Gil
378 Thriving vs surviving: benefits of formal mentoring program on faculty well-being
Shanna Marie Stuecky, Brian Todd Collins, Shawn Patrick, Kathleen S. Grove and Etta Ward
397 Exploring professors’ experiences supporting graduate student well-being in Ontario faculties of education
Vera Woloshyn, Michael J. Savage, Snezana Ratkovic, Catherine Hands and Dragana Martinovic


www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/ijmce
The role of mentoring and coaching as a means of supporting the well-being of educators and students

With the ever-changing and conflicting professional demands, work-related stress, anxiety, burnout and increasing work–life imbalance, now more than ever educators are in need to attend to their well-being (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Cherkowski and Walker, 2018). Well-being here is broadly understood to include both hedonic aspects of feeling good (positive emotions) and more eudemonic (conducive to happiness) aspects of living well that entail experiences of positive relationships, meaningfulness in life and work, senses of mastery and personal growth, autonomy, and achievement (Keyes, 2002, 2003; Ryan et al., 2008; Seligman, 2011). Working in different roles and at different levels of teaching practice and career stages, many educators are rightfully concerned with the impact that well-being (or the degrees of its absence) can have on everyday functioning of students in their classrooms, lectures or other learning environments, recognizing their own limited knowledge about how to develop environments conducive to student thriving and flourishing (Daniszewski, 2013; Gagnon et al., 2017). However, the need is great for ensuring that educational professionals are also attuned to the importance of their own well-being as an essential grounding for their job satisfaction, and caring for and fostering well-being among those they serve and with whom they work (Aguilar, 2018; Sturmfels, 2006).

In parallel to this, we see a strong need for research on the role of mentoring and coaching in supporting the holistic well-being and ongoing development of educators. Similar to Hobson (2016), we believe that supporting the well-being of mentees and protégés is an essential part of the mentor’s role. Mentoring thus becomes a relationship between less experienced colleagues (mentees) and more experienced colleagues (mentors), where the latter aim “to support the mentee’s learning, development and well-being, and their integration into the cultures of both the organisation in which they are employed and the wider profession” (p. 88). Coaching, whether used interchangeably with mentoring, seen as one of the aspects of mentoring, or used as a standalone term, also focuses on the relationship between coach and coachee to help with the skill development, psychological well-being and social circumstances of the latter (Clutterbuck, 1992; Fletcher and Mullen, 2012; Popper and Lipshitz, 1992).

As such, the potential impact of mentoring and coaching on the well-being of educators and students transcends the educational levels and contexts. Beginning teachers need support to not only survive but also thrive, grow professionally, and build their capacity to maintain and sustain their well-being (personal and of others), including through support systems such as teacher induction and mentoring programs (Hobson and Maxwell, 2017; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Shanks, 2017). Coaching and mentoring are not only limited to early career stages but also instrumental for experienced teachers and school leaders (Campbell et al., 2017; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Hobson et al., 2009). Experienced teachers who no longer have the formal supports through induction can benefit from peer coaching and informal mentoring. School principals and leaders, likewise, value professional and institutional structures and supports in the form of mentoring and coaching aimed at leadership development (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Searby and Armstrong, 2016). Beyond the K–12 education system, university faculty members also appreciate supportive structures to help them with orientation, socialization and acculturation to the new workplace (Ramaswami et al., 2014; Thomason, 2012). Similarly, youth taught by educators at these various educational institutions increasingly find mentoring and coaching practices...
beneficial for their overall development and learning (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2019; Hylan and Postlethwaite, 1998).

Mentoring and coaching in education often have the dual aims of personal support and professional learning because the protégés are being helped to assimilate into new roles or responsibilities as well as to develop employment-related skills. The primary intended beneficiaries of the mentorship and coaching may be students, recently qualified or more experienced teachers, and instructors in schools, colleges and university settings. However, there is limited research on the role of mentoring and coaching in supporting holistic well-being and ongoing development of educators at these various levels. Therefore, we endeavored to seek out research that explores the role that mentoring and coaching practices play in helping educational professionals attune to the importance of maintaining their own well-being and fostering the well-being among those they serve and with whom they work. Of particular interest for us was to learn how mentorship and coaching can support the well-being and mental health of educators who work under demanding conditions, often in complex and stressful environments, and how their well-being capacity can contribute to the well-being of their mentees/protégés/coachees, students and colleagues. Furthermore, learning how educator well-being is supported through coaching and mentoring in different locales and diverse settings would help with understanding the specific, contextualized factors conducive to flourishing in educational institutions.

With this special issue of the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education (IJMCE) we aimed to examine potential benefits, challenges and implications of mentorship and coaching as supportive structures for the well-being of educational professionals and students in a variety of educational contexts, including compulsory and post-compulsory educational settings. We also intended to contribute to and enhance the body of literature pertaining to the role of mentoring and coaching in supporting the holistic well-being and ongoing learning and development of educators and students.

We are enormously pleased by an overwhelming response to our call for papers to this special issue and with the final selection of accepted papers presented here, which we believe provides a rich, deep, and fairly comprehensive picture of the connection between mentoring and coaching and well-being in the field of education. The special issue features ten papers from across Canada, Malta and the USA that examine the role of mentoring and coaching in supporting the well-being of educators and students in a variety of roles and contexts. It should also be noted that many more submissions worthy of inclusion in this issue were received, but regretfully, publication constraints did not allow us to include all of them. Some of these will be published in subsequent, regular issues of the IJMCE.

Below, we provide an overview of each of the ten papers. The first paper addresses mentorship of pre-service teachers. Next, the second, third and fourth papers highlight the role of mentoring in supporting early career teachers (ECT), and the fifth and sixth papers focus on mentoring and coaching of experienced teachers. In the seventh paper, the authors discuss the well-being of teacher-leaders and principals, whereas the eighth and ninth papers deal with supports for the university faculty members, both new and experienced. We close with a paper that addresses how faculty members provide support for graduate students.

Virtual mentor partnerships between practising and preservice teachers: helping to enhance professional growth and well-being

In this paper, Patricia Briscoe presents the findings from a qualitative mixed-methods study of 77 pre-service teachers who participated in virtual mentorship with practising teachers. The qualitative self-reports provided by the pre-service teachers highlighted their learning and professional growth, and Briscoe shows that after engaging with the virtual mentorship from an experienced teacher practitioner, the pre-service teachers felt more prepared, confident and supported to enter the teaching profession. On the basis of her findings,
Briscoe suggests that the virtual approach to mentorship eliminates some of the access barriers that have impacted upon the face-to-face mentoring approach, with implications for the virtual mentorship to open up opportunities to connect teachers both across nations and the world.

The well-being of the early career teacher: a review of the literature on the pivotal role of mentoring
This paper is the first of three that consider the well-being of ECTs who work in compulsory education. Vicki Squires concentrates on peer-reviewed articles published over the past decade, including additional seminal works published between 2000 and 2010. In her review, Squires highlights promising practices and models of mentorship focused on providing personal and professional support for ECTs that helped develop resiliency and support well-being. Squires concludes that the adoption of a holistic approach, where strong relationships built on trust are formed between mentors and mentees, has the capacity to provide ECTs with social and emotional support to foster their well-being.

The benefits of mentoring newly qualified teachers in Malta
Michelle Attard-Tonna uses a grounded theory approach to explore the reflections and online conversations of 15 mentors from 10 schools who were each supporting a newly qualified teacher (NQT) for one academic year. Attard-Tonna notes that a mentoring approach based on reflection and dialogue promoted positive relationships that ultimately led to professional growth in the NQTs. Importantly, Attard-Tonna establishes that the school and school environment played a significant role in defining the challenges faced by NQTs and the interactions between the beginning teachers and their mentors.

The impact of mentoring on the Canadian early career teachers’ well-being
Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Lorraine Godden and John Bosica selectively analyze 35 survey questions from an online New Teacher Survey that examined the perceptions and experiences of 1,343 ECTs teaching in publicly funded schools across Canada. Through the mixed-methods exploration, Kutsyuruba and colleagues establish a strong correlation between the mentoring experiences and well-being of Canadian ECTs. Kutsyuruba et al. argue that purposeful, strength-based approaches for mentoring could help create environments in which ECTs can flourish.

Educators’ perceptions of the value of coach mindset development for their well-being
This paper is the first of two that consider the well-being of more experienced teachers who work in compulsory education. Kendra Lowery qualitatively examines five high school educators’ perceptions of training to develop a coach mindset, and whether the training contributed to the professional and personal well-being of the teachers. Lowery determines that adopting a coach mindset may increase educators’ well-being as they learn to build positive student, collegial and personal relationships within their schools.

“I love this stuff!”: a Canadian case study of mentor–coach well-being
Trista Hollweck shares the findings of her qualitative case study that employed Seligman’s well-being theory (PERMA) to examine the potential benefits, challenges and implications of the mentor–coach role as a supportive structure for experienced teachers’ well-being and flourishing in schools. Hollweck concludes that the mentor–coach role is not a panacea for...
well-being; rather, the quality and effectiveness of the mentoring and coaching relationship are the determining factors that facilitate teachers’ positive emotion, engagement, relationships and sense of accomplishment.

**Mentorship for flourishing in schools: an explicit shift toward appreciative action**

In this paper, Sabre Cherkowski and Keith Walker utilize findings from a multi-year qualitative research project to show the agency of principals and teacher-leaders in building developmental relationships and mentoring cultures that orientated and supported teachers toward well-being. Cherkowski and Walker offer four domains of inquiry and a model for flourishing schools that encourage principals and teacher-leaders to develop habits of mind and heart that in turn enact positive and appreciative methods of sustaining the work of teaching and learning. Cherkowski and Walker’s conceptual models provide strong indicators for nurturing developmental approaches to mentoring to form appreciative and growth-based approaches that enhance the well-being of entire school communities.

**Not a solo ride: co-constructed peer mentoring for early career educational leadership faculty**

Benterah Morton and Elizabeth Gil present a co-constructed peer-mentoring model intended to support mentoring opportunities that would enhance faculty development and well-being for early career educational leadership faculty from historically underrepresented populations. The model includes intentional practices aimed at fostering healthy work–life balance, developing support systems, increasing faculty agency and opportunities for storytelling for well-being. The authors suggest that the model has implications for preparing institutional leaders to institutionalize mentoring programs that promote professional growth and personal wellness.

**Thriving vs surviving: benefits of formal mentoring program on faculty well-being**

In the second paper that considers the well-being of faculty members, Shanna Stuckey, Brian Collins, Shawn Patrick, Kathleen Grove and Etta Ward discuss the findings from a mixed-methods study, based on grounded theory, to evaluate a formal mentoring program (EMPOWER) aimed at addressing the challenges faced by women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty members. Stuckey and her colleagues posit that EMPOWER not only framed positive mentoring relationships and a wellness model, but also demonstrated such indirect benefits as creation of a safe space, continued relationships between mentees and mentors, networking benefits, acculturation to campus and increased understanding of organizational politics and how these might positively impact faculty well-being.

**Exploring professors’ experiences supporting graduate student well-being in Ontario faculties of education**

Michael Savage, Vera Woloshyn, Snezana Ratkovic, Catherine Hands and Dragana Martinovic conclude this special issue with a qualitative study that explored seven Ontario education professors’ perceptions of and support for their graduate students’ well-being. Savage and colleagues argue that supporting the graduate students’ psycho–socio–emotional well-being was a critical aspect of faculty members’ roles. The seven participating professors intentionally used a number of strategies to support their graduate students, including the creation of inclusive learning environments, providing academic accommodations, nurturing caring relationships, and promoting on-campus supports and events. Savage and colleagues conclude with several recommendations for supporting graduate student mental health and well-being.
Conclusions
This special issue focuses on the role of mentoring and coaching as a means of supporting the well-being of educators. The aim has been to contribute to and enhance the body of literature pertaining to the role of mentoring and coaching in supporting the holistic well-being and ongoing learning and development of educators. The collection of articles in this issue addresses the notion of well-being of educators in different geographical locations and in a variety of educational contexts. The range of papers included here is indicative of a circle of support where at different levels of education, professionals are able (through mentoring and coaching) to support the development of others and to facilitate the well-being of peers, colleagues and students. Our hope is that this special issue will serve as a guide for academics, policymakers and practitioners in their quest to find answers about the benefits, challenges and implications of using mentorship and coaching programs and initiatives to promote educator well-being and flourishing in their respective milieu.

Benjamin Kutsyuruba
Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada, and
Lorraine Godden
Faculty of Public Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Acknowledgments
We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Professor Andy Hobson, Editor-in-Chief of the IJMCE, Associate Editor Pam Firth, Content Editor Lauren Malone, and all the reviewers for their generosity with time and expertise. Without their help, this special issue would not be possible. We would also like to thank all the authors who responded to our call for proposals and contributed their research and conceptual articles to this special issue. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to all the mentors and coaches in the field of education from whom we have benefited and continue to learn, in both our personal and professional lives, and whose devotion and support have greatly affected our own well-being.

References
Chutterbuck, D. (1992), Mentoring, Henley Distance Learning, Henley.


Virtual mentor partnerships between practising and preservice teachers
Helping to enhance professional growth and well-being

Patricia Briscoe
College of Education, Niagara University, New York, New York, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to assess the potential benefits of a virtual mentorship between teacher candidates and practising teachers. Specifically, the research aimed to determine whether candidates felt they had increased their professional learning and prepared for the realities of the job early in their training program as a means to enhance their well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – A systemized, virtual mentorship network was set up and a qualitative mixed-methods study was conducted with two separate groups of 77 students total consisting over a three-month course in two consecutive years. Three data sets were collected; this paper reports on one set – qualitative self-reports from mentee participants.

Findings – The response from preservice teacher participants was, through qualitative self-reports, overwhelmingly positive. After engaging in a guided virtual mentorship with an experienced teacher, they felt more prepared, more confident and more supported. Response from the preservice teacher participants provided evidence and confirmed a sense of improved educational preparedness for teaching by engaging in a guided virtual mentorship partnership with an experienced teacher.

Research limitations/implications – Virtual mentorships are highly beneficial for teacher candidates’ learning and professional growth; the relationships positively impact preservice teachers’ level of preparedness for the profession, which can lead to increased confidence and contribute to a positive sense of well-being. In addition, the virtual approach eliminates many of the access barriers that limit the efficacy of traditional, face-to-face mentorships. In doing so, the virtual format makes mentorships a possibility in any teacher preparatory education program, with endless opportunities to connect teachers across the world.

Originality/value – In an effort to better prepare quality teachers, a virtual mentorship program, embedded in teacher education programs, is a viable solution for shaping preservice teachers learning in the early stages of their careers, establishing a commitment to professional learning and mitigating teacher attrition rates and burnout by enhancing well-being. For these reasons, the authors believe virtual mentorships can be considered to be used as a framework for the future.

Keywords Well-being, Mentor–mentee relationships, Preservice teacher preparedness, Virtual mentorship

Paper type Research paper

The quality of education systems is based, fundamentally, upon the presence and development of exceptional teachers in classrooms. In Barber and Mourshed (2007) stated that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (p. 16). The World Bank (2018) has recently declared improving the quality of teachers as one of their key mandate for improving education. Such quality is contingent on not only the teachers’ professional knowledge and expertise, but also their well-being. However, recent literature (Aloe et al., 2014; Shukla and Trivedi, 2008; Stanley, 2014) from around the world has highlighted a disconcerting trend in teachers’ well-being: There has been an increase in teacher stress, burnout and other mental health issues that impact their ability – especially among new teachers. Given that attrition rates in the teaching profession worldwide are high, and stress is increasing (Arens and Morin, 2016; Greenberg et al., 2016; Hsiang, 2016; Watson, 2006), the challenge for scholars and practitioners is how to proactively develop nurturing systems that can provide early supports to teachers to increase their self-efficacy.
An increasingly common practice is providing mentoring and other forms of formal induction programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), and Ingersoll and Kralik’s (2004) large-scale review has confirmed the positive effects of induction programs on attrition rates. The Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) in 2006 as a means to create this “nurturing system” for new teachers in the province – in other words, to support teachers in their early years in the profession with professional learning and mentorship. However, many new Ontario teachers begin their careers as occasional teachers with wait times for full-time teaching positions being as long as five years (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017); therefore, they do not qualify for the NTIP based on full-time work criteria. In this case, NTIP support may be too late to fully promote well-being – they need it as early in their careers as possible. Given this possible gap, a logical solution would be to include elements of a nurturing system in the preservice phase of teacher education, which can help future teachers learn how to attend to their own well-being and be prepared for the unique stressors of the profession. To test the efficacy of this solution, I conducted a study that paired preservice teachers with experienced teachers into virtual mentorships as a part of the teacher preparatory program at Niagara University in Ontario, Canada. The results, as anticipated, were extremely positive: Overall, the mentees felt able to access professional advice, they felt more confident, and they felt more knowledgeable about professional learning resources. Given that well-being issues for new teachers are often connected to feelings of stress and burnout, these findings have potential for improving well-being for prospective and novice teachers.

Many scholars concur that professional experience – in other words, field experience – is vital for developing quality teachers in preparatory education programs (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Mena et al., 2017; Standal et al., 2013). Within the early stages of these programs, preservice teachers are generally limited in their exposure to experienced teachers. Previous research conducted in Ontario (Frank et al., 2015; Kane and Francis, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018) has shown that mentorships can effectively increase professional knowledge and give support to beginning teachers. Collaboration between and among education professionals within and across classrooms, schools, districts and systems is widely supported in research literature on effective professional learning (e.g. Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In a recent study, 80 percent of respondents reported that their best professional learning was in “collaboration with colleagues” (Beauchamp et al., 2013). Mentorship programs are an effective means to promote this type of collaboration and have the potential to reduce attrition, burnout and emotional exhaustion (Greenberg et al., 2016; Hsiang, 2016) for new teachers by providing an organized system where they (mentees) can speak with experienced teachers (mentors) – who have first-hand experiences and informed advice – about the realities of the profession. However, there are barriers to traditional mentorship involving space and time – more specifically, too much of one and not enough of the other. Virtual mentorships can help solve these problems in that they enable teachers to connect on their own time from any location via an online platform.

As a scholar and practitioner, I wanted to see whether the documented success of mentorships for improving teacher development as a way to increase some of the general indicators for achieving well-being (i.e. confidence, feeling well, socially connected (Davis, 2019)) could be applied in preservice teacher programs. Could virtual mentorships help preservice teachers develop this self-confidence and enhance well-being? To test this concept, I developed and implemented a virtual mentorship as a means to improve and create a better “nurturing system” earlier in teachers’ careers.

The virtual mentorship project was conducted in a preservice teacher education program in Ontario, Canada with three groups of participants (two groups in 2017 and one group in 2018) over a three-month period during the first term. In this paper, the findings are based on one data set: qualitative self-reports from mentee participants.
Context

Achieving well-being

Although well-being is a frequently invoked concept, there is no single definition, and it can, therefore, mean different things in different contexts. Alatartseva and Barysheva (2015) suggested that perhaps this is due to its subjective nature: “There is no unanimously agreed definition or approach of well-being. In turn, there are many interpretations” (p. 1). Consequently, there are ample discussions in various disciplines around how to achieve it. This section outlines the definition of well-being used in this paper.

First, a universal definition that includes “mental health and well-being” is consistent with that used by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2013). The WHO (2013) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” Generally speaking, well-being is just feeling well and happy combined with a sense of having a healthy, socially connected and purposeful life (Davis, 2019). Davis (2019) suggested that well-being can be framed by five common areas – emotional, physical, social, workplace and societal. However, each of the five types is connected to a person’s thoughts, actions and experiences. For example, when we think positively, we tend to have greater emotional well-being and can lead to enhanced well-being in other areas of our life. So then, how do we achieve positive thinking that leads to enhanced well-being? The answers are neither simple, nor is achieving well-being isolated by one event, incident, or personal involvement activity, but it does involve actions and experiences that collectively contribute to increased confidence and positive thinking that lead to well-being. As Davis (2019) suggested, “Growing your well-being is a lifelong pursuit” (n.p.). Therefore, in this study, well-being is referred to as an increase in confidence about one’s ability or feeling more prepared for their new teaching profession.

Many scholars have argued (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Byrne et al., 2015; Soutter et al., 2012; Vesley et al., 2014) that preservice teacher training programs should be the priority context for developing well-being competencies in teachers, and also for early promotion lifelong personal and professional development for achieving well-being. This state of enhancing well-being is intended to be enacted by providing a mentoring partnership (or experience) early in a prospective teacher’s career to support them by way of building their confidence in professional skills and knowledge during pre-career development stages. In some respects, it can be considered an early career intervention for building the foundations of lifelong well-being.

Mentorship program

As mentioned earlier, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced the NTIP in 2006. With increasing attrition rates among teachers in the first five years, NTIP was implemented to help recent graduates from preservice teacher education programs to transition into the teaching profession. Since 2006, NTIP has continued to be:

[...] a job-embedded step along a continuum of professional learning for new teachers, building on and complementing the first step: initial teacher education programs. It provides professional support to help new teachers develop the requisite skills and knowledge to be effective as teachers in Ontario. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 3)

Moreover, the intention of the program is to improve new teachers’ confidence, continue to support their professional learning and development by offering professional learning communities and provide a mentor (experienced teacher) in an effort to reduce the level of attrition among beginning teachers in Ontario. Specifically, the program includes the following elements: orientation for all new teachers to the school
and school board; mentoring for new teachers by experienced teachers; and professional
learning relevant to the individual needs of new teachers (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2018).

This project was an attempt to replicate this mentorship opportunity for preservice
teachers. In NTIP, a mentor (experienced teacher) is assigned to each new teacher to support
development in four core goal areas: build confidence, efficacy, instructional practice and
commitment to continuous learning. According to an evaluation of the NTIP (Kane and
Francis, 2013), of all the activities offered to new teachers in the NTIP, the mentor/
mentorship component was ranked most beneficial to the new teachers. An additional
report, conducted by Frank and associates (2015) on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of
Education, suggested that teachers in their first four years of NTIP attributed their overall
growth to two main factors: the availability of mentors when needed and their mentor’s
interest in their growth. Both reports concluded that having a mentor is advantageous to the
professional growth of new teachers and therefore points to a possible direction for
mentorships in teacher education programs.

One of the limitations of the NTIP program is eligibility. Teachers must be hired in a
permanent full-time or part-time position by a school board to begin the program. As well,
teachers who are working in a long-term contract position for 97 consecutive days or
longer are eligible. There are situations where teachers who do not meet the first two
criteria are permitted to participate in NTIP, but it is on a board-to-board basis. Although
the NTIP program has proven beneficial for new contract teachers, there are no such
programs from the Ministry for preservice teachers in teacher education programs. The
reality is that most newly certified teachers in Ontario experience up to a five-year wait
time, or more, from the time they graduate from teachers’ college to becoming eligible for
the NTIP program (with eligibility based on a signed, full-time teacher contract). Therefore,
many newly graduated teachers have been already occasional teaching/or
completing shorter term contracts (under 97 consecutive days) for up to two or three years
prior to meeting the NTIP eligibility, which means they have a gap between the end of
their teachers’ program and possibly up to three years before they are provided with any
additional professional support. As such, NTIP support may be coming too late to
discourage dropouts from the teaching profession.

Literature review

Well-being in preservice teacher programs

Although much scholarly attention is focused on student well-being, many researchers
(Byrne et al., 2015; McCallum and Price, 2010) have suggested that teachers’ well-being is
equally important. Alarmingly, numerous reports from various global studies have
indicated that teachers are struggling to achieve well-being, with up to 30 percent being
affected by burnout and psychological distress (Milatz et al., 2015); as a result, up to
40 percent of teachers leave the profession in under five years of service (Acton and
Glasgow, 2015). The emotional demands of the job not only impact teachers, but also
affect the educational, personal, social and emotional outcomes of students (Vesley et al.,
2014). As such, the promotion of teachers’ well-being is imperative: Recent attention has
been directed to teacher development programs for “addressing teachers-in-training who
are considered particularly even more vulnerable to the multitude of stressors found in the
early years of their careers, which is likely a major reason such a large number leave
teaching within the first 5–6 years” (Vesley et al., 2014, p. 82). Again, the reason many
scholars argue (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Byrne et al., 2015; Soutter et al., 2012; Vesley
et al., 2014) for earlier interventions, such as in the preservice teacher training program, is
to promote lifelong personal and professional development to enhance well-being sooner
rather than later in a teachers’ career.
Acton and Glasgow (2015) found that the most impactful of these initiatives focus on strategies that:

1. help empower teachers to better negotiate imposed systemic constraints;
2. manage emotional labor; and
3. support professional social networks for enabling greater possibilities for professional flourishing (p. 110).

However, Vesley et al. (2014) have suggested that further research is required to assess the effectiveness of particular strategies used in preservice teacher development programs directed at reducing teacher stress to improve well-being, and to find whether these interventions can help new teachers with the continuous achievement of well-being in the beginning of their careers to reduce the chance of teacher burnout in the first five years.

**Mlearning**

Recent studies (Carpenter and Morrison, 2018; Cochrane and Rhodes, 2013; Malanson et al., 2014) have pushed the limits of learning with various forms of mlearning (Cochrane and Rhodes, 2013, p. 374): mobile learning designed to disrupt and expand traditional in-class learning pedagogies. The outcomes of these studies have confirmed the positive effects of alternative professional learning in education. Specifically, mlearning enables its users to increase learning-based communication among all stakeholders using mobile devices (e.g. cell phones, tablets), which has a wider and easier reach than traditional classroom spaces. Numerous studies (e.g. Carpenter and Morrison, 2018; Malanson et al., 2014; Owen, 2015) that have integrated various forms of mlearning (i.e. social media, virtual mentorships) into pedagogical practices have reported positive learning outcomes. These studies confirm the possibility of combining traditional and innovative pedagogical methods not just for the classroom, but for professional learning as well.

**Mentoring in education**

As teacher stress rates have risen in the past decade, correlative rates of stress and burnout in the profession have also been documented, “especially among new teachers, at around 46 percent” (Hsiang, 2016, p. 5). There is no “one size fits all” approach to support teachers or their professional learning, and nor should there be (Campbell, 2017). However, mentoring is one type of opportunity that can help reduce new teachers’ fears about their role and feelings of isolation that negatively impact their mental health and professional practice, and thereby improve student outcomes.

Many teacher induction programs that include mentoring components have gained popularity worldwide (Ingersoll and Strong, 2004; Le Cornu, 2005), with varying formats, structures and content in different jurisdictions. Although a detailed description of mentoring programs across the globe is beyond the scope of this paper, Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) reported that most teacher mentoring programs have positive results; specifically, these programs help increase professional learning among teachers, which leads to increased student learning and decreased attrition rates among new teachers.

Mentoring does have its limitations, however. As Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) noted, mentorships tend to be hierarchical and concerned with acclimatizing new teachers to existing school and district structures, which can reinforce existing values and ways of working. According to Gless (2006), meaningful mentoring programs need to go beyond the paradigm of novices in survival mode, which limits their possibilities of professional growth. Moreover, critically discussing mentoring practice and identifying fundamental issues are necessary: as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) concluded, “Mentoring of new teachers will never reach its potential unless it is guided by a deeper conceptualization” (p. 50).
Researchers who study traditional, face-to-face mentoring programs (see, e.g. Achinstein and Athanases, 2006; Achinstein and Barrett, 2004; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Strong, 2009) have pointed to several issues that need to be considered when enacting such programs. These issues include:

- conflicting conceptions of teaching held by mentors and mentees;
- mentors’ lack of preparation to support teaching for equity and diversity;
- the tendency to follow traditional teacher development patterns that may unwittingly discourage or contradict teaching that meets the needs of diverse students; and
- emotional and personal challenges.

Apart from these noted challenges, however, there is still a wide array of mentorship possibilities to meet a variety of needs, experiences, interests, contexts and career stages. As mentioned earlier, two of the most common challenges related to providing quality mentorship are access and time (Campbell, 2017). Paired with money and distance constraints and a lack of formal structure, forming meaningful mentoring partnerships with experienced teachers, can be difficult.

**Virtual mentoring**

Virtual mentorships can help circumvent many of these issues (Greenberg et al., 2016). By eliminating time and other constraints, a virtual, asynchronous, technology-based approach provides a number of positive ways to encourage mentoring and a reflexive and constructive multidimensional pedagogy. This approach also provides valuable technological training in an expanding field of education, where blended and online methods help develop both effective peer-to-peer and peer–mentor dynamics.

Recent studies (Malanson et al., 2014; Owen, 2015; Reese, 2016) have noted both clear benefits and challenges that should be considered when implementing virtual mentorships. For example, Reese (2016), who specifically implemented a virtual mentorship in a preservice teaching program, explained:

> Virtual experiences were valuable but different from traditional mentoring experiences. The benefits were similar to those identified by traditional mentorships and the use of technology alleviated some challenges associated with face-to-face mentoring, but the challenges were deeper than access and time; it was the inability for mentees and mentors to facilitate deeper connections and reflections for learning. (p. 43)

Reese (2016, 2017) concluded that more research in virtual mentorship practices in preservice teacher programs is needed to consider strategies that can help foster deeper levels of conversation and connection. Owen and Whalley (2017) responded to some of these common challenges by creating the Virtual Mentoring CASE Model. The model is an attempt to provide a framework for virtual mentoring that includes four key stages (contextual, administration, scaffolding, empowering: CASE). At this point, Owen and Whalley (2017) suggested that more research is needed to confirm the model’s impact before it can be transitioned into various education contexts.

Overall, the concept behind participating and providing mentorship in education – and specifically with preservice teachers – emphasizes the importance of creating communicative spaces in which new teachers can speak openly with an experienced teacher. Within these spaces, prospective teachers can gain the following:

- increase in self-confidence before entering the teaching profession;
- development of pedagogical strategies such as classroom management;
- curriculum insights;
advice on how to deal with challenging issues in the class; career retention; mental health and coping strategies, and work–life balance; new perspectives on the teaching profession; nurturing and nonjudgmental support networks; and long-term professional relationships and friendships that are needed for early success in a teaching career.

Entering the profession with a deeper sense of pedagogical knowledge increases teachers’ self-confidence and efficacy – common characteristics that are difficult to target and needed in the beginning years of teaching (Owens and Whalley, 2017). Such feelings also acknowledge that emotional preparation is an equally important part of the preparatory process, in addition to professional and technical knowledge. The concept behind implementing virtual mentorships is to facilitate the benefits named above by eliminating many of the traditional barriers and as such improve new teachers’ well-being and prepare quality teachers for long, successful careers. As Reese (2016, 2017) suggested, however, more research is needed with mentorships to be clear on how to confirm this concept.

Methodology
It can be challenging for future teachers to find nongraded and nonthreatening situations in which they can discuss concerns and issues about teaching. They can join chat groups on Twitter or consult with friends who are teachers, but there is currently no formalized, structured mentoring partnership for teacher candidates outside of their practicum placements. Based on the success of mentoring in the NTIP implemented in Ontario, I decided to replicate mentorship in the teacher preparation program as a means to extend their learning and provide an external structure for authentic conversations about teaching. This study received ethical approval from the author’s academic institution and all participants signed a letter of consent prior to participating in the research. The focus of this research was guided by three main questions:

RQ1. In what ways do virtual mentors’ impact and benefit students’ professional learning and knowledge, improve self-confidence and enhance well-being?

RQ2. Does virtual mentoring help preservice teachers develop similar core areas (build confidence, efficacy, instructional practice and commitment to continuous learning) as demonstrated in the NTIP?

RQ3. How do we determine the limitations of virtual mentorship partnerships for future direction improvement delivery?

Participants
This research involved three groups of first-term preservice teachers in the Niagara University teacher education program (two groups in 2017 and one group in 2018); combined, there were 77 participants involved in a virtual mentorship over a three-month period during the first term of their program. I invited all preservice teachers in the course to voluntarily participate, and all 77 agreed. I identified 10 to 20 experienced (more than five years of teaching), certified[1] mentors using snowball sampling, and sent them information letters and invitations to participate as mentors. I then randomly selected and paired three to four mentees with a mentor into partnerships. Given the study aims, I did not collect data from the mentors. The participants (the preservice teacher candidates) did not receive any grades based on their survey responses from the virtual mentorship and ethical approval for the study was obtained from the author’s academic institution.
Research methods
I collected three sets of data in this mixed-methods study. The first data set was comprised of students’ journal logs, which used a KWL-AQ chart (know, want to know, learned, action and questions) to guide and organize students’ reflections on their conversations and learning during the mentorship. All students were required to complete the charts based on five big concept questions (5-BCQs) that guided the mentorship and pertained to the overarching fundamental concepts within the course learning outcomes. The 5-BCQs included What do teachers do to facilitate learning? What is a good teacher? What is effective teaching? What is learning? and How do teachers engage and motivate students? The second set of data, an anonymous mixed-methods survey, was completed after the end of the 13-week mentorship. I used the survey to determine students’ perceptions about their experience and gain feedback about the virtual mentoring process. The final data set was comprised of conceptual papers in which students wrote summaries, based on a set of criteria, to reflect upon their overall learning during the process of their mentorship. For the purposes of this paper, I solely present the mixed-methods survey results, as they connect most directly to the purpose of this study – to determine the impact of virtual mentorships on beginning teachers.

Data collection
I collected data for this project during a required theory course – EDU 432 Human Development, Learning and Motivation – over a three-month semester. Mentors and mentees connected via online mediums such as Skype, FaceTime and Google Hangouts for a minimum of five sessions over the three-month period. I provided the mentees with specific questions and reflection tasks to help guide their mentorship and contribute to their professional knowledge about teaching. At the end of the mentorship and course, the mentee participants completed a 13-question mixed-method survey.

Data analysis
I analyzed the mixed-methods survey results using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. I entered the data from the ten quantitative questions into Google Forms, and a computer-generated percentage analysis of each question was formulated based on the possible four responses to the questions (i.e. strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). I have illustrated these results using circle graphs, which are included in the findings section. The three qualitative questions of the survey asked students to state two most positive aspects of the mentorship, two most challenging aspects of the mentorship and any overall concluding comments about their mentorship experience. I conducted qualitative analysis by consolidating, reducing and interpreting student responses; in essence, I employed a process of making meaning with an open text (Merriam, 2009). Based on the responses to the three qualitative questions, I identified themes and sub-themes. I then re-read the questions and coded each response based on the themes and generated a bar graph to demonstrate the collected responses.

Findings
The findings confirmed that virtual mentorship can be enriching and unique out-of-classroom opportunities; specifically, these types of mentorships can meaningfully enhance preservice teachers’ professional knowledge and support their sense of well-being in ways that would otherwise be difficult to achieve from textbooks or their peers. According to the survey results, participants overwhelmingly felt that the virtual mentorship had positive effects. Regarding the positive impact of the virtual mentorship on their professional learning and insights about teaching, all five of the related survey questions had responses
in the agree or strongly agree areas, collectively resulting in a consistent 75 percent positive response. Figures 1–5 depict the specific responses to each question.

When students were asked if they planned to continue the mentorship communication after the course, 70 percent said they did not (see Figure 6). This is an important insight, as it indicates that students did not view the continuation of the relationship between mentor and mentee as possible beyond the course requirement completion. Even with the ease, structure 

![Figure 1.](image1)
**My professional learning has transformed since this project**

- Strongly Agree: 17.1%
- Agree: 68.4%
- Disagree: 14.5%
- Strongly Disagree: 14.5%

![Figure 2.](image2)
**My professional learning has increased with the help of my virtual mentor**

- Strongly Agree: 21.8%
- Agree: 66.7%
- Disagree: 9.0%
- Strongly Disagree: 2.6%

![Figure 3.](image3)
**I feel that my professional learning from my mentor will help me become a more effective teacher**

- Strongly Agree: 29.9%
- Agree: 54.5%
- Disagree: 13.0%
- Strongly Disagree: 2.6%
and accessibility of the virtual set-up, mentees did not automatically feel that the relationship would or could continue in the long term because the mentorship structure did not include any criteria or expectation for continuation beyond the course (although the virtual aspect did allow for this). This implies that, in future incarnations designed to create mentorships that begin in preservice but continue into mentees’ early careers, the intention of longevity must be emphasized as an aim from the start, as in this research this did not occur naturally.
When the participants were asked if the mentorship helped them extend their learning beyond the classroom, 87 percent either agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 7).

The participants’ positive view of the program was also reflected in their descriptions of the two most positive professional learning aspects of the mentorship (see Figure 8). Forty participants mentioned the ability to talk with a “real” (practising) teacher, and 47 participants specifically referenced gaining insight about becoming a teacher. Of these 47 responses, three themes emerged: accessing professional advice (35), building their confidence (7) and learning about new professional resources (5). As well, 32 made general comments about gaining insight into various teaching strategies, such as differentiated instruction, classroom management, motivating students and parental relationships; five specifically mentioned the opportunity to learn about and use new technology to conduct their mentorship.

When the participants were asked to describe their most significant learning experience, the themes overwhelmingly mentioned were gaining advice about teaching. Most participants also reiterated the point about listening to real experiences, advice, resources and strategies from a practising teacher about being in the classroom and educational approaches. Some specific comments related to the overall advice they had received included “get to know your students,” “be okay with making mistakes,” “truly care about your students,” “be passionate about your work,” and “always be searching for new ways of teaching and improving for meeting the needs of all students.” Others commented that they
felt the most significant take-away was feeling motivated by their mentors’ passion and dedication for teaching – all of which are contributing factors to participants’ well-being.

Participants were also asked to identify the two least positive learning aspects of the virtual mentorship (see Figure 9). The responses overwhelmingly and consistently (41) indicated that lack of time to meet was the least positive aspect. Participants noted that there were many barriers to finding a time to meet, including differing schedules between mentees and mentors and the inflexibility of everyone’s schedules. The next issues included mentor seemed uninterested (12), meetings were too short (13) and the structure of the 5-BCQs were limiting and repetitive (14). A few other least positive aspects were mismatch in teaching interest (4), technology problems (4), and desire to meet face-to-face (4). It is also worth mentioning that three participants felt overwhelmed with the amount of information.

Participants were asked, in two questions, to rate their confidence about entering the teaching field after the virtual mentorship (see Figures 10 and 11). Most participants felt that what they learned from the mentorship was helpful (84 percent) and they felt more confident about entering the profession (85 percent).

Directly related to one of the objectives of the virtual mentorship was to help preservice teachers connect the insights they gained from their mentors to events and experiences in the classroom. Participants were asked if they were able to make connections between their virtual mentorship meetings and discussion about the 5-BCQs, and what they were seeing...
during their observation days in the classroom (see Figure 12). There was an exceptionally positive response: 83 percent of participants agreed that they were able to see the ideas implemented in their practicum classrooms.

Overall, there was a strong consensus among the preservice teacher candidates that the virtual mentorship was an extremely positive experience that provided professional learning and personal insights into teaching that would not have necessarily happened within class time. The data also indicate common themes that participants gained a sense of motivation and confidence in the course of the virtual mentorship – feelings that are central to supporting well-being. These three examples of participant comments are indicative of the positivity felt by participants from the mentorship and demonstrative of the increased level of confidence necessary for supporting well-being:

Before the mentorship, I felt like a teacher candidate, but working with my mentor made me feel more like a professional teacher, boosting my confidence, and alleviating feelings of inadequacy that may have negatively impacted my ability to work with students in complex classrooms.

The most significant learning I experienced through this virtual mentorship of active learning with my mentor was that he taught myself and my group members that it is okay to make mistakes because that is how you are going to learn about teaching. He was comforting and he made us feel comfortable that we didn’t know or have all the answers.

My mentor encouraged me to stay positive and that this career path is totally worth it – I can’t wait! Having a mentor was great to help boost my confidence.
Overall, the findings indicate that virtual mentorships positively impacted and benefited preservice teachers’ professional learning and knowledge, which contributed to greater self-confidence and enhanced well-being; virtual mentoring helped preservice teachers build confidence, efficacy, instructional practice and commitment to continuous learning; and there are limitations around virtual mentorships that must be addressed in future efforts.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate positive outcomes of using virtual mentorships to increase professional learning and knowledge in the first three months of teacher candidate preparatory programs. This increase in professional capacity can be seen as a way of contributing to, supporting and enhancing the well-being of prospective teachers in the earliest stages of their careers and is in alignment with recent literature (Davis, 2019) that suggests well-being is not solely achieved in single events or from isolated feelings, but from situations that can inspire a lifelong pursuit supported by feelings of confidence. The survey data show that participants felt the mentorships increased their professional knowledge in certain areas, such as the importance of building relationships with students and the school community. Participants also commented that their professional confidence was increased because they gained a better understanding about the realities of teaching from someone in the profession – both of which are limited or non-existent in the classroom context. In other words, the virtual mentorship increased participants’ professional knowledge, which in turn reduced their fear associated with the unknown and enabled them to gather new perspectives about teaching practices and to gain confidence about transitioning into the teaching profession. The reduction of participants’ fears is in alignment with current literature (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Davis, 2019) on well-being: it is one of the criteria or conditions necessary to maintain a sense of well-being, and is connected to increased confidence in professional knowledge and skills.

Another important outcome of this study is that it demonstrates the efficacy of virtual mentorships in the development of nurturing systems that provide early support to teachers as a means to increase their professional knowledge and well-being. Moreover, implementing virtual mentoring partnerships as a proactive practice can circumvent barriers of proximity and time (Greenberg et al., 2016) and support the well-being of prospective teachers early in their careers. Based on the findings, this study has three overarching implications for teacher education programs looking to enhance the well-being of preservice teachers in teacher preparation programs: preservice teachers can gain valuable knowledge about teaching such as teaching strategies (e.g. classroom management, diversified learning approaches, parental involvement) and professional knowledge and resources (e.g. parental involvement, classroom technology); they can learn about and from “real” experiences from practising teachers, especially situational knowledge about what happens in the classroom on a day-to-day basis; and they can receive professional advice about the teaching profession for moving forward in their teaching career, which can make them feel more confident about becoming a teacher. Collectively, these findings align with Acton and Glasgow’s (2015) review of the current literature: the social networks formed in virtual mentorships can meaningfully benefit prospective teachers as a preventative and proactive approach for supporting indicators of well-being (i.e. confidence in practical and professional skills) not only during their preparatory years but also as a lifelong approach.

The data confirm the value of using communicative technology to facilitate mentorships: It provides the means for preservice teachers to “meet” with their mentors in asynchronous or synchronous sessions to explore ideas and issues. In some cases, the preservice teachers expressed that developing a working mentor–mentee relationship online prior to a hands-on, face-to-face setting created great feelings of safety (Watson, 2006). In this way, the
virtual mentorships circumvented some of the access challenges; moreover, the participants found that learning how to communicate with their mentor using an unknown technology – despite some first-time user challenges – was an educational opportunity for them. It is also worth noting that only a small number (four of 77) of participants found not being able to meet face-to-face with their mentor as a least positive aspect. This may be due to demographics: The generation entering the teaching profession is younger and as such has – generally speaking – high levels of digital literacy. It is not a stretch to infer that years of experience communicating digitally would lead to a sense of comfort communicating in a virtual medium.

With the barrier of access removed, the participants confirmed that they benefited from talking with an experienced teacher about teaching and becoming a teacher. According to the literature social networks (Acton and Glasgow, 2015) a feeling of confidence in one’s professional knowledge and skills (Davis, 2019) helps enhance well-being. In this study, participants reported that the virtual relationship made them feel more confident about teaching and helped them connect the concepts being taught in their classes to practical knowledge in the field. Another significant aspect of the findings is confirmation that mentor–mentee relationships are less fraught when they are collegial in nature, rather than based on marking schemes that involve expectation and compliance. Nevertheless, the virtual medium did not diminish the challenge of time. According to the participants, and consistent with other studies (Owens, 2015; Reese, 2016), the least positive aspect about the mentorship was scheduling times to virtually meet with their mentor: The time component had to be determined according to the availability of both mentor and the group of two to three mentees. Time is a precious commodity, and there are not many solutions to alleviate this challenge in both traditional and virtual mentorships. Nonetheless, a virtual approach to mentorship is one manageable solution to equip prospective teachers with the tools they need to increase their professional knowledge and improve their well-being.

For many teacher candidates, their initial training program is the opportunity to develop the quality of their knowledge and pedagogical teaching skills and instill the practice of lifelong professional learning – an ideal time to forge meaningful mentorships and set the foundations for supporting a lifelong pursuit of well-being. However, given that teacher candidates do not access the benefits afforded by the NTIP program for up to five years, preservice candidates do not benefit from mentorships early enough; when they eventually do form mentorships within the NTIP framework, these relationships can be hindered by the constraints of time, money, distance and lack of formal structure. Virtual mentorships are a viable solution to some of these consistent problems. In this study specifically, the two most cited benefits of the mentorship were the opportunity to talk with a teacher and gain professional advice – both of which are limited in early stages of their program. This indicates that mentorship opportunities should be included and encouraged in the teacher education preparation programs, and that virtual communicative technology can make this possible.

Previous studies (Achinstein and Athanases, 2006; Achinstein and Barrett, 2004; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Owen and Whalley, 2017; Reese, 2016; Strong, 2009) have raised concerns about the possibility of mentors giving biased or conflicting advice to mentees; this phenomenon was not apparent in this study. I believe this can be explained by the nature and structure of the virtual mentorships: They were short-term, voluntary, framed by casual conversations, guided by focal questions about teaching, and nonevaluative for both the mentee and mentor. This underscores that the context of the mentorship and the role of mentor are extremely important and emphasizes that mentors must use this position of power, both ideological and professional, responsibly and ethically. Owen and Whalley’s (2017) CASE model provides an excellent framework to help alleviate these pitfalls.

In this study, although mentors were voluntary participants, they were recruited based on recommendations from trusted teacher colleagues who had a strong network of
like-minded teachers. In future incarnations, mentors who are not only experienced teachers, but have also actively developed mentoring skills – for example, in mentor training courses – will be best prepared to work with new and/or preservice teachers in an individual and systemized environment. The skill of mentoring (e.g. interest in supporting other teachers; being giving and open in terms of sharing ideas, advice and guidance; imparting strategies; fostering inclusiveness and openness; having awareness and understanding of cognitive–behavioral issues; being a constructivist thinker; believing in community building and modalities of support; advocating for social justice and diversity models) can be innate, or stem from pedagogical–philosophical approaches. Mentors’ own ability to remain in the teaching profession and develop sustainable personal and social strategies for maintaining their well-being (i.e. surviving, overcoming challenges, managing their own stress) – in addition to their knowledge on curricular and student-management issues – can both actively and indirectly support and model to preservice and emerging teachers how to achieve well-being (Watson, 2006).

**Future success guide**

Indeed, there is no “one size fits all” approach to professional learning in teacher learning or teacher development programs in Canada, and nor should there be (Campbell 2017, p. 8). There is a need for a wide array of professional learning opportunities that can accommodate a variety of experiences, needs, interests, contexts and career stages. The main take-away is that mentoring is an opportunity that can help increase professional knowledge and help new teachers reduce certain fears – fears that, when left unchecked (or to be solved on their own), can spiral into feelings of isolation that can negatively affect their professional practice and well-being. Overall, the findings demonstrate that forging connections between practising teachers and preservice teachers earlier rather than later is advantageous to preservice teachers’ professional growth and confidence in teaching that lead to an improved sense of well-being. The findings confirm the concept behind engaging in virtual mentorships as a way to enhance well-being among prospective teachers – that they are positive and beneficial, that emotional preparedness is highly important and that creating open, nonjudgmental spaces in which new teachers can learn from experienced teachers is crucial – and provide a viable solution to closing the gap between preservice and experienced teachers during the early stages of the teacher education program: the preservice teachers had an opportunity to ask questions about teaching in a nonthreatening and nonjudgmental environment, because the virtual mentor teachers were not evaluating them in any way.

Using the evidence from this study, paired with the existing literature, future studies could further explore the specific impact of virtual mentoring on the graduates from preservice teacher education programs as a means to enhance well-being for prospective teachers. Future research questions could include the following:

- Is there a timeframe that works best? Is a two-year mentor–mentee program more effective than one of shorter duration?
- Is there a way to measure the effectiveness of different formats (asynchronous or synchronous capacity, as through a webinar Skype one-on-one or even group situation) through either longitudinal effects or the number of times that the mentor and mentee formally and officially meet?
- What are potential ways to work around the barriers related to time and challenges related to building mentor–mentee relationships?
- How can mentor–mentee relationships and partnerships be enhanced so that they specifically improve well-being in the pre-career stages of graduates from preservice teacher education programs?
How can the longevity of the mentoring partnerships be improved to ensure they support graduates from preservice teacher education programs beyond the preparatory stages?

At the policy level, integrating mandatory virtual mentorships into the preservice program has the potential to have a lasting impact on teacher efficacy and well-being. The hope is that, based on success rates in Ontario, other ministries of education adopt similar initiatives and direction in the pursuit of creating quality teachers and education systems that support the well-being of educators.

**Limitations**

As Clutterbuck has contended, there is often a lack of precision in mixed-method (and/or qualitative) research in terms of fully and completely defining a researchers’ meaning – what is a mentor; how are they mentoring; what is it that the study is intending to measure, exactly; how can we effectively measure or compare one study to another, and so on. In this study, I have attempted to avoid some of these pitfalls by specifically developing and writing about virtual mentorships in the preservice education system and the impact these may have on new teachers in Ontario. This research project was a starting point for a general exploration of the impact of virtual mentorships on preservice teachers to enhance a level of well-being, and as such I did not include the mentors in this study in the data collection process or collect additional qualitative data; doing so in a future, more comprehensive study could yield rich, insightful details. Further research to measure and fully explore the impact and processes of a virtual mentorship from both perspectives is needed. As well, adding various frameworks, such as social justice, could potentially reveal how embedded systems of power (e.g. racism, sexism, etc.) may or may not impact mentorship outcomes and, in the long term, help inform an inclusive system of possible mentor–mentee relations that does not reproduce inequalities, power structures and biased knowledge.

**Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that a virtual mentor–mentee experience positively impacted the professional knowledge and well-being of preservice teachers in Ontario. Overall, the participants found the virtual mentor format to be manageable; they increased their knowledge about “real” experiences from the classroom and gained motivating and encouraging advice from experienced teachers. In terms of practical implications, this research has shown the importance of establishing and promoting mentorship programs in the first three months of teacher education programs to establish an accelerated professional learning process. This research also confirms Ericsson’s (2006) finding that increasing preservice teachers’ level of participation in the knowledge construction process – in this case, mentoring – from the outset can accelerate the development of their expertise.

A virtual mentorship program, embedded in teacher education programs, is a viable solution for shaping preservice teachers in the early stages of their careers, establishing a commitment to professional learning and mitigating teacher attrition rates and burnout by improving well-being among prospective teachers. For these reasons, virtual mentorships can be used as a nurturing strategy for the future. By using a novice-to-expert approach as a way of considering how preservice teacher candidates can enhance their well-being by learning about teaching and acquire experience-based professional knowledge that they cannot gain from textbooks alone, new teachers will feel more prepared for the realities of the job in the early stages of their profession and have the tools they need to promote their own well-being throughout their hopefully long and meaningful careers.
Note
1. By the Ontario College of Teachers.

References


Corresponding author
Patricia Briscoe can be contacted at: pbriscoe@niagara.edu
The well-being of the early career teacher: a review of the literature on the pivotal role of mentoring

Vicki Squires
Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the extant literature with regard to the role of mentorship in promoting the well-being of early career teachers.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper was comprised of a review of the current literature. Key terms were used to identify initial sources. The search was narrowed further by using the Boolean operator AND to link key terms.

Findings – Much of the literature exploring mentorship and induction focuses on the formal structures and the targeted learning outcomes of the processes. However, the emotional and personal support afforded new teachers through the development of relationships with mentors is being recognized as contributing high value to the continued retention efforts. Although there are promising practices with regard to induction programs and formal mentorship arrangements in some schools, these practices are very scattered and may not even be equally well established within one school district.

Research limitations/implications – Implementation of models that are focused on personal and professional support of new teachers could provide an avenue of research examining teachers’ perceptions of well-being and resiliency. Longitudinal, pan-provincial and pan-national research is necessary for developing more support for systemic implementation of mentorship models.

Originality/value – While there is research identifying existing programs and induction models, this paper uses the lens of early career teacher well-being to point out promising practices and additional considerations for adopting a holistic approach to mentorship. This mentorship model may result in better personal and professional outcomes for new teachers.

Keywords Relationships, Teacher well-being, Mentorship, Early career teachers

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction
Deeper investigation of induction and mentoring practices for early career teachers has become more urgent given the emergent recognition of alarming attrition rates for this group. Recognition of the critical nature of mentorship in terms of new teacher induction is evident in the adoption of mentoring programs globally (Kardos and Johnson, 2010; Kutsyuruba, 2012). Although much research has supported the positive outcomes of formal induction and mentoring practices (cf. Adams and Woods, 2015), the implementation of such practices has been uneven across districts, provinces and across Canada. Interestingly, a recent pan-Canadian study reported that only 27 percent of early career teachers across Canada identified that they had been part of a formal mentorship program during their first year of teaching (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica, 2017).

Formal mentoring programs help establish collegial norms and facilitate the engagement of new teachers in the life of the schools and in the professional learning structures, such as school learning communities (Kutsyuruba, 2012). As Shanks (2017) pointed out, “Mentoring in teacher education often has the dual aims of personal support and professional learning because the mentee receives assistance to assimilate into a new role as well as to develop instructional skills” (p. 159). Better understanding of mentorship programs with teacher education programs could help with transitioning into a mentorship model with early career teachers. Most existing programs appear to be focused on professional growth with little consideration of the emotional and social benefits of a holistic model. Less evident in the
research is the crucial role of mentors in facilitating the well-being of early career teachers from a more holistic sense. This paper will examine key considerations, as highlighted in the literature, for the implementation of processes that focus not only on the professional learning outcomes of mentoring, but also on the facilitation and ongoing support for teacher well-being. Several conceptual frameworks that focus on well-being (Seligman, 2011), thriving schools (Cherkowski and Walker, 2018) and flourishing learning communities (Cherkowski and Walker, 2013) will be further explicated as examples of potential foundational principles that could be used in the development of a holistic mentorship model that promotes professional growth and personal well-being for early career teachers.

Methodological approach
The purpose of the study was to examine current literature on the role of mentorship as a process to support the well-being of new teachers. Given that this was a literature review, no institutional ethics approval was required. Research was limited to primary, peer-reviewed sources; while most of the articles and books were published within the last decade, several seminal articles within the 2000–2010 time period were included. The databases used in the search included Education Database, ERIC and Google Scholar. To conduct the search, a number of terms were used: “teacher induction,” “teacher mentorship,” “mentorship in schools,” “early career teacher” and most importantly, “teacher well-being.” The search was narrowed further using the Boolean operator AND between terms. For example, a search was conducted using the term “teacher induction” AND “mentorship.” In addition, reference lists from articles published within the last five years were mined for further resources on these topics. While some articles were useful for providing context on the current state of mentorship, other sources focused on aspects of well-being and the promotion of well-being. An examination of the topics and subtopics from these articles suggested headings that served as a framework for this study.

Understanding well-being
Critical to developing a holistic model is providing a foundational understanding of well-being and the promotion of well-being in schools. This section will articulate the concept of well-being and examine several conceptual frameworks that can support the notion of a holistic mentorship model. First, Seligman’s (2011) conceptualization of well-being will be described and then examined through the lens of application to a mentorship model. Second, Cherkowski and Walker’s (2018) description of a thriving school will be explored as a framework for promoting well-being in schools and will be further articulated with regard to early career teachers within thriving schools.

Well-being is a term that incorporates a broad view of connection, contentment and sense of purpose. There are various definitions of this term, such as that proposed by Seligman (2011) who described well-being as having five areas: positive emotions, engagement, meaning, relationships and achievement. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1986) offered an explanation of well-being in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: “To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment” (p. 1). Furthermore, “Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life: where they learn, work, play and love” (WHO, 1986, p. 4). As evidenced by this explanation, organizations, including schools, can include practices and ways of working that facilitate well-being. For example, Seligman’s (2011) five dimensions of well-being (positive emotions, engagement, meaning, relationships and achievement) can serve as guideposts for the way schools and school divisions work. If schools focus on student engagement and the development of relationships among staff and students, a sense of well-being can be fostered. Although schools usually have a strategic
plan outlining priorities and objectives, these school goals may not seem relevant to all
individuals and, thus, have no meaning for some of the schools’ members. However, if
schools identify specific meaningful, school-wide goals that are achievable and involve
everyone, engagement will be higher. Furthermore, as Seligman suggested, if schools
highlight the achievement of those goals, not only is meaning and engagement enhanced but
also positive emotions are propagated throughout the school community. By bringing
clarity to the goals and then ensuring that everyone understands their respective roles, all
community members will find meaning and purpose in their work.

In the context of mentorship, Seligman’s (2011) dimensions of well-being have further
applicability. Mentors can use these pillars or guideposts to understand how best to
support the novices’ well-being. Focusing on positive emotions can ensure that
accomplishments are recognized and constructive feedback is framed in such a way that
mentees feel supported and valued. Relationships are built on these positive and affirming
interactions, where trust develops and challenges are seen as learning opportunities.
Mentors can help novices set personal and professional goals and provide the necessary
support and guidance to achieve these goals. Helping mentees focus on what is the end
goal establishes purpose and meaning to the work, especially when the “going gets tough”
and the challenges seem overwhelming. When the importance and value of teachers’ work
is emphasized, early career teachers can see the bigger picture and stay engaged in the
meaningful work of facilitating student growth. Furthermore, helping the mentees remain
excited and engaged in the work through sharing ideas and providing guidance are
critical elements of mentors’ roles. Finally, celebrating achievements, large and small, are
essential milestones for maintaining motivation of mentors and mentees. Both groups can
become re-energized when milestones are recognized on a personal level or more broadly
by other staff members, students, parents, the whole school or the school district.
Understanding and using this framework has implications, though, for school districts
and teacher training programs in terms of structuring learning opportunities, highlighting
these practices that facilitate well-being. Mentors need support in order to more fully
incorporate these practices into their work with mentees.

The importance of developing and maintaining well-being has become increasingly
apparent and applies across personal and professional settings. Educational institutions are
essential in promoting this imperative. University programs that prepare teachers have the
responsibility for highlighting the need to pay attention to wellness during the students’
academic program and beyond into the workplace. By facilitating the development of
wellness practices, early career teachers are more aware of key considerations for staying
well (Kalyn et al., 2018). Furthermore, university graduate programs for educational
leadership can emphasize the importance of leaders within schools promoting well-being
and ensuring that all staff members understand that imperative (Squires, 2018). If
post-secondary campuses can promote promising practices and initiatives that facilitate
well-being, they have the potential to proliferate the understanding of well-being across
multiple disciplines and, through the development of future leaders, across multiple local
and global communities (Okanagan Charter, 2015). Dollansky et al. (2018) contended that
“those who nurture beginning teachers, including people working in universities, colleges,
school divisions, or as in-school administrators, must acknowledge the importance of the
mentorship process in supporting beginning teachers’ personal and professional needs”
(p. 280). Additionally, explicit development of mentorship skills is essential to ensure that
mentors understand how to best facilitate these practices (Callahan, 2016).

They contended that well-being is facilitated in thriving schools; there are four key signals of a
thriving school: noticing, nurturing, sustaining and flourishing (Cherkowski and Walker,
2018). While the establishment of a “flourishing pedagogy” (Cherkowski and Walker, 2018)
can help all teachers, it can be argued that the inclusion of novice teachers is especially important in that process. First, noticing means engagement in self-reflection and taking time to deliberately cast back over what has transpired and its implications for future action. Mentors can provide essential guidance in how to engage in self-reflective practice and how to set up personal inquiry goals based on that reflection. Second, nurturing occurs not only through providing opportunities for growth with regard to professional practice, but also through exemplifying compassion, trust and hope in interactions with others, as noted by Cherkowski and Walker. Although nurturing can promote development of professional competencies through mentoring and professional development, nurturing also includes providing a safe and welcoming space where mentees can feel emotionally supported. Third, sustaining well-being in a thriving school requires collective effort; members of the community care for each other, provide support, create a welcoming environment and promote engagement through innovative, positive activities that work toward collective goals of well-being as well as academic achievement. This practice can be extended to a learning community of mentors and mentees within a school district who can investigate practices of support, development and encouragement for both roles. Fourth, flourishing requires conscious engagement of all members of the community. Leaders and mentors can work together to open up those spaces for mentees to grow and flourish. They can provide the groundwork for the novice teachers to grow into their professional roles and provide the critical support for the personal, professional, emotional and social well-being of the mentees. There is a shared leadership approach as formal leaders and mentors, as well as informal leaders and mentors, become involved in the work of facilitating the development of the mentees. The role of formal leadership in establishing and sustaining this climate is fundamental. Not only do they provide time and resources to the mentorship teams, they model behaviors of compassion, hope and trust. They demonstrate that they are invested in the well-being of their novice teachers, through genuinely engaging in conversations and regularly “checking in” with not only the mentees but also the mentors.

Research emphasizes the necessity of a focus on the emotional supports for new teachers. Well-constructed induction processes help early career teachers develop a feeling of connectedness with the profession (Dollansky et al., 2018; Kutsyuruba, 2012). Moreover, they develop a sense of belonging, feel valued and are well positioned to build relationships with colleagues and students (Bayles et al., 2018). Furthermore, the emotional support provided by the mentors was essential for mentees in facing new challenges in their new roles (Hellsten et al., 2017). However, the way in which mentorship is structured and enacted influences the actual outcomes for novice teachers.

**Mentorship: formal and informal systems**

*Mentor characteristics*

One of the crucial elements of a successful mentorship is the mentor themselves in terms of their attitudes, expertise and interpersonal skills (Callahan, 2016). Often mentors are chosen for the role because of their experience in the profession; formal training for mentorship is often cited as a barrier to effective mentorship (Langdon and Ward, 2015; Thornton, 2014). There are few incentives for serving as a mentor, and indeed, there are added responsibilities and expectations. Martin et al. (2016) posited that leaders should select mentors very carefully; furthermore, leaders need to ensure that those selected teachers are qualified to act as mentors and receive proper preparation to serve effectively in that capacity. For example, the mentors should strive to give targeted feedback that is linked to their observations. Langdon and Ward (2015) added that effective mentors question their own practices and engage in life-long learning to ensure that they continue to meet the educational goals of their students. Mentors should have demonstrated capacity in interpersonal skills, leadership skills and instructional effectiveness as well as having...
content- and grade-level expertise that is relevant for the mentees with whom they are matched (Callahan, 2016). Not only are the mentors’ skills essential, but the matching of the mentors and mentees is highly influential on the personal and professional outcomes of the relationships.

Matching mentors
Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica (2017) reported that, in a pan-Canadian survey of early career teachers, 82 percent identified that they received professional development from their district, 73 percent received informal mentorship and only 27 percent reported receiving formal mentorship. In this study, mentees described challenges such as resource constraints and the added pressure of trying to find time to meet with the mentor. While some mentees indicated that they would rather have had a mentor from a like grade-level assignment, others noted that they preferred having mentors from within their own school or community (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica, 2017). Some mentees felt that there was a perceived power dynamic that posed a problem in the relationship, with mentees reporting that they felt inferior (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica, 2017).

Lozinak (2016) emphasized that having mentors in the same school improved the induction process. The accessibility of the mentors created a stronger perception of support among the mentees. Kardos and Johnson (2010) countered that, while the convenience of having a mentor in the same building facilitates support that is close at hand, matching for the same grade level or subject area is more difficult to achieve and yet would better support the mentee with substantive interactions focused on best teaching practices. Interestingly, Kardos and Johnson (2010) noted that the focus on teaching support was less likely to happen in schools situated in low-socioeconomic areas or in teaching areas that were more difficult to staff, such as science and mathematics. This finding suggested that there is a shortage of potential mentors in those positions who have the expertise to guide a mentee in the content areas or in understanding the context of the community.

The development of the mentor–mentee relationship
Based on the results from their study of early career teachers, Broad and Muhling (2017) purported that the development of supportive and collaborative relationships between the mentors and mentees was critical in facilitating the mentees’ work, learning and optimism. Of note, though, is that the “bureaucratic structure of formal mentoring may be disconnected from the relationships that form between new teachers and their mentors and the interactions that occur in the context of those relationships” (Kardos and Johnson, 2010, p. 41). Processes should not negatively impact the potential of developing an honest and supportive relationship.

Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015) contended that trust needs to be built between not only the mentor and the mentee, but also between the mentor and administrator and between the administrator and the mentee. In this tridimensional relationship, a healthy culture that fosters well-being and professional growth can develop (Kutsyuruba and Walker, 2015). According to Hiscoe (2018), “Trust is the glue that holds social networks and relationships together and is significant in effective workplace cultures” (p. 255). Martin et al. (2016) concurred and highlighted that the relationships between mentors and mentees should be built upon strong relationships and mutual trust, so the feedback from mentors is perceived as helpful rather than judgmental. The mentor–mentee relationship itself, whether formal or informal, had a crucial and far-reaching impact on novice teachers’ induction; the culmination of positive and negative experiences within that dyad had a significant influence on how the interactions were received (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson et al., 2017).
Daly and Milton (2017) posited that mentors need to recognize the time it takes to build trust that then serves as a foundation for genuine engagement and reflexivity, for the mentor as well as the mentee.

The role of leaders
In Campbell’s (2017) study of research, policies and practices to support professional development and learning of Canadian teachers, she noted that there was great disparity in opportunities and resources focused on professional development among and between provinces and territories. Furthermore, she argued that teachers at all stages of their careers should have equitable access to quality professional learning, including mentorship for early career teachers. This disparity across provinces and districts of access to key learning opportunities, and to a robust mentorship program, is a finding echoed by others (Kardos and Johnson, 2010; Kutsyuruba et al., 2016).

The in-school administration holds a critical role in ensuring that there are adequate supports. Not only are they responsible for choosing mentors and matching mentors with mentees, they need to carve out professional development opportunities and adequate release time for novice teachers (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016). Furthermore, across jurisdictions, administrators are responsible for “overseeing the mentorship process, for monitoring the progress of early career teachers, and finally, and most importantly, for being role models of mentoring in their everyday activities in schools” (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016, p. 65). Leadership is a key to imparting the importance of these processes. As indicated by Kutsyuruba, Walker and Godden (2017), Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica (2017), only 45 percent of mentees agreed or strongly agreed that the “school administrator took an active interest in their successful induction into teaching” (p. 31). Yet leaders are recognized as essential in establishing the structures and providing adequate resources for mentorship (Bayles et al., 2018; Squires, 2018; Walker and Kutsyuruba, 2019). Leadership includes not only the in-school administration who can leverage resources to support the development of the mentorship, but also the central administration who can provide additional resources, implement the district-wide initiatives such as induction programs, and elevate the status of these practices by championing mentorship throughout the district.

Although the formal in-school leadership has responsibility for and provides oversight of the formal mentorship programs across districts, other leaders within the school can be an additional resource for new teachers. Administrators have argued that a team approach would better meet the needs of new teachers and broaden the foundation of support for mentees (Lozinak, 2016). According to Lozinak (2016), these administrators recognized that formal leadership is an important element; however, their efforts should be bolstered by other leaders and processes.

Similarly, Martin et al. (2016) advocated for a blended approach with a structured, formal and systemic process as well as more individual support targeted to the more specific needs of that particular early career teacher. Mentors could play a pivotal role in both contexts. Morin et al. (2017) agreed and stated that formal mentorship could be supplemented by job-alike communities of practice. Kutsyuruba, Walker and Godden (2017) contended that mentorship programs should evolve from the expert and novice relationship to the development of a culture centered on continuous professional development and personal support. These suggestions align with the model of professional and networked learning communities (NLCs).

Professional and NLCs
Learning communities focus the efforts of its members on agreed-upon goals. The structures and processes of a professional learning community (PLC) provide a base for developing shared goals and for encouraging collaboration and engagement with others in
Within learning communities, relationships built on trust are key in working collaboratively on these mutual goals (Katz and Earl, 2010). Principles of a learning community suggest a strong structure for promotion not only of academic achievement, but also for promotion of a sense of belonging and for building personal relationships and emotional connections.

For example, Cherkowski and Walker (2013) contended that the learning community model could be adapted to focus on the construct of well-being. The development of such a learning community is intentional and takes time. The model of a flourishing learning community, as developed by Cherkowski and Walker (2013), is founded on five principles: deep respect, collective responsibility, appreciation of diversity, problem-solving orientation and positive role modeling. These five principles can be expressed in schools in multiple ways; the following description illustrates potential application of this framework. First, deep respect is evident in the day-to-day interactions and communications within the school. There is a sense that every member of the flourishing learning community is a valued participant as evident in the dialogue and the intentional protection of everyone’s dignity and self-worth. For example, novice teachers are encouraged to have a voice at staff meetings and at planning sessions. Second, collective responsibility is demonstrated through the active engagement of all members of the community, including parents, students and staff, in constructing collective goals and in supporting the attainment of the goals. Communication among the school staff, students and leadership is multi-directional, rather than top–down, and regular communication to the parents and broader community is clear and focused on collective goals and achievement of those goals. Third, appreciation of diversity is evident in the artifacts of the school and in the day-to-day workings of the school. Furthermore, appreciation of diversity is evident when diverse teaching styles and strengths are celebrated and innovation is encouraged. Novice teachers are supported in stretching their professional repertoires, and, indeed, they can be role models of emergent pedagogical techniques. Fourth, the problem-solving orientation is evident in the work of the flourishing learning community as individual members and the group reflect on their successes and challenges and devise innovative ways to address issues. The approach is dynamic and action oriented toward generating solutions, testing solutions, evaluating and determining next courses of action. Mentors and leaders need to model these problem-solving approaches and encourage the involvement of the mentees in crafting potential solutions. Fifth, positive role modeling throughout the school is essential; leaders and mentors demonstrate ways of being that affirm the value of each member of the community. They encourage others and draw everyone into the collective work of the schools. The role of mentors is critical in this regard as they demonstrate compassion, respect, encouragement and affirmation when working with all students, colleagues and parents. Mentees are more likely to emulate these behaviors when they see and experience the benefits of these positive interactions. If members of the community exemplify these principles in their interactions, a culture that promotes growth and well-being can be established. Teachers, especially novice teachers, will benefit from such a positive learning community.

If this idea of a learning community is extended beyond the boundaries of individual schools, the potential for varied supports for novice teachers is expanded. These NLCs are systemic extensions of PLCs (Stoll and Louis, 2007) and involve clusters of schools working together on collaboratively determined goals (Sammons et al., 2007). Stoll et al. (2006) contended that looking beyond the school itself and engaging in networks and partnerships is an important activity for professional learning and growth. NLCs offer the opportunity for grade-alike or subject-alike teachers to work collaboratively toward a shared goal that is extremely relevant to the work of all members of the group (Stoll et al., 2006). In their study of NLCs, Blazieko and Squires (2018) identified that authentic collaboration is grounded in the development of relationships that are built on trust and
the maintenance of frequent connections. Additionally, the purpose and focus of the NLC is co-constructed, rather than mandated; this element of choice enhances motivation of the community members and encourages accountability (Blazieko and Squires, 2018). An advantage of NLCs is the opportunity to work with peers who may be better matched in terms of grades or subject areas. Additionally, there would be more opportunities for collaborative co-mentoring (Godden et al. 2014), whereby small groups of teachers could contribute their own expertise to others in the group, regardless of their career stage; there is a recognition that everyone can contribute something of value to the relationship. These interactions help to develop a mentoring culture and build confidence and a sense of self-esteem among all the participants.

The pivotal role of mentors in supporting well-being

While there is growing recognition of the need for targeted and sustained professional learning opportunities for mentors, with the focus on developing content expertise and mentorship skills (cf. Daly and Milton, 2017; Langdon and Ward, 2015), there has been scant attention on the crucial role that mentors could play in supporting the well-being of the mentees. However, according to Kutsyuruba, Walker and Godden (2017), Kutsyuruba, Walker, Matheson and Bosica (2017), “The role of a mentor was particularly important, both in creating a positive learning culture and in helping a new or beginning teacher to participate in such a culture” (p. 12). The development of a positive culture promotes trust and belonging but requires the intentional efforts of all members, especially the leaders. According to Hiscoe (2018), “positive workplace cultures of trust do not just happen, they are built over time by employees who are invested in healthy workplace relationships and in leaders who engage encourage, and reinforce positive values and traditions by investing in that foundation” (p. 256). The imperative to address this aspect of early career teacher engagement is evident in the plethora of research with regard to the health and well-being of professionals in the health, education and social services sector who experience significant compassion fatigue (Cherkowski and Walker, 2018).

In their study of mentees and mentors working in rural school districts, Hellsten et al. (2017) found that the emotional support provided by the mentors was as critical as the professional learning that resulted from their work together. One mentor emphasized that “mental health is just as important as the academics. And you cannot deliver those academics properly if you’re not mentally healthy” (Hellsten et al., 2017, p. 324). Hellsten et al. (2017) noted that “the mentors provided beginning teachers with a sense of perspective and emotional support which increased beginning teacher wellness” (p. 327). Interestingly, given the rural context of their study, communication and more immediate support was achieved through e-mail and phone as well as the in-person meetings and discussions. This finding aligns with Callahan’s (2015) contention that successful mentoring programs are characterized by frequent and varied communication between the mentor and mentee that is open and honest from the perspective of facilitative rather than evaluative feedback.

Furthermore, Kutsyuruba et al. (2018) posited that relations with colleagues was a critical element in new teachers’ support. Experienced teachers could provide the academic supports and advice whereas other new teachers provided the emotional support and the ability to engage in dialogue regarding shared experiences and frustrations, without the perception of being judged by others. Additionally, the relationship with the administrator had a definite impact on new teachers’ experiences (Kutsyuruba et al., 2018). Leaders’ personal interactions with new teachers could be positive, affirming and helpful, whereas negative interactions resulted in teacher dissatisfaction and potential attrition (Kutsyuruba et al., 2018).

Given the earlier description of well-being articulated by Seligman (2011), this model can address the five areas of well-being. Relationships are built among in-school and
district-level colleagues. Professional and shared goals facilitate connections with colleagues, and a strong relationship between the mentor and mentee is fostered through the development of trust. The in-school mentor is accessible and provides immediate support for the mentee, whereas district-wide colleagues can provide guidance and support as a result of collaborative work around shared goals that are related to job-alike contexts. As the mentee learns without fear of harsh consequences but with the guidance of an experienced mentor, they feel that they are achieving their career goal and are becoming comfortable in their identity as a teacher. Hellsten et al. (2017) posited that “new teacher induction programs and processes need to look beyond retention and toward support for flourishing” (p. 328). Positive experiences in the classroom lead to positive emotions and a sense of meaning in their work. The layering of support with a mentor, colleagues within the building and colleagues within a broader network means that the mentee has various avenues of support and multiple opportunities for engagement. Over time, with the support for their particular learning and emotional needs, new teachers gain confidence and competence (Callahan, 2016), leading to enhanced well-being.

Implications for practice

The needs of early career teachers are myriad and complex. The evidence for formal induction processes and mentorship programs firmly points to the effectiveness of these processes. By limiting our thinking with regard to the best approach, we may not be able to identify an optimal process and structure. The research presented herein suggests a more holistic approach. Having mentors within the same building provides the mentee with more immediate accessibility of supports. There is a shared context of the school community and the needs of the students within that school. Optimally, the in-school mentor would also be specifically selected because of shared grade levels or subject areas. A district-wide induction program helps the early career teachers understand policies and procedures as well as curricular objectives. This program could be bolstered by a networked learning community where new teachers from across the jurisdiction join colleagues in particular groups focused on relevant learning goals, aligned with grade-alike or subject-alike groups. This setting further advances early career teachers’ understanding of the larger jurisdiction and helps them develop relationships among a wider number of colleagues.

Implicit in this model is the role of leaders in implementing school-wide learning communities, establishing formal induction processes and determining mentor–mentee matches that have the potential for facilitating strong relationships built on trust. Furthermore, within the school and within the district, the five principles of a flourishing learning community, namely, deep respect, collective responsibility, appreciation of diversity, problem-solving orientation and positive role modeling, can provide the foundation for these communities of practice. Within a positive workplace culture, and supported by formal and informal mentors, novice teachers will thrive and have an opportunity to deepen their identity as a teacher.

In essence, this model is built upon three levels of support: district-level leaders who establish induction processes and champion mentorship, district-level colleagues who can provide grade- or content-level expertise, and emotional and social support, either informally or through a networked learning community and school-level mentorship through a formal mentor, a PLC, supportive administrators and informal mentoring from close colleagues. In order to develop a more holistic model, key participants within the district (including leadership) need to engage in intentional and strategic planning to develop a framework that focuses on supporting the personal and professional needs of all members of the teaching community, especially novice teachers who will become the future leaders of our schools.

This work will not gain traction, however, if it is not properly resourced and championed by provincial-level educational leaders who ultimately construct the strategic goals for
schools province wide. In pan-Canadian studies, the inconsistent implementation and resourcing of mentoring and induction programs was evident not only across provinces, but also across districts. The disparity across provinces suggests that mentoring and induction had not been emphasized by influential leaders at the ministry levels. The success of novice teachers should not hinge upon the availability of resources within their district or province.

Implications for research

Although research on mentorship to this point largely has focused on the professional growth outcomes and on the retention of early career teachers, the emphasis on well-being more broadly as a global concern (Okanagan Charter, 2015) may lead to renewed efforts to investigate mechanisms and processes that not only lead to professional growth, but also support personal well-being. Additionally, research efforts need to use a wider lens to examine the potential of multi-layered supports. Rather than a reductionist investigation into a didactic relationship between mentor and mentee, researchers can explore a more holistic approach to mentoring through the formal processes of a district, the influence of district and in-school administrators, the potential of team support through professional and NLCs and the impact of personal and informal relationships based on shared contexts, teaching areas or interests. Additionally, the model of a flourishing school and its connection to novice teachers’ well-being could be explored. How are novice teachers nurtured, professionally and personally? How is noticing or reflexive practice supported? How do leaders and mentors sustain mentees’ growth and well-being? How can schools become flourishing learning communities; what are the essential steps for incorporating the key elements? Furthermore, examining school cultures that celebrate innovation, and exemplify compassion, hope and trust, could provide insight into practices that promote a flourishing culture and facilitate the development of all of its members, including novice teachers.

The concept of teacher resilience and the critical role of mentors is another potential avenue of research. How can schools promote adaptability and a problem-solving orientation? How can mentors encourage mentees to focus on long-term goals and celebrate achievements, finding purpose and meaning in their work, so that they have the fortitude to weather challenges and tackle issues? This research on promotion of resilience also has implications for preservice teacher programs. By promoting a deeper understanding of practices to facilitate resilience, preservice teachers may be able to carry with them into the field of practice a “toolkit” that they can employ when their well-being is affected by their day-to-day work. Research would need to uncover what kinds of professional development and learning opportunities would best enhance resilience in preservice teachers who will then be able to model these positive behaviors in schools.

Employing a number of different research approaches may be helpful for addressing questions, such as these ones. For example, longitudinal case studies potentially could track the perceptions of preservice teachers with regard to their own well-being, beginning with their preservice training and then following them through their first five years of teaching. Longitudinal studies of mentorship programs and their impact on novice teachers’ well-being and novice teachers’ continued engagement in teaching may inform elements of a mentorship model that are particularly helpful in facilitating well-being. Studies could focus on mentorship models that intentionally incorporate pillars of well-being as identified by Seligman (2011) or the signals of a thriving school as described by Cherkowski and Walker (2018).

Although there is a depth of research on positive practices for implementing successful learning communities, there are few studies examining the flourishing school learning community model (Cherkowski and Walker, 2013). Action research, appreciative inquiry and case study approaches could investigate the power of a flourishing learning community in nurturing and sustaining the citizens of the community. Qualitative studies investigating
the stories of novice teachers and the role that their mentors played could potentially uncover rich data to address these questions. By more fully understanding the impact that mentorship programs have on novice teachers’ well-being, leaders and mentors in school districts as well as faculty in preservice programs may be better able to craft models of mentoring that allow novice teachers to flourish.

Final thoughts

While much recent effort has focused on the retention and success of novice teachers, the programs and initiatives have had a relatively narrow scope with a concentration on formal induction programs or formal mentorships within schools. There is potential for a more holistic approach that would address not only professional learning needs but also the emotional and social support needs of early career teachers who are stepping into their role as a teacher and forming their professional identity. Developing a strong relationship between a mentor and mentee, built on trust, ensures that failures and successes can be shared and advice can be sought from a helpful, rather than a judgmental, perspective. However, this relationship does not preclude the added support of informal mentors and peers who have shared experiences or contexts. Whether these personal supports are developed informally or through more structured opportunities such as professional and networked learning opportunities, this more holistic approach is more likely to foster well-being.

As Cherkowski and Walker (2018) contended, “This call to action for wellbeing needs to be at the heart of the work of teaching, learning and leading in schools – it is the work of our time” (p. 147). Most critically, this call to action extends to the mentoring of novice teachers so that they may carry on this work in the future as mentors and leaders, ensuring that they perpetuate a culture of well-being within schools that fosters the next generation.

References


Literature on the pivotal role of mentoring

267


Corresponding author
Vicki Squires can be contacted at: vicki.squires@usask.ca
The benefits of mentoring newly qualified teachers in Malta

Michelle Attard Tonna

Department of Leadership for Learning and Innovation, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Abstract

Purpose – Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) seek advice from more experienced colleagues and are considered as learning through participation, including observing other teachers and receiving feedback. In many education systems around the world, induction programmes are developed to support these new teachers in needs ranging from pedagogical to the practical. The induction programme in Malta has been in place since 2010 and offers support to NQTs through their mentor, a member of the school management team, and their college principal. The purpose of this paper is to examine the benefits of mentoring as experienced by a group of NQTs and their mentors in select Maltese schools.

Design/methodology/approach – Through a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1994), the reflections and online conversations with 15 mentors from 10 schools, who were given the role of supporting an NQT in their school for one scholastic year, informed this study. This approach was used because grounded theory seeks to derive its explanations from the data of the phenomenon itself and encourages systematic, detailed analysis of the data. Codes were developed from the transcripts, which were then compared against the research questions, using an inductive approach. Themes emerged, helping the researcher to construct meaning.

Findings – The data strongly suggest that a mentoring approach based on reflection and dialogue promoted positive relationships between the mentors and the mentees and led to professional growth. Moreover, the school and social environment played a crucial role in the way the participants interacted and defined their challenges. It is thus recognised that the NQT induction programme needs to be adequately understood and acknowledged by schools and the education authorities in order for it to reach its aims of supporting beginning teachers. Physical spaces and opportunities for collaboration can enhance what the mentors are trying to achieve.

Originality/value – This research is the first of its kind in Malta as it explores the perceptions and experiences of mentors who are actively participating in the induction programme for NQTs.

Keywords Malta, Induction programme, Newly qualified teachers, Reflective practitioners, Teacher mentors

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) often have to do the same job as their more experienced colleagues: they are given full responsibility for their students’ learning (Shields and Murray, 2017). For this reason, their colleagues, and members of the school management team, need to help them do the best that they can, and this is the purpose behind induction (Daly and Milton, 2017; Howe, 2006). Induction benefits not only NQTs but also those who support and assess them, together with current and future pupils that new teachers work with as students will learn more and be happier.

Although NQTs receive training on how to teach through their initial teacher training phase, the schools in which they start teaching can once again serve as testing grounds to understand their strengths and weaknesses and explore the areas of practice they need to develop. A teacher mentor allocated to them during their induction can serve as the critical friend who makes that journey with them.

This research study focussed on the benefits of mentoring as experienced by a group of NQTs and their mentors in select Maltese schools. The term teacher mentor, in this research study, refers to a teacher of some experience who works with a beginning teacher during their early experiences in the classroom. The teacher mentor is in a position to offer support...
through observation, being an inquirer and a critical thinker. Rather than being there to give advice and solve problems, the mentor’s role is to question, listen and model reflective thinking (Kim and Silver, 2016).

The Maltese context
The notion of mentoring in teacher induction is a recent phenomenon in Malta. A teacher induction and mentoring policy and strategy was launched by the Quality Assurance Department in October 2012, 2010 (see Quality Assurance Department, 2010, 2012) for NQTs in the state sector and is an integral condition of employment for all those employed within this sector. Around 60 per cent of the child population in Malta attends state schools. The non-state sector is made up of church schools and independent schools. Around 30 per cent of children attend church schools, and a further 10 per cent of children attend independent schools. NQTs must undergo a two-year induction and mentoring programme during their probation period before they can be awarded a permanent teacher warrant. Throughout these two years, NQTs are expected to focus on developing the key professional knowledge, attitude, and skills required to become reflective practitioners within the education system. During this process, they are required to participate in a three-day induction seminar, keep a personal reflective journal, attend a group mentoring session with the college principal as mentor, attend two formal meetings with the college mentor and attend a national concluding seminar at the end of the scholastic year organised by the Quality Assurance Department.

NQTs, in their first year of induction, are also allocated a mentor who meets with them a few times during that scholastic year and who is required to complete a checklist at the end of the year, providing scant details of the support given. For a number of years, teachers were prepared to be mentors through a short-training programme offered by the ministry, which a number of teachers and members of the school leadership team attended. Mentors are usually allocated a number of NQTs to mentor each year within their own college (a cluster of schools within the same geographical area and coordinated by a college principal) and are expected to fix appointments with the NQTs and visit the school for meetings. Mentors may choose not to provide this support, especially if they have time restrictions in their school schedule. Moreover, other officers and employees within schools can request to be mentored at any time in their career. Some of the NQTs employed by the non-state sector also undergo an induction programme within their own school, but in this case, the head of school, as the employer, decides on the need and format of this programme and whether the NQT is allocated a mentor, or not.

In September 2016, mentor training was formalised by the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, and since then, all teachers aspiring to become mentors must undergo a Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Mentoring, the successful completion of which qualifies them to mentor student teachers who are following the Master in Teaching and Learning and carrying out their field placement in schools, and NQTs during their induction period. The Faculty of Education adopts a subject-based model and, when possible, allocates mentors who teach the same subject or learning area of the mentee. It is also stressed that within this model, mentoring takes place within the same school the teacher mentor is based, and mentoring across schools is discouraged.

The aim of the Faculty of Education in its collaboration with the Ministry for Education (MEDe) is clear: teachers in schools are best placed to assist the development of beginning teachers in training. This development involves a partnership between the school and the university in the form of subject teachers becoming mentors and the Faculty of Education playing a greater role in the induction of beginning teachers. As the researcher of this paper, I am also a member of the Faculty of Education and have the primary responsibility of preparing teachers to become mentors. I also help coordinate the mentoring for student
teachers and NQTs in schools. The purpose behind this research study is precisely this: to explore whether mentors are supporting beginning teachers in their practice and whether they have the adequate conditions to provide this support.

The research questions set for this study were as follows:

RQ1. How are mentors offering support to NQTs in their school, leading to beneficial experiences through collaboration and reflective practice?

RQ2. How are schools/education authorities being engaged to facilitate the NQT induction programme?

The benefits of mentoring
Ample research has studied the effects of mentoring on teachers (Dawson, 2014; Sterrett and Imig, 2011). Teacher mentoring is regarded as one of the most important factors that contribute to professional teacher development (Hobson et al., 2009), and its benefits for both mentors and mentees have been widely reported (Bean et al., 2014; Scanlan et al., 2019). Mentoring is widely recognised as an important adjunct to teaching because it influences and fosters the intellectual development of learners (Sider, 2019). Mentoring benefits include enhanced performance, reduced teacher attrition and greater career advancement. There are also social and psychological benefits such as both mentors and mentees feeling more confident, adopting an enhanced sense of organisational culture and loyalty towards the school (Cowin et al., 2016), and improving their own craft by reflecting and deconstructing their teaching for their mentees (Crutcher and Naseem, 2016). Three main benefits of educational mentoring are categorised below.

Supporting teacher development
The important role that mentors play in shaping NQTs is widely acknowledged in the literature (Robson and Mtika, 2017; Smith and Lynch, 2014). Mentoring can contribute to the development of their teaching efficacy, and mentors impact on their practices (Hobson et al., 2009; Mena et al., 2016), particularly because of discussing practices, modelling teaching and providing feedback (Clarke et al., 2013). Effective mentoring also leads to better morale, increased willingness to take risks, more effective problem-solving strategies, improved classroom management and organisation and more effective instructional strategies (Kemmis et al., 2014). When a new teacher becomes more effective in the classroom, the potential for student learning increases.

Fostering collaboration
In Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study, Dan Lortie (1975) identifies isolation as a major cause of new teacher attrition. The “cellular nature of schools” fosters independence and self-reliance but discourages collaboration (p. 14). Professional isolation is a challenge that beginning teachers face and is a primary reason for leaving the profession. Many teachers work alone in classrooms, physically isolated from their peers whose support is unavailable to them (Gardiner and Weisling, 2018). Collaboration, as promoted through mentoring, minimises teachers’ isolation and fosters dialogue and discussion (Lothhouse, 2018). Teachers often learn best from and with other teachers when they trust each other and collaborate.

Preventing teacher attrition
Low retention rates of beginning teachers may have important implications for schools and the students they serve. In the current local situation, schools cannot afford to lose teachers, and there are already a number of subject areas that lack qualified teachers, like English,
sciences, ICT and sometimes elementary classes. Moreover, the number of student teachers in Malta choosing to take up the profession is dwindling because of an increasing perception that teaching is challenging and that teachers do not have adequate pay and good working conditions, because of competing careers with more attractive pay, and because of a booming economy and low unemployment rate.

While the societal, cultural, economic and political factors (as outlined above) are important to explain the variations in teacher retention across countries (Darling-Hammond and Rothman, 2011), there are also individual-level factors, such as teacher demographics and burnout (De Jong and Campoli, 2018) and school-level factors such as administrative support (Boyd et al., 2011).

Various research studies have addressed teacher attrition and exit patterns (Kirkby et al., 2017), and also others in which levels of support provided to beginning teachers such as through induction and mentoring (Taylor and Black, 2018) have been investigated. These studies contribute to the knowledge of why teachers leave and how the right support structures can help alleviate this phenomenon. There is a meaningful association between the presence of mentors in schools and teacher retention. Mentors may reduce teacher attrition because of the instructional and emotional support they provide, and they may enable beginning teachers to experience a sense of success (De Jong and Campoli, 2018).

**Mentoring through collaboration and reflective practice**

There are multiple ways a researcher can interpret the experiences of the participants under study. The theoretical framework of this research study informed the research questions, as the theory helped to define the selection and parameters of the inquiry and shape its method. The intention was for the research questions to embrace theory as a way of giving direction and framing particular ideas. Theory also serves as a conceptual tool that can move the inquiry forward towards deeper levels of understanding (Agee, 2009).

This paper intends to find relations on the concept of learning and development and the way mentoring, as proposed by the Faculty of Education and as implemented by the education authorities, is being carried out. A theoretical understanding of this investigation is thus taken. While the concept of mentoring lacks a clear definition or description (Roberts, 2000) because of a number of research traditions connected to it, it is safe to say that mentoring is enacted differently, and people relate to one another differently in varied forms of mentoring. Hence, a range of understandings of, and theories about, mentoring ensue. The social constructivist theories of learning to examine mentoring may be the most popular because they emphasise mentoring as a social practice. The first focus in my discussion will thus be related to this approach, namely, the benefits brought about through collaborative learning and the sociocultural understanding of learning. This is because the proposed mentoring model shares the same principles of Vygotsky’s (1978, 1981) theories of development and their underlying emphasis on the concepts of development and social interactions that characterise professional change and growth.

Sociocultural understanding of learning and development was initially systematised and applied by Vygotsky and his collaborators in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. Current conceptualisations of this theory (Eun, 2008; Ohta, 2000) drew heavily on this work, although there is also a range of more recent interpretations and applications. Sociocultural learning is associated with social learning theories as well as cognitive and psychological aspects of development. Vygotsky contends that knowledge construction takes place in the social interaction co-constructed between a more and a less knowledgeable individual (Lantolf, 2008). Moreover, the construction of knowledge is a socioculturally mediated process. The sociocultural learning model stipulates that the development of the learner’s higher mental processes depends on the presence of mediating agents in the learner’s interaction with the environment, such as formal education, mediation through another.
human being and mediation in the form of organised learning activity (Scanlan et al., 2019). Some mediational concepts such as scaffolding appeared as a result of assimilation of Vygotskian ideas. Others, such as a mediated learning experience, were developed independently and later acquired new meaning in the context of sociocultural theory (Kozulin, 2003).

The mentoring model researched in this paper is closely related to Vygotsky’s (1987) sociocultural understanding of learning and development, particularly to his revolutionary concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This concept implies that a less knowledgeable person (in this case, an NQT) gets engaged in developmental changes through interactions with a more significant other (in this case, a teacher mentor). The roles of the teacher mentor and mentee are in a state of flux (Aderibigbe et al., 2018) because the mentee can also contribute their knowledge to both pupils and mentor. The mentor and mentee come together in a collaborative activity where they teach and learn from each other (Shanks, 2017). The mentoring approach proposed by the Faculty of Education is based on the premise that, through reflection, the mentee, who is being observed by the teacher mentor, makes use of the mentor’s feedback to improve his practice. Simultaneously, the teacher mentor has the opportunity to closely examine and reconsider aspects of teaching while observing the mentee or while discussing the mentee’s observation of their own practice. This mentoring support is referred to as “scaffolding” in Vygotsky’s developmental theory. When providing the support or “scaffold”, the teacher mentor leads the NQT into the learning activity but both are actively engaged. Reflection is the medium used to enhance this interaction.

As my second focus of the theoretical underpinnings of this paper, I will elaborate on reflective practice. Theorists such as Schön (1983, 1987), Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (2007) speak about the dilemmas and problems that student teachers and NQTs face when entering the teaching profession. One of the approaches designed to scaffold critical review and support the development of beginning teachers’ practice is reflective practice; this process can be traced back to the development of constructivist interpretations of learning.

Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning is useful to understand the development of reflection. He defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38) with reflection as a critical tenet. Making meaning and developing understandings from experiences enable the individual to project about possibilities in new contexts. According to Kolb (1984), learning occurs in the interplay between expectation and experience.

Reflective practice is thus fundamental to professional teacher development and to the Maltese induction programme. Reflection is a core activity within the profession but is particularly critical in supporting and maintaining professional development in the formative years. The Faculty of Education’s philosophy for novice teachers’ learning, in partnership with schools, is for them to become reflective thinkers who explore their own individual teaching styles, rather than mimicking the methods of experienced teachers. Discursive dialogue, an important mentoring activity, is encouraged. Through reflective discussion, the dyad (mentor and mentee) engages in meaning making and the co-construction of shared knowledge and understanding (Heikkinen et al., 2012). When mentoring adopts such a constructivist approach, an environment is fostered where professional development is more possible (Heikkinen et al., 2012).

D’Souza (2014) points out that a mentor following a reflective practitioner model would need skills in how to facilitate the learning environment. Mentors need to be aware of how to develop their own approach and how to customise different perspectives on the mentor–mentee relationship and mentees’ different abilities and needs (Schön, 1987; Zeichner and Liston, 1996). Together with Kolb’s theory of experiential learning and Vygotsky’s sociocultural understanding of learning and development, Schön’s (1983) theory of reflection guides the
researcher’s understanding of how a mentor needs to assist the beginning teachers in reflecting on their practical teaching experience with a view to developing their pedagogical skills and improving their professional practice.

The paradigm of the reflective practitioner as presented by Schön underlines that successful or effective teaching requires one to reflect actively and self-critically, or to theorise by bringing to bear on one’s practice the available and appropriate sources of knowledge and understanding. For teachers to learn by reflection, they need to critically examine their own motivation, thinking and practice (Trent and Gurvitch, 2015). In this way, they become reflective learners who can explore their experiences to lead to new understandings and appreciations (Farrell, 2016). Reflection enables individuals to pause and reflect on prior experiences that have facilitated their learning (Opdal, 2008). Hence, to be effective, reflection must also be reflexive, that is, it must begin with the self (Pitsoe and Letseka, 2015).

Mentors themselves should be reflective practitioners, and their key role is to provide the structural support for beginning teachers to reflect on their actions and systematically develop their perspectives on teaching and learning (Lunenberg et al., 2007). When successes are examined and challenges/issues are identified as problems to be solved, this can lead to meaningful development. Rather than simply offering coping strategies and survival techniques, through a reflexive process mentors would maintain the problematic nature of teaching and lay the foundation for critical appraisal of one’s classroom practices and beliefs (Edwards et al., 2002). According to Mamlok-Naaman and Eilks (2012) and Khan (2014), this is essential if teachers are to be creative professionals rather than mere functionaries. Teaching is a profession, and teachers regard their practice as problematic and open to change, and in which they are accustomed to deliberating rather than merely asserting. Moreover, scenarios in schools that would require new teachers to adjust to the school’s institutional norms and values at the expense of smothering their perspectives and needs must be avoided (Stîngu, 2013; Wang and Odell, 2007).

**Research methodology**

Grounded theory was used to collect and analyse this research study’s data. Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Its origin is owed to Glaser and Strauss and is an approach formulated in reaction to the sociological stance prevalent in the 1960s that insisted studies should have a firm *a priori* theoretical orientation. Advocates of this research tradition support the idea that theory is emergent rather than predefined and tested. Theory generated in this way relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study. This methodology was utilised because grounded theory seeks to derive its explanations from the data of the phenomenon itself, rather than seeking information to confirm or refute an existing theory. It encourages systematic, detailed analysis of the data and gives researchers ample evidence to back up their claims. Grounded theory also acknowledges that there is no one truth or one theory, and that theory is a construction from data. In everyday life, actions are interconnected and people make connections naturally. The actions, interactions and processes of the people involved in the study have theory “grounded” in them. A grounded theory approach allows an understanding of these connections (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

The data informing this research study were derived from the reflections and online conversations of teacher mentors, in which they were required to partake as part of their training. These teacher mentors were the stakeholders who I, as a researcher, was in contact with while teaching in and coordinating the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Mentoring, the training partaken by mentors. Part of my role entailed facilitating the online discussions, prompting them to reflect on areas that were closely linked to the literature being
used in the course and to the issues being experienced by themselves or their peers while mentoring NQTs in schools. These reflections and online conversations gave rise not only to deeper analysis of the mentoring scenarios being experienced, but also to diverse ways of addressing challenges based on participants’ different teaching beliefs and possibilities their school contexts provided them. The data led the process of theory building and determined the themes that I, as a researcher, eventually focussed upon in this research study.

The participants who contributed data for this study were selected from a larger group of mentors who, during their training, were mentoring NQTs as part of their practicum experience. This study includes the perceptions and reflections of 15 mentors from 10 state and non-state schools who mentored an NQT for one scholastic year, during 2016–2017. At the end of their training; after the required permissions were attained from the Faculty of Education’s (FREC) and the University of Malta’s (UREC) research ethics board, all mentors were asked whether they would be willing to share their contributions in the online conversations, and their reflections for this study; the online discussions and reflections of the first 15 mentors who gave their consent were analysed. An inductive approach of comparing data to the research questions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) was used. The aim was to evaluate this experience as perceived by the mentors, in particular their perceptions of whether the NQTs were adequately supported in their induction phase and the way schools were being engaged as part of this induction programme. The level of contact with their mentees was varied, depending on the school and availability of the teachers involved. However, all of them had opportunities to observe each other’s practice and give feedback on it.

All mentors participating in this study were provided professional development on how to observe practice, how to be reflexive, and how to collaborate and engage in professional learning communities. An online discussion platform, regulated by me as the researcher, was used to yield the data. The mentors were asked to participate in this online discussion forum as part of their formal training to qualify as mentors, and the virtual learning environment of their course served as a platform onto which these online discussions, and their reflections, were uploaded. The mentors were also required to write reflections of their mentoring experience. Hence, the data for this study were taken from the transcripts of the online conversations that took place and from the mentors’ reflections. Before analysis of the data took place, all transcripts and reflections were allocated a pseudonym, and any detail that could reveal a participant’s identity was removed to safeguard the confidentiality of the mentors partaking in this research and also the NQTs, schools and other individuals involved.

This study’s data were analysed in a rigorous and systematic manner to discover the concepts leading to the categories. The data yielded were made up of the meaning and purposes of the mentors participating in the research. A process of content analysis – that of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data – helped to organise and manage the data in a structured manner. A number of central issues were analysed, keeping as a focus the research questions generated at the beginning of the inquiry process. As far as possible, data were organised, accounted for, explained, and made sense of in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation. The online posts and the excerpts from the mentors’ reflective diaries were systematically searched and arranged, and patterns, themes, categories and regularities were noted in a way that enabled me to construct meaning. Internal validity was sought by demonstrating that the explanation of a particular issue (in this case, the support provided by mentors) could actually be sustained by the data (Cohen et al., 2011). Triangulation “within methods” (Denzin, 1970) was achieved through an interrater reliability of codes with another researcher (Lodico et al., 2010) and triangulation “between methods” was achieved through the use of online conversations and reflective logs.

Excel was used to facilitate the coding procedure. The coded excerpts were transferred to Excel, each row denoting a particular research participant. The codes used at this stage were descriptive labels of text, but on assembling this text in Excel, certain words, phrases
and patterns of behaviour were repeated and stood out. As regularities, patterns as well as topics started to emerge, concepts eventually developed and connections were made between them (Cohen et al., 2011). On categorising the codes, one moves away from descriptions to a more analytical and theoretical level of labelling. Meaning is ascribed to the data and hierarchies are created. Hierarchies also prompt a number of analytic questions as certain themes start to emerge from the way the codes are organised.

Table I includes the final list of codes, the emergent categories and the themes that were eventually developed to formulate theory.

Results
The results of the data generated from the online discussions and the mentors’ reflections are presented in this section under two distinct themes and linked to the emanating theory following coding and in-depth analysis of the data.

A sociocultural approach to learning and development
The idea of a mentor being a mediating agent in an NQT’s learning journey was suggested recurrently in the participants’ online conversation posts and reflections:

Mentoring is an essential leadership skill […] Hence, I am positive that being a mentor would be an eye-opener for me and my teaching. This was primarily my biggest reason for opting to do this mentoring course. (Julia, reflective diary, 10 March 2017)

Many of the reflections pointed towards the way mentoring were impacting the mentors’ own practices and their identity as teachers, and challenge the conventional idea of working in isolation, which teachers are usually afflicted with. The data also imply that the roles of the mentor and mentee are in a state of flux and that mentors benefit significantly in enhancing their practice through this experience, as suggested by (Aderibigbe et al., 2018) on discussing Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD:

Why do experienced teachers want to engage in mentoring? Mentoring involves a significant investment of time, commitment and effort, but the tangible rewards received in return are not to be ignored. Through mentoring, we gain a greater understanding of our own self, and of our practice. Since when this course started, even before the actual mentoring started, I have been reflecting on my everyday practices […] not just practices used in the classroom but also on how I relate with my colleagues […] I believe that through this increased reflection and self-awareness – that will

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors speaking of learning opportunities (or lack of) in their school</td>
<td>Professional learning context</td>
<td>A sociocultural approach to learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors speaking of partnerships between Faculty of Education and schools</td>
<td>Mentors supporting NQTs through reflective practice</td>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors discussing desired support structures that can facilitate mentoring</td>
<td>Mentors analysing their mentees’ practices</td>
<td>Relationship between teacher mentor and NQT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors analysing their mentees’ practices</td>
<td>Mentors describing the dialogues they held with their mentees</td>
<td>Scaffolding and zone of proximal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors describing the dialogues they held with their mentees</td>
<td>Mentors speaking about the need of mutual trust and respect</td>
<td>Table I. Codes, categories and themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors speaking about the need of mutual trust and respect</td>
<td>Mentors speaking of roles and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
continue to develop throughout the mentoring experience - there is self-development and an increase in confidence in seeing oneself as a leader. (Cathy, reflective diary, 3 December 2016)

In one of the prompts for their reflective diary, the mentors were asked to recall and reflect on an experience when they had been mentored in the beginning phase of their career. The mentors, through this reflection, acknowledged the challenges an NQT encounters at school. The following excerpt derives from one of the mentors’ reflective diary:

We found similar teachers’ attitudes welcoming us to the profession. I first started working in an independent school, where there was a positive attitude and a lot of support given. Luckily, only one colleague proved to be a hindrance to us novice teachers, looking upon us as a threat, minimally guiding us. I experienced the same experience when I moved on to a state school eight years later. To top up the fact that I was being regarded as an inexperienced teacher, I was assigned the lowest stream in year 6. Everyone, from teachers to SMT [Senior Management Team], was reluctant to disclose any information regarding the students’ abilities and behaviour: “You’ll realise when you meet them” were the comments heard. As I moved on during the scholastic year, a particular teacher advised me to keep all that I know and all that I was capable of to myself. With mentors and a collaborative attitude present at school, such negative experiences could be avoided. (Amy, reflective diary, 1 November 2016)

All of the participants acknowledge that having a mentor proves to be beneficial, not just for the NQT concerned but also for the school hosting that teacher. The following excerpt from an online discussion post exemplifies this attitude:

Having a mentor with whom to discuss, reflect and turn to for guidelines when difficulties arise could improve support and the success of the novice teacher when it is most needed [...] Collaboration practices from all and professional development opportunities would help in identifying areas of need and sources of good practice to enhance one’s teaching. (Charmaine, online conversation post, 12 April 2017)

The mentors’ discussion of the ways they supported their mentees, mostly through lesson observation followed by reflection and dialogue, was inextricably linked with their observations of the challenges the school context presented them with. The role that the school/social environment plays in this experience was a recurrent theme, articulated in terms of challenges that mentors experience to collaborate with their mentees and with their need for supportive structures to enable this collaboration to be nurtured. The findings related to the school context are here linked to the learner’s interaction with the environment and the construction of knowledge as a socioculturally mediated process (Scanlan et al., 2019). The challenges were in fact often communicated in terms of frustrations, from the mentors’ end, because of lack of opportunities to collaborate. This was particularly the case in the primary sector where mentors were engaged in teaching most of the day, and it was not easy to visit their mentee’s classroom on a regular basis. Most of the participants in fact mentioned that mentoring should be considered as part of a teacher’s workload, with a number of lessons allocated for mentoring meetings to take place:

From my short experience as a mentor, I feel that time is the biggest setback. Being a mentor to an NQT in the primary means that we are both occupied and rarely have a free lesson, and when we do, the time does not coincide. (Joanie, online conversation post, 30 March 2017)

These challenges were intensified if mentors were asked to mentor beginning teachers outside the school – a system highly discouraged by the Faculty of Education but which schools sometimes resort to due to lack of mentors:

Sometimes there are instances where the mentor and mentee are not from the same school. It is already very difficult to find time to meet in the same school. I can’t imagine myself finding time to go from one school to another. (Joanie, online conversation post, 30 March 2017)
Another aspect the mentors stressed about was the need for the whole school to be involved in supporting beginning teachers. Albeit the mentor’s role was officially recognised by the ministry and the college principal, they felt that there were other members of staff who could contribute to this programme within their areas of expertise. While this was already happening in some contexts, the participants argued that schools could enhance this level of collaboration by providing accommodating environments through personal assistance and access to school resources, by promoting the programme during its various staff meetings and staff development sessions, and by giving mentoring more recognition and inviting both mentor and mentee to talk of their experiences. The mentors argued that such initiatives would increase ownership of the programme among all members of staff.

Most mentors also wrote about the lack of awareness, by the school leadership team, of what mentoring entailed and of the needs that had to be fulfilled to keep the system running effectively. Some mentors also observed that their head of school was burdened with paperwork, and it was impossible for them to be engaged more closely in the induction of the NQTs in that school. The mentors also frequently referred to the need of support structures, on a national basis, that could render the system more effective and sustainable in the long term:

As for the Educational Department there has to be an understanding that no new systems are introduced without changes in the framework. Mentoring needs its space so that it can happen. Holding on to the present rigid timetabling systems is creating a great time deficit and mentors and mentees are finding themselves struggling with an overload of work which is becoming hard to handle. (Pauline, online conversation post, 28 March 2017)

Indeed, the data revealed loopholes in the NQT programme implemented in state schools. Not all mentors were guided into where their responsibilities lie, especially in terms of the kind of rapport they forge with the NQT (who is effectively their colleague) and the kind of report they would need to complete at the end of the scholastic year. Although the ministry stressed they were only required to mention, in a formal manner, the kind of support given throughout the year, some heads of school had a different perception of how this mentoring relationship should work and pressured the mentors into evaluating the progress of their mentees.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice was also a persistent theme in the data, specifically because mentors were highly encouraged to be reflexive in their approach with NQTs and were being trained to enhance their reflective skills. The mentors believed that when they take a cyclical approach to learning – that promoting inquiry and problem-solving – they are more likely to grow professionally and to adapt their beliefs and practices. Reflective practice also encourages positive and respectful relationships with their mentees, rather than hierarchical ones and creates processes of individual professional growth because it duly considers the context in which mentoring takes place. There were instances where mentors provided their mentees with problematic scenarios, from their own classrooms and invited them to search for new strategies for themselves:

Despite these challenges, I feel really encouraged when these teachers give me positive feedback and they themselves look forward to the next inquiry. As a result of this collaboration, we are sharing ideas, critiquing each other’s views and considering alternatives[...]. As a result of this collaboration, we are recording an improvement in the level of conceptual challenge for pupils in primary science, we are promoting higher-order thinking in science, we are recording an increased pupil enthusiasm for science and engagement with the scientific process. (Luisa, reflective diary, 2 April 2017)

The way the mentors held their dialogues and reflexive practices, both individually and with their mentees, is connected to Kolb’s theory of experiential learning in my analysis.
because rather than the NQT receiving coaching on the expected duties, one could observe a transformation of experience during the mentoring phase:

As mentor, my job was not to interfere during a lesson but to observe and then give the mentees advice about how to reflect-on-action and improve on their performance [...] In order to create a reflective rather than an instructive train of thought, I used questioning to lead the mentees to identify any issues which needed to be worked on. After that, various strategies were discussed and readings which could help the mentees identify a possible solution themselves were suggested, thus providing them with a feeling of empowerment over the situation and enhancing their confidence in their abilities as teachers. (Christy, reflective diary, 8 May 2017)

Discussion and implications

Mentoring is seen as one of the most important components in induction programmes (Carr et al., 2017). Through mentoring, beginning teachers are guided to develop knowledge about practices of teaching, and they develop a professional identity (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). However, this kind of mentoring needs to be accompanied by adequate support and an acknowledgement of its professional value, by the rest of the school community and the education system at large. Beginning teachers’ induction programmes that include mentoring should acknowledge that this process is developmental (Lindner et al., 2011), and that a structured approach offering tangible opportunities needs to be in place for NQTs to receive support and direct guidance from their mentors in a meaningful way. Common planning time, professional development and mentoring standards are three areas that can help enhance the current induction programme.

The mentoring approach adopted in these experiences reported is closely related to Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD. The roles of the mentor and mentees were sometimes interchangeable, coming together in a collaborative posture and contributing something, while taking something away from the learning interaction. The mentor and the NQT learnt from each other, making use of the feedback given and also of other members of the school community to scaffold their learning and development. The reflexive approach that mentors used to articulate their experiences as mentors also highlights the fact that these same mentors undergo a learning journey (Achinstein and Athanases, 2006) whereby they self-assess their practice, a process that is critical for improvement of their practice but which also shows how mentors do not come ready-made. Their professional training benefits both them and their mentees, but this must be sustained by regular support from schools and standards, which helps reduce ambiguity in their role and expectations placed upon them.

This research study yielded a number of important findings. A sociocultural approach to learning and development characterised the scenarios. The NQTs did not work in isolation but in collaboration with the mentor, and through reflection, they engaged in inquiry and problem-solving, leading to professional growth. Positive and respectful relationships between mentor and mentee were developed as, rather than in coaching, the NQTs underwent a transformational experience where they themselves looked for strategies to enhance their practice. The lack of time to carry out reflective practice with the NQTs was one of the most persistent challenges the mentors reported, together with the fact that schools did not always provide accommodating environments for mentoring, leading to lack of ownership by the rest of the school community.

The evaluation of these mentoring scenarios, based on the reflections and the online conversations of the mentors during their training, has provided teacher educators in Malta with a framework for working with schools and for developing shared understandings of strategies related to effective professional learning and feedback. Thus, it can add to knowledge in the field by considering how mentoring based on non-judgemental feedback
and reflection can contribute to the professional growth of NQTs, especially when whole school approaches are involved. It can also act as the basis for continuing research and for the development of more effective professional learning opportunities for teachers.

One of the limitations of this study is that it focussed solely on the perceptions of the participating mentors. A more exhaustive analysis of this induction programme would need to include the experiences of the NQTs involved and investigate the other components of this programme throughout the two years of the teachers’ induction. Moreover, the findings analysed by the research represent the data and were a requirement of the training that these mentors undertook; however, other interpretations of the online discussions and mentors’ reflections are possible, particularly if different theoretical frames are employed.

Despite some limitations, a number of key points and implications stem from the data in this research study. First, it is clear that mentoring is a collaborative learning exercise closely dependent on the context in which it takes place. In this research study, a sociocultural understanding of learning and development was used to understand the participants’ experiences and give meaning to the way the NQTs were supported in their practice. The data strongly suggest that the skills mentors nurture in their training are not enough to adequately support their mentees, and factors like time, exposure and support from school are extremely important for an effective system of collaboration whereby mentors are allocated sufficient time for them to meet their mentees, observe their lessons and give them feedback and engage in reflective practice. This is particularly significant in the primary sector, where teachers have class responsibilities for nearly the whole day. When teacher mentoring is placed in school contexts where there is an inquiry orientation to support colleagues, to reflect and to give and receive feedback, it will be more sustainable.

The experiences analysed in this study show that schools need to be better aware of the benefits of mentoring in their institution. If they appreciate what NQT mentoring entails, they may be able to provide the required support in terms of relieving mentors of some of their daily tasks to allow them to go in the NQTs’ classes, and helping to foster a culture of collaboration in schools. The mentors stressed that when the other members of staff understood the needs of the NQTs and how they worked with their mentees, they were far more willing to collaborate and become mentors themselves. The education authorities, in turn, need to consider allocating NQTs a lighter working load, at least in their first year of teaching, so as to allow them to focus on their professional growth and, in a tangible manner, visit their mentors’ classrooms and observe their practice. The mentoring approach being adopted is one of inquiry, which admittedly will require more time to observe lessons and reflect on practice. Such support will facilitate a process whereby the beginning teacher explores effective strategies and is receptive to experiment on varied routes for success, rather than resort to ways of surviving with learning new things and coping with a full teaching schedule.

While mentoring plays a critical role in developing new teachers’ pedagogical skills and identifying effective teachers who are able to model and mentor is essential, the school needs to endorse these productive models of mentoring that encourage collaboration not solely between NQTs and mentors, but also among teaching staff in general. A more integrated approach between the Faculty of Education, the ministry and schools should take place. Strong links between the different stakeholders help ensure that the shared understandings of the role of mentoring and its purpose can develop (Lai, 2005). More substantive, meaningful partnerships between schools, the ministry and the Faculty of Education, built upon mutual cooperation and responsibility for NQTs, can lead to the establishment of communities of practice (Lynch and Smith, 2012). The teaching community stands to benefit from shared inquiries, professional learning opportunities, and common conceptions of teaching.
The participants described in detail the kind of approach they used to support their mentees, the role they adopted and the relationships that ensued. Mentoring through collaborative practice and a reflective approach was proving beneficial for both mentor and mentee. Knowledge construction happens in a setting where both parties trust each other and are receptive to transformation. A process of inquiry helps these teachers to not only contest their successes and challenges, but also consider novel pedagogies that can lead to better outcomes in teaching and learning.

Conclusions
It is important to identify how this research can help enhance the current efforts of NQT mentoring in Malta. In the contexts being evaluated, mentors and mentees adopted a sociocultural approach to work together, using reflection to promote inquiry, problem-solving and professional growth. The mentors carried out their mentoring duties in conjunction with the responsibilities they already had towards the students in their class and in conjunction with other roles they had in school, leaving them limited time to collaborate. These experiences demonstrate that although the current induction system is providing a much-needed support to beginning teachers, especially when compared to the recent past where the culture in schools was completely different and NQTs were left to their own devices, a more consistent and concerted effort should be in place for this system to function effectively. This study also highlights that mentoring other teachers is undoubtedly a challenge, and supportive structures can make all the difference. Moreover, differences in educational philosophies between the mentor and mentee can create barriers, which is why, as shown in these scenarios, the development of a reflexive attitude towards teaching is necessary. When the beginning teacher and mentor do not agree on basic teaching beliefs, their reflexive approach can help them remain open-minded and find common ground. By recognising the importance of mentoring for NQTs, schools and educational systems can develop structures that improve the learning environments of beginning teachers and support them in this crucial phase of their career.

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


**About the author**

Michelle Attard Tonna is Academic Member of staff at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, fulfilling the role of Deputy Dean and also that of Head of Department, while coordinating school-based mentoring on a national level. This role oversees the mentoring of student-teachers during their field placement whereby teachers based in schools are trained to be mentors. Before occupying this role, she

---

**Benefits of mentoring NQTs**

283
was engaged by the Ministry for Education and Employment as Head of Project in the Learning Outcomes Framework, coordinating a national project on the introduction of learning outcomes in the curriculum. She has also represented the Ministry in a number of working groups and fora, both locally and internationally. Her primary research interests include the professional development of teachers and comparative studies of the way teachers learn. She has contributed to various European-wide studies in the area of teacher learning and participated in various conferences and European networks in which she has presented her research. She has published her work in a number of educational journals and books, mostly focusing on teachers, their perceptions, their professional growth and their role as leaders in schools. She has completed a PhD with the University of Aberdeen, UK, basing her research on professional teacher professional learning in Malta. Michelle Attard Tonna can be contacted at: michelle.attard-tonna@um.edu.mt
The impact of mentoring on the Canadian early career teachers’ well-being

Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Lorraine Godden and John Bosica
Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact that mentoring has on Canadian early career teachers’ (ECTs’) well-being. The authors describe findings from a pan-Canadian Teacher Induction Survey (n = 1,343) that examined perceptions and experiences of ECTs within K–12 publicly funded schools, with particular interest in retention, career interests and the impact of mentoring on well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey was used to examine perceptions and experiences of ECTs within publicly funded K–12 schools across Canada. For this paper, the authors selectively analyzed 35 survey questions that pertained to mentorship and well-being of ECTs, using quantitative and qualitative procedures.

Findings – The findings revealed a strong correlation between the mentoring experiences and well-being of the participating Canadian ECTs. The teachers who did not receive mentorship indicated significantly lower feelings of well-being, and conversely, teachers who participated in some kind of mentorship demonstrated much higher levels of well-being.

Research limitations/implications – This paper draws on the selective analysis of the data from a larger study to elicit the connections between the mentoring support and perceived well-being. Due to inconsistencies in terminology and multifaceted offerings of induction and mentoring supports for ECTs across Canada, there might have been some ambiguity regarding the formal and informal mentorship supports. A longitudinal study that is designed to specifically examine the connection between the mentorship and well-being of ECTs could yield deeper understandings. A comparative study in different international contexts is commended.

Practical implications – The findings showed that the ECTs who did not receive any mentorship scored significantly lower feelings of well-being from external, structural, and internal well-being sources, and conversely, the ECTs who participated in some kind of mentorship scored much higher levels of feelings of well-being. Policy-makers should therefore continue to confidently include mentorship as an intentional strategy to support and help ECTs to flourish. However, inconsistent scoring between individuals and their levels of external, structural and internal well-being suggest that more research on the connection between mentoring and well-being of the ECTs.

Social implications – Work-life imbalance seems to be more challenging for ECTs than policymakers who provide these expectations are aware. Therefore, excessive work demands and intensive workloads need to be given proper attention for their potential negative effects (such as stress, burnout and absence) on the beginning teachers’ health and well-being. Likewise, purposeful strength-based approaches should be undertaken to establish generative and pro-social efforts to enhance the connectedness, collaboration, collegiality and resilience-building opportunities for novice professionals within flourishing learning communities.

Originality/value – In this paper, the authors have undertaken the first steps in exploring the impact that mentoring has on Canadian ECTs’ well-being. The study increases the understanding of how mentoring can be used as a purposeful strategy to support the well-being of ECTs and retain them in the teaching profession in Canada and potentially in different international contexts.

Keywords Teacher well-being, Canadian teachers, Mentorship of early career teachers

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

At the beginning of their professional journeys, early career teachers (ECTs) across the world often face immense challenges related to personal relationships, organizational structures, and professional expectations for teaching, evaluation and professional learning from their employers, school administrators, colleagues, parents and students (Guardino and Fullerton, 2010; Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007; Whisnant et al., 2005). As a consequence of stresses from challenging working conditions, inadequate support, and limitations of certain
education policies, many ECTs (including the most talented) choose to leave the profession (Borman and Dowling, 2008; Colb, 2001). In varying degrees, teacher attrition is present and affects the educational systems in the UK (Smithers and Robinson, 2003), Australia (Stoel and Thant, 2002), the USA (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll and Smith, 2003; Smith and Ingersoll, 2004) and other countries (OECD, 2005). Internationally, studies show that the majority of teachers who quit the profession do so in their first two to five years, and in some cases, even before the end of their first year (Black, 2001). While Canadian statistics about the attrition rates are not conclusive, during the period from 1995 to 2004, attrition ranged from 30 to 40 percent for teachers in the first five years of service (CTF, 2003, 2004). More recently, studies showed that ECT attrition rates across Canada varied from high to low across provinces and territories (Clandinin et al., 2012; Clark and Antonelli, 2009), unevenly affecting segments of the teaching profession (Karsenti et al., 2008; Valeo and Faez, 2013). It is clear, though, that teachers across Canada quit the profession mainly within the first five years (Karsenti and Collin, 2013). Moreover, due to provincial/territorial control over education, induction supports as mechanisms for retention of ECTs vary across Canada with multilayered supports provided by provincial/territorial governments, teacher associations and unions, school boards and individual schools, or hybrid formats as a combination of supports from several sources (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). The nature and length of induction supports also vary considerably across the country. Some jurisdictions offer one or more years of induction through centralized programs that may or may not include mentoring, while other programs are organized in a decentralized manner (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016). Furthermore, a route to permanent employment is long and circuitous in some parts of Canada, with the occasional teaching (OT) route being the only one available for ECTs (Broad and Muhling, 2017). Occasional teachers are usually employed by the school board as substitutes for regular or temporary teaching staff on daily casual and long-term occasional teacher contracts (Kutsyuruba et al., 2013).

To mitigate the attrition issue, it is instrumental to offer induction support for beginning teachers (Le Maistre et al., 2006). Mentoring is considered an integral and crucial component of induction programs, intended to support individual beginning teachers’ needs (Hobson et al., 2009). Effective induction programs and high-quality mentoring programs can have positive impacts on early career teaching. These effects are manifested through increased teacher effectiveness, stronger self-confidence, higher levels of satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, reduced stress, improved classroom instruction and student achievement, and early career retention of novice teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Henry et al., 2011; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Wynn et al., 2007).

Teacher well-being has also been viewed as a pivotal condition for increased teacher effectiveness and improved teacher retention (Day, 2008; Day and Kington, 2008). Scholars argued that attrition should be primarily addressed through efforts directed at ensuring continual professional development, renewal and reinvigoration of practice for ECTs (Farrell, 2012; Yonezawa et al., 2011). Creating a school climate that is inviting, supportive and conducive for new teachers’ learning, development, collaboration and connection is an important aspect of growing well-being and organizational health. Focus on well-being is also important to mitigate new teachers’ high levels of stress, burnout and dropping out of the profession (CTF, 2011). Hobson and Maxwell (2017) noted that despite the crucial importance of the early formative years in the profession, there is limited empirical research on the well-being of ECTs. Our research directly responds to their call for enhanced understanding of how policymakers, school leaders and practitioners can create conditions for the optimization of ECTs’ well-being through proper attention to mentorship.

Our multiyear pan-Canadian research project examined the differential impact of teacher induction and mentorship programs on ECTs’ retention, as perceived across the provinces and territories. In this paper, we outline the results from one of the research study phases,
a pan-Canadian Teacher Induction Survey \((n = 1,343)\), that examined Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) ECTs’ perceptions of induction and mentorship programs, with particular interest in retention and career issues. In particular, we were interested in exploring the impact of mentoring on the Canadian ECTs’ well-being. Upon reviewing the literature with respect to mentoring and well-being in the teaching profession, we describe our research methodology and share the analysis of the survey responses from the Canadian novice teachers. We conclude with the discussions of our pan-Canadian study research findings and offer implications for policymakers, academics, and practitioners who work with ECTs across international settings.

**Review of the literature**

In the following sections, we offer brief reviews of literature related to provision, benefits and nature of mentoring for ECTs, as well as discussions of teacher well-being, stress, work–life balance, and flourishing school cultures.

**Mentoring in early career teaching**

A major component within provision of support for ECTs is mentoring where experienced teachers are paired with novice teachers to help them survive and thrive in the beginning phase of their teaching career (Wong, 2004). Based on the premise of “critical friend,” (Costa and Kallick, 1993, p. 49), mentorship involves facilitation of instructional improvement wherein an experienced educator (mentor) works with the ECT (protégé) to examine and mutually plan ways instruction in the classroom may be improved (Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum, 2010). Although ECT mentoring has traditionally been framed as a one-on-one relationship, it has grown to include group mentoring and mentoring networks. In addition, mentoring has often been conceptualized as and categorized into formal and informal (e.g. formal would include planned and intentional mentoring programs whereas informal would include mentoring that happens between two individuals without any additional support or involvement from other individuals or organizations) types (Desimone et al., 2014). Whatever the format, mentors aim to support the ongoing development of their protégés, providing tailored coaching, guidance, advocacy, counseling, help, protection, feedback and information that the ECT would not readily have access to. ECTs can have different energy, commitment, and motivation toward teaching; for some, teaching is a passionate vocation, and for others, teaching is merely a job (Day, 2017). Ultimately, a crucial task of mentors is to respond to ECTs’ personal learning needs (Bennetts, 1995; Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Portner, 2008) and to intentionally differentiate support to address varying needs (D’Souza, 2014).

To try to ensure that ECTs flourish, support provided should include mentorship and collaborative approaches to continued growth and learning (Carroll, 2005; Howe, 2006) that consider beginning teachers’ stages of development. Mentoring, when provided for novice teachers at the early stage, creates a positive learning environment from the outset that supports individual learning and development and successfully fosters beginning teachers’ competence and well-being (Richter et al., 2013). Mentoring also improves ECTs’ work satisfaction (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Stanulis and Floden, 2009), enhances feelings of competence (Lindgren, 2005), and reduces the likelihood that teachers will leave the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). As such, mentoring can bring personal benefits for ECTs, including stronger self-confidence, reduced stress, and increased motivation and learning (Allen and Eby, 2007; Lacey, 2000), as well as reciprocal benefits to mentors (Ghosh and Reio, 2013). Research has shown that the most effective mentors possess a deep knowledge base, experience, and expertise that is needed to guide the ECT in their professional growth (Elfen et al., 2012).
Effective mentoring also includes a personal dimension, a capacity for forming successful interpersonal relationships. Of particular importance is mentors’ ability to establish productive relationships with school administrators (i.e. school leaders in supervisory roles), students, staff and other mentors (Gardiner and Weisling, 2018). Subsequently, the affective dimensions of the mentoring relationship between ECT and mentor should be nourished to create effective and mutually beneficial mentoring pairings (Hudson and Hudson, 2010; Kilburg, 2006). Trust is crucially important within interpersonal relationships and is reliant upon open lines of communication between mentor and ECT (Levin and Rock, 2003; Yendol-Hoppey and Fichtman, 2007). In addition, mentors should be supportive, good listeners, non-judgmental, and accepting of the ECT’s pedagogical practice, even if it differs from their own (Johnson, 2002; Marable and Raimondi, 2007). An effective mentor is able to instill hope and an optimistic outlook in the beginning teacher, conveying a sense that any challenge can be overcome (Rowley, 1999).

Mentors often take on an evaluative role over their protégés, which can be an anxiety-provoking process for the ECT. The conflation of mentoring support and evaluation roles has been termed “judgementoring,” which amongst other detrimental impacts has been found to impede mentees’ willingness to openly share their concerns with and seek support for their learning needs from mentors (Hobson and Maldez, 2013). To overcome this, mentors should clarify that their primary role is to assist and support professional growth with the ECT rather than evaluate their teaching or performance (Eferton et al., 2012). Only when ECTs sense their mentors’ non-judgmental support and trust have been established do they feel sufficiently secure in revealing their concerns and challenges (Daresh, 2001).

Some practices identified as important components of effective mentoring programs are: selecting mentors with the same certification, geographically located in proximity to their mentees; providing the mentoring pair with flexible enough schedules that they are able to find time to plan together; reduced workloads for the ECT; and program induction being available for both mentors and mentees (Barrera et al., 2010). More recently, attention has turned to identifying innovative mentoring that adopts ethical approaches to supporting ECTs. For example, Nahmad-Williams and Taylor (2015) described the READ model where mentors and mentees reflect on mentoring experiences through a series of journal entries. This model is based upon the three themes (identity, fear of being judged and respect), which in turn become dimensions of the mentoring model (relational dimension, affective dimension, and ethical dimension). Another model (Langdon and Ward, 2015) focuses on educative mentoring, where both mentors and mentees construct a collaborative partnership by reconstructing their practice with the aim of transforming student learning. Both the READ model and educative mentoring approaches call for a commitment to continued professional development for mentors as well as ECTs.

Teacher well-being

The literature on teacher well-being has multiple foci, including the need to mitigate the negative effects of stress (Farber, 2000; Vesely et al., 2013), enhance work–life balance (Burke and Mcateer, 2007), increase resilience (Gu and Day, 2007), and, more recently, develop prosocial behaviors and flourishing cultures (Cherkowski and Walker, 2013; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Framing teacher stress as a crisis, Greenberg et al. (2016) called for more attention to organizational and individual interventions to help reduce stress and promote well-being for teachers. Negative effects of stress on teachers include reduced self-efficacy, strained teacher–student relationships, burnout, and higher rates of teacher absenteeism and teacher turnover (Fives et al., 2007; Harris, 2011; Klassen and Chiu, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001), as well as reduced morale, thwarted educational goals and increased probability of quitting (Leroux and Théorêt, 2014; Yong and Yue, 2007). Multiple studies have acknowledged the negative effects of stress...
Workload and work–life balance are deemed closely aligned to well-being, and the well-being of teachers today affects the well-being of society tomorrow (Bubb and Early, 2004). However, maintaining teacher well-being and work–life balance is problematic across the teaching profession in general and early career teaching in particular. As an extensive work–life balance study showed (Froese-Germain, 2014), most Canadian teachers struggle with work–life imbalance and increased workplace stress that negatively affect their ability to teach. In their research in England, Hobson and Maxwell (2017) noted that the single most prominent individual factor inhibiting ECTs’ well-being was the perception of having an unmanageable workload or a poor work–life balance (often as a consequence of unmanageable workload). Further adding complexity to the issue is the expectation for teachers to play a major role in a transformed child and youth mental health system, requiring ECTs among others to have skills in identifying and providing mental health support for their students (Kirby, 2013). As Bubb and Early (2004) noted, unless teaching is perceived to be a rewarding and less stressful career, there can be little doubt that recruitment and retention of ECTs will continue to be a major challenge.

ECTs need support to not only survive but also thrive and build their capacity to maintain and sustain well-being (personal and of others). Teacher resilience enhances motivation and commitment of teachers to deal with work–life challenges and positively affects teaching effectiveness, heightens career satisfaction, builds working relationships, and prepares teachers to adapt to changing conditions in education (Gu and Day, 2007; Howard and Johnson, 2004; Le Cornu, 2013). Having synthesized five decades of research on resilience, Luthar (2006) concluded that resilience fundamentally rests on relationships. Furthermore, resilience and successful adaptation despite stress and other challenges help teachers maintain their personal well-being (Howard and Johnson, 2004). In this regard, self-care is critical for ECTs due to its focus on engaging in reflective practices and maintaining positive mindset (Wood and Stanulis, 2009).

Roffey (2012) posited that literature often describes teacher well-being in deficit terms – how stress is impacting teacher burnout and problems with retention. Recently, the focus on well-being has changed toward a positive, prosocial outlook, describing it as an “overarching term that encapsulates an individual’s quality of life, happiness, satisfaction with life and experience of good mental and physical health” (Noble and McGrath, 2012, p. 17). Suggesting a mindset shift in studying teacher well-being, Walker and Cherkowski (2018) argued for the need to approach the work of teaching from a different, positive, strength-based, appreciative and affirmative perspective of flourishing. Flourishing refers to the optimal ways of functioning characterized by goodness, wholeness and high levels of well-being that result in resilience, self-fulfillment, contentment, happiness and mental health (Frederickson and Losada, 2005; Haybron, 2008; Huppert and So, 2013; Martin and Marsh, 2006). Within a positive organizational scholarship field, a number of models for well-being have been suggested that can be applicable to the study of early career teaching. The most well-known is PERMA: Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Noble and McGrath (2015) proposed a similar model, positivity, relationships, outcomes, strengths, purpose, engagement and resilience. Both models highlight the importance of well-being in building and improving schools as enabling institutions.

Methodology

This paper describes the findings from the survey phase of a multiyear pan-Canadian research project that examined ECTs’ experiences and the differential impact of induction...
Research instrument

An online survey was developed to examine the perceptions and experiences of ECTs within publicly funded schools across Canada. The survey was developed based on relevant literature and instruments, as well as the input generated from a pan-Canadian expert panel comprised of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The survey questions covered such aspects as demographics, teacher induction, mentorship, school administration, work environment, and career and professional development. Of 89 questions, 77 were quantitative (multiple-choice and Likert scale) and 12 were qualitative (open-ended).

Research sample

The survey instrument was field-tested with the expert panelists, principals and teachers prior to distribution. The invitations to participate in the online survey were distributed through teacher federations/associations, ministries of education, community organizations and social media platforms. Survey participants needed to be beginning teachers (within their first five years of employment) in a publicly funded K–12 school in Canada. The survey was distributed in the Spring/Summer of 2016. With varying degrees of completion, the researchers received over 2000 responses to the survey from ECTs across all provinces and territories in Canada. Due to the nature and modes of survey distribution, survey return rate calculation was not possible. Processes of data cleaning and removing incomplete data sets afforded researchers a final sample of 1,343 usable responses, with some variation in responses to individual survey items.

Data analysis

This paper reports the outcomes of selective analyses of survey questions that pertained to ECTs’ mentorship and well-being. For this purpose, we finalized a workable data set with 35 questions (33 quantitative Likert-scale questions and two open-ended qualitative questions). The analytic software SPSS was used for the quantitative analysis of the 33 quantitative questions, which included simple descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations and inferential statistics), as well as a series of analysis of variances (ANOVAs) to determine different levels of variance and significance for the more in-depth analysis of the data. The open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively using emergent and a priori coding procedures (Creswell, 2012), whereupon codes were combined into themes. As a team of researchers was involved in analyzing the data, we followed the general guidelines for assessing and reporting inter-rater reliability (Creswell, 2012).

Research findings

Demographic information

The demographic data showed that the mean age of respondents was 29 years old, with 19 percent being male and 81 percent being female. Significantly, 96 percent of the respondents had a Bachelor of Education degree, and 27 percent of the respondents had other forms of credentials (Master of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, etc.). While the current teaching location for the majority of participants represented three provinces, Ontario (33 percent), Alberta (27 percent) and British Columbia (18 percent), all 13 provinces and territories were represented in this study. This trend also reflected the province in which the respondents obtained their teacher certification/accreditation. For the overall years of teaching experience, data showed an almost equal distribution of respondent teaching experience, across span of one to five years. Teaching experience at all
grade levels from Kindergarten to 12 was represented in the sample. In total, 85 percent had OT experience, with almost a third of ECTs having taught occasionally for less than one year, while the rest had taught for up to five years in OT positions. Over a third of respondents (37 percent) had been at their current school for less than a year. In all, 23 percent had been at their school for a full year, 22 percent for two years, 10 percent for three years, 5 percent for four years and 4 percent for five years. Moreover, the majority of these schools were located in small cities (with a population of about 100,000). See Table I for detailed demographic information.

Quantitative analysis

Mentorship

A number of survey questions related to the ECTs’ experiences with receiving mentorship. In our analysis, we first analyzed four general questions about mentoring support (i.e. How have you been supported as you started your career as a teacher? Who provided that support? Which source of support has been the most beneficial? and Has the support you have received met your needs as a beginning teacher? Why or why not?). We noted that participation in mentoring differed across the survey participants. When asked about the type of support they had received as a beginning teacher, 73 percent responded about receiving informal mentorship, compared to 27 percent receiving formal mentorship (among other supports). The two types of mentorship (as part of multiple-choice options) were defined for survey participants as follows: informal mentorship (between colleagues) and formal mentorship (established through a program). Regarding the question about the most beneficial types of support, 44 percent mentioned informal mentorship and 6 percent mentioned formal mentorship as the most beneficial supports (among other supports). When the respondents were asked if they ever had a mentor, 33 percent responded negatively and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province currently teaching in</th>
<th>Province of accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>Manitoba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunavut</td>
<td>Nunavut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
<td>Yukon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–22</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–26</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27–30</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–34</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35+</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall years teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their first year</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their second year</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their third year</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their fourth year</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their fifth year</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of occasional teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full year</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three years</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four years</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five years</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Demographic information for survey participants
67 percent responded positively. Of those who had mentors, 29 percent had multiple informal mentors, 26 percent had multiple formal and informal mentors, 22 percent had a single informal mentor, 21 percent had a formal mentor, and 2 percent had multiple formal mentors (see Table II).

Further analysis was conducted on 11 questions that elicited responses about specific impacts of mentorship. The responses to these items were on a five-point Likert scale (see Table III).

A principal axis factor analysis was run on the above mentorship items pulled from the survey to determine if these items aligned with a larger concept of positive mentorship. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = 0.96. Only one factor had an eigenvalue over Kaiser’s criterion of 1 and explained over 70 percent of variance. The scree plot also agreed with the one-factor analysis. Therefore, it appears that all 11 mentorship items from the questionnaire can be factored into a larger concept. This concept was called the mentorship score and related to the constructive impact a mentor may or may not have on the new teacher. The higher an individual’s mentorship score, the higher the perceived impact a mentor had on this individual. This value was calculated by combining the 11 scores of the individual mentorship questions. See Table IV for the list of the 11 mentorship items.

An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the type of mentorship received (formal mentorship, informal mentorship, or a mix of formal and informal mentorship) and an individual’s mentorship score. Note that if an individual

### Table II.
Participation in mentorship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Statement</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>R (%)</th>
<th>S (%)</th>
<th>O (%)</th>
<th>VO (%)</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How frequently do you and your mentor meet?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My mentor provides constructive feedback about my practice</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My mentor provides constructive feedback about my students’ learning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My mentor clearly communicates school expectations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My mentor observes my teaching to enable more effective practice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My mentor encourages me to try out different teaching approaches</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My mentor guides me to set goals related to student learning</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My mentor and I have professional conversations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My mentor and I discuss my ongoing career planning</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My mentor helps me to communicate with school administration</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mentoring helps me with my personal development</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** N, Never; R, rarely; S, sometimes; O, often; VO, very often
indicated they did not have a mentor then their mentorship score would obviously be 0. Thus, this group was not included in this analysis (see Table V).

The ANOVA shows that the mentorship score of those who had only a formal mentorship was significantly \((p < 0.05)\) lower than those with an informal mentorship or a mix of formal and informal mentorship. There was no significant difference in mentorship score between the informal mentorship group and the mix of formal and informal mentorship group.

Overall, these findings indicate that over the three types of mentorship (formal, informal or a combination of the two), if an individual had only a formal mentor then they reported a poorer reception to their mentorship experience. It appears that combining informal mentorship with the formal mentorship or having only informal mentorship led to a better mentorship experience for ECTs.

**Well-being**

We also analyzed participants’ responses to 14 items on the survey that were related to ECTs’ well-being. The responses to these items were on a five-point Likert scale (see Table VI).

A principal factor analysis was run on the 14 well-being items pulled from the survey to determine if these items aligned with a larger concept of general new teacher well-being. I regularly consider leaving the teaching profession was reverse coded as a high score in this item and would indicate a negative association with well-being. The KMO measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = 0.919. Three factors emerged with an eigenvalue over Kaiser’s criterion of 1 and collectively explained over 62 percent of variance. The scree plot also indicated three factors. With these measures as well as the large sample size, three factors were retained. The three factors are external well-being, school structure and internal well-being. See Table VII for the factors and their corresponding well-being items.
These three factors of well-being were created by adding the scores of the individual questions. Each individual was then given three separate scores on well-being: external well-being (with a maximum score of 30), internal well-being (with a maximum score of 15) and school structure (with a maximum score of 25).

**Well-being and Mentorship**

An ANOVA was run to determine if there was a significant difference between the type of mentorship received and their level of well-being received from external sources (Factor 1). The analysis showed that the group that received no mentorship scored significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than the other three groups. (It is worth mentioning that the other three groups had no significant differences between each other in the analyses.) This shows that the new teachers who did not have any mentorship at all had a significantly lower feeling of well-being that came from external sources (see Table VIII).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SD (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>D/A (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>SA (%)</th>
<th>N/A (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe my working conditions (e.g. class size, planning time, case</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>load) are appropriate for a beginning teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have adequate time to reflect on student learning</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel I am well integrated into my current school community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other teachers listen to my thoughts and opinions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel respected as a colleague in this school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel I have earned the trust of my fellow staff members in this</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school has an inclusive and supportive culture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My successes are regularly acknowledged</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In my school, teachers are engaged in decision-making processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about matters that affect them</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. There is informal peer mentoring (or group mentoring) in my school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In general, I enjoy working as a teacher at this school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In general, I thrive as a teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I regularly consider leaving the teaching profession</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am proud to tell others that I am a teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: SD, Strongly disagree; D, disagree; D/A, neither agree nor disagree; A, agree; SA, strongly agree

Table VI. Wellbeing perceptions

Table VII. Wellbeing factors

Factor 1 – external well-being
I feel I have earned the trust of my fellow staff members in this school
Other teachers listen to my thoughts and opinions
My school has an inclusive and supportive culture
I feel respected as a colleague in this school
I feel I have earned the trust of my fellow staff members in this school

Factor 2 – school structure
My successes are regularly acknowledged
There is informal peer mentoring (or group mentoring) in my school
In my school, teachers are engaged in decision-making processes about matters that affect them
I believe my working conditions (e.g. class size, planning time, case load) are appropriate for a beginning teacher

Factor 3 – internal well-being
I regularly consider leaving the teaching profession
In general, I thrive as a teacher
I am proud to tell others that I am a teacher
In general, I thrive as a teacher
An ANOVA was run to determine if there was a significant difference between the type of mentorship received and their level of well-being from the school structure (Factor 2). The analysis showed that the group that received no mentorship scored significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than the other three groups. This shows that the new teachers who did not have any mentorship at all had a significantly lower feeling of well-being that came from the structure of the school (see Table IX).

An ANOVA was run to determine if there was a significant difference between the type of mentorship received and their level of well-being received from internal sources (Factor 3). The analysis showed that the group that received no mentorship scored significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than the other three groups. This shows that the new teachers who did not have any mentorship at all had a significantly lower feeling of well-being that came from internal sources (see Table X).

A paired sample $t$-test was used to compare the mentorship score of an individual with their level of external well-being (Factor 1; see Table XI). The test showed that the mentorship score and external well-being factor were weakly positively correlated ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). A paired sample $t$-test was used to compare the mentorship score of an individual with their level of school structure well-being (Factor 2). The test showed that the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mentorship</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Significance to no mentor</th>
<th>Significance to formal</th>
<th>Significance to informal</th>
<th>Significance to formal and informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1 – external well-being</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mentor</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>16.39</td>
<td>10.90</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>21.36</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>21.90</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and informal</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>22.78</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table VIII.* Wellbeing factor 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mentorship</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Significance to no mentor</th>
<th>Significance to formal</th>
<th>Significance to informal</th>
<th>Significance to formal and informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2 – school structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mentor</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>13.36</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and informal</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>14.59</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table IX.* Wellbeing factor 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mentorship</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Significance to no mentor</th>
<th>Significance to formal</th>
<th>Significance to informal</th>
<th>Significance to formal and informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3 – internal well-being</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mentor</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>11.37</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>0.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal and informal</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table X.* Wellbeing factor 3
mentorship score and school structure well-being factor were positively correlated ($r = 0.345, p < 0.001$). A paired sample $t$-test was also used to compare the mentorship score of an individual with their level of internal well-being (Factor 3). The test showed that the mentorship score and internal well-being factor were weakly positively correlated ($r = 0.248, p < 0.001$).

Overall, these analyses indicate that for well-being experienced through supports from external sources, school structure and from internal sources, any form of mentorship is beneficial. Our analysis shows a significant decrease in well-being in terms of all three factors if the individual has no mentorship in place at all. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between all three well-being factors and an individual and their mentorship score, thus suggesting that positive mentorship increases an individual’s well-being.

**Qualitative analysis**

*Well-being, flourishing and thriving*

Emergent coding (Creswell, 2012) was used for the responses to the question: What helps you to sustain your own well-being and “flourish” or “thrive” as a beginning teacher? From the responses ($n = 868$), 998 pieces of information were coded into 11 emergent themes (see Figure 1). The two codes colleagues and work–life balance had by far the highest occurrence with 248 and 239, respectively, which we have chosen to describe in detail below.

**Colleagues**

Individual responses in the colleagues code related to the notions of both formal and informal mentorship. The data elicited from the responses suggest that when an ECT needs support or is going through a time of struggle, they often turn to their colleagues for support. For some, this support came in the form of helping with planning and resources: “sharing ideas and resources with other new teachers,” “conversations with fellow teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair with mentorship score</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External well-being</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School structure</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal well-being</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.**

Well-being categories

---

Meditation/Mindfulness

Reflection

Sleep

Professional Development

Not Thriving

Exercise

Family and Friends

Students

Colleagues

Work–life Balance

Internal Motivation

Figure 1.

Well-being categories
to share ideas and resources.” “the other teachers around me supporting me and giving me resources.” For others, support was manifested via emotional help and mental health; “hearing from my colleagues who face similar frustrations is immensely comforting,” “creating my own professional relationships with people I can discuss difficult situations with and find support from,” “talking with my colleagues and knowing that everyone goes through the same things that I do.”

Several comments were made about the direct relation of mentorship to flourishing and thriving: “as for flourish and thrive, I would say my mentor and friendly colleagues at the school,” “reaching out to my mentors when I need support or encouragement,” “my mentors help motivate me at a time when long-term occasional and permanent positions seem so far away,” and “regular talk with peers and mentors.” Other indicators of flourishing and thriving included “continued support from colleagues,” “teaching in teams and having other teachers to talk with, complain to, and share resources with,” “experienced teachers who tell you that what you are doing in the classroom is good,” and “talking with my colleagues and knowing that everyone goes through the same things that I do.” While these sorts of experiences did not directly mention a mentor, they all shared characteristics with an informal mentorship.

Interestingly, multiple pieces of data addressed the importance of colleagues who were also starting their teaching career. Things like “talking with other new teachers,” “interactions with other new teachers,” “knowing other new teachers go through similar periods of turmoil, stress, reflection, and exhaustion and that I can get through my own trials,” and “communicating with other beginning teachers” pointed to the benefits of establishing and maintaining friendships and connections with their peers and colleagues.

Work–life balance
The importance of leaving work at work and creating a separation between work life and home life seemed to be crucial to many new career teachers. For instance, one teacher shared “focusing on everything but teaching after I leave school. I try to leave work at work.” Often, ECTs mentioned a time when they did not have this balance and how important maintaining this balance had become.

Striking a balance: I spent probably 15 h a day working (both at school and at home) in my first year, and it was impossibly difficult. Now, at the end of my third year, I don’t spend as much time at school before and after the school day and while I still routinely bring work home at night, I rarely pull it out. Instead, I spend that time with my family or on myself. Some ECTs discussed the importance of having this work–life balance for their mental health and well-being and acknowledged that it also helped them perform better as a teacher. For instance, one teacher noted the need for:

[...] making sure I have healthy work–life balance. This is something that I have struggled with since the start of my teaching career. I only recently started to take more time for my life and relationships outside of work. Having the balance helps me feel rejuvenated and gives me the motivation to continue learning and thriving as a teacher.

Critical in this regard was maintaining a positive mindset: “I need to have my own down time to maintain a healthy lifestyle and continue being a positive person – if I get down on myself and become stressed then I do not perform well I the classroom.” Many teachers identified the positive impact that a sufficient work–life balance had on the reduction of stress in their lives; “having hobbies that I work on outside of school helps in stress reduction,” “finding the balance between work and life. It’s challenging, but once you find an outlet for frustration or stress, things get much easier,” and “I make sure I leave some time for family/hobbies so that the job doesn’t consume my life. I find these moments help lower my stress and well-being.”
Mentors’ impact on teacher well-being

To examine the impact a mentor might have on an ECT’s well-being, we analyzed the following question: In what way(s) has your mentor been most valuable to you and your teaching? We used a combination of emergent and a priori coding procedures (Creswell, 2012). Based on the analysis of the responses to this question (n = 753), results were organized into three major themes: general impact of mentorship, increased confidence and self-efficacy, and improved teacher–student relationships.

General impact of mentorship

With regard to the general impact of mentorship, respondents considered mentorship valuable through collaborating, guiding teaching and guiding non-teaching. Mentors that provided value through collaborating with beginning teachers did so with report cards, planning for teaching and developing resources to use in teaching. Mentors that guided beginning teachers in teaching provided resources, modeled their own teaching practices, and modeled communication practices to students and other individuals within the school community. In addition, mentors’ guidance in non-teaching contexts was deemed beneficial by participants. For instance, mentors provided feedback and advice, and assisted with a number of first-time experiences including speaking with parents and how to handle students failing courses: “by supporting me in situations where I’ve had to make tough calls – failing a student, contacting parents about plagiarism, etc.” and “[offering] a model for building positive relationships with students and classroom management.” ECTs appreciated when mentors advocated on their behalf (especially when working with administrators), assisted with understanding routines and procedures within the school and profession, and provided encouragement and emotional support when needed. Many beginning teachers felt that mentors had helped develop their network and specifically assisted with both the transition to the profession and the school community. Mentors were considered valuable in providing information about students, listening to beginning teachers’ concerns and thoughts, answering questions and pushing beginning teachers to continually improve their practice.

Increased self-efficacy and confidence

There were multiple examples of ECTs sharing the perceived impact their mentor had on their self-efficacy or confidence as a teacher. These responses focused around issues from inside the classroom – “provided me with new ways to differentiate and has also helped boost my confidence level within my classroom” – in addition to challenges outside of the classroom – “provide a confidence boost when I’m flagging or worried (about parental involvement).” One participant described:

Overall, it was the confidence she [the mentor] instilled in me […] when I brought new ideas and my creativity into the classroom and she encouraged it; when she would tell me that I had a great idea, she liked it and that she felt she learned as much from me, as I did from her. That always made me smile and realize that our mentorship meant as much to her as it did to me.

This boost in ECTs’ self-efficacy levels attributed to mentors’ direct actions provided clear next steps and encouragement to ECTs.

Improved teacher–student relationships

A swathe of comments revealed the impact mentors had on ECTs’ teacher–student relationships. The concept of the teacher–student relationship can be viewed on a large scale (the interaction and relationship a teacher has with their class) or on an individual scale (the interaction and relationship a teacher has with individual students). While multiple responses discussed the positive impact a mentor had on the large-scale teacher–student
relationship (mentor helping with differentiated instruction, lesson planning, etc.),
mentorship effect was evident on the teacher–student relationship at the individual scale.
For instance, one participant shared, “In my first year of teaching my mentor knew the
students I was working with and was able to provide me with some background information
and insights on strategies that worked for her with some more challenging students.”
Another respondent similarly identified how their mentor had helped with “knowledge of
students in my classroom in regard to their strength, needs, and interests.” These insights
from the mentoring interactions were seen to be very valuable for some individuals and
helpful for ECTs’ early efforts to forge successful teacher–student relationships.
Interestingly, there were also cases of mentoring being helpful in bolstering individual
teacher–student relationships by providing the ECT with information and context
regarding issues outside of the classroom that might impact particular relationships with
students. These included the “bigger picture” of the school where “my mentor has an
understanding of my students and the school which really helped me as a new teacher to the
school” and the broader community within which the school was located: “She has an
understanding of the community and the students that I, as someone from a very different
life, do not have.” Many instances of such information sharing between mentor and protégé
would be difficult to surface through a more impersonal and standardized new teacher
induction program.

Discussion
Our findings revealed a strong correlation between the mentoring experiences and
well-being of the participating Canadian ECTs. In general, we note that participation in
mentoring differed across the survey participants, with an alarming finding that close to
one-third of the respondents reported that they had not experienced any mentoring
support in their early career teaching. Mentorship support for new teachers should be
considered a “must-have resource” (Glazerman et al., 2010; Guarino et al., 2006; Henry et al.,
2011; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). In relation to the connection between mentorship and
well-being, our results show that ECTs who did not have any mentorship at all had a
significantly lower feeling of well-being that came from external sources, from the
structure of the school, and internally.
For most of the participants who benefited from mentoring, supports mostly came from
informal mentorship arrangements with colleagues rather than from a formal mentor
assigned as part of the program. Quantitative data analysis showed that the mentorship
score of those who only had formal mentorship experiences was significantly lower than
those with an informal mentorship or a mix of formal and informal mentorship. Previous
research in education and other fields has similarly revealed that informal mentorship is
more frequently accessed and sometimes deemed more beneficial than formal mentorship
(Desimone et al., 2014; James et al., 2015; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Du and Wang (2017)
found that ECTs are more likely to develop informal mentoring relationships if they have
opportunities to interact with colleagues within and outside of their immediate work unit in
a positive, trustful, open, and stable social environment. Qualitative responses from those
ECTs who experienced mentoring highlighted the importance of the strength of the
relationship in mentoring, regardless of whether it was an informal or a formal mentoring
relationship. As Desimone et al. (2014) found, complementary roles of informal and formal
mentors point to the desirability of having both: while informal sources of support can help
address the personal needs of teachers, the formal mentoring structures are often directed at
meeting their professional needs.
Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed the importance of collegial relationships
through mentorship for the overall well-being, flourishing and thriving of new teachers.
Collegial support for our respondents came in the form of help with planning and resources...
or manifested via emotional help and mental health. These findings are consistent with those of Hobson and Maxwell (2017), who noted that the presence, absence, nature and intensity of teachers’ relatedness (i.e. social connections to others in and around schools) are key factors in enhancing or impeding ECTs’ well-being. Our participants emphasized the need for connection with other beginning teachers for professional and emotional support. Interpersonal relationships amongst peers have been found to lead to greater satisfaction, ability to develop professionally, more effective and confident decision making, and increased sense of belonging and efficacy (Grodsky and Gamoran, 2003). In general, collegial relationships enabled ECTs to operate within the culture of open access to knowledge and expertise, collective problem solving, and trusting school climate, particularly reflected in their courage to share their frustrations (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Collaboration for new teachers thus is critical, as it helps them to mobilize knowledge without having to “reinvent the wheel” and to develop a higher sense of connectedness (Swarz et al., 2009), which in turn can translate to pedagogical well-being (Soini et al., 2010). Mentoring also afforded development of strong teacher–student relationships that enhanced ECTs’ feelings of flourishing. Building positive teacher–student relationships is deemed strongly related to effective classroom management and instructional quality of beginning teachers (Kwok, 2017) and an ethos of community and caring in the classroom (Wentzel, 2012). In addition, collegiality and connection between school administrators and teaching staff could provide school administrators with increased opportunities to meaningfully interact with, support, and ultimately retain high-quality educators (Barnett et al., 2016). To this end, Hobson and Maxwell (2017) argued that school administrative teams should include a member of staff with overall responsibility for teacher well-being.

Mentorship and collegial support allowed our participants to expand their understandings of school structures, policies, routines and procedures and thus gain confidence in their everyday decisions. Similarly, other researchers found that personal confidence and efficacy depend on supportive relationships that help ECTs with socialization into the teaching profession (Penwick, 2011; Long et al., 2012; Tillman, 2005). For beginning teachers, making independent decisions could be one of the most challenging tasks; with no prior experience, they might feel vulnerable or hesitant to make choices. Having a mentor, formal or informal, helped some of our participants make decisions with assurance, thus increasing their self-efficacy (Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Tschannen-Moran and McMaster, 2009). To support the promotion of ECTs’ well-being, Hobson and Maxwell (2017) recommended that all novice teachers be allocated a mentor or another colleague whose remit included a specific concern for the promotion of their well-being. For the ECTs in this study, mentors exhibited positive impact on their learning by being competent, knowledgeable, and willing to guide, enable, and share resources. These practices and actions align with main roles of mentors evident in the literature: guiding, leading, advising, supporting; coaching, educating, enabling; organizing, managing; and counseling, developing interpersonal relationships (Harrison et al., 2006).

Mentoring in our study was found to mitigate feelings of stress. Stress in teaching often results in “teacher turnover, low teacher satisfaction, and high teacher burnout, along with negative physical and psychological health outcomes” (Harris, 2011, p. 105). In order to deal with stress by growing resilience, Kyriacou (2001) distinguished between two approaches: direct action techniques that a teacher enact to eliminate the sources of their stress; and palliative techniques that engage teachers in mental or physical strategies aimed at lessening the feeling of stress that occurs. Certainly, the findings of this study seem to support Kyriacou’s first assertion that direct action type approaches support the ECT in becoming more resilient to stress. ECT participants in this study reported that their mentors helped to reduce stress by providing supportive pedagogical advice and the sharing of resources.
For ECTs in our study, the mentoring relationships provided opportunities for them to pause and have a conversation with a trusted colleague. This in turn prompted deeper reflection, as mentors modeled reflective practices through the questions posed to their protégés. While serving as a prominent feature in teacher induction and mentorship programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Wang et al., 2008), reflection (and especially critical self-reflection) also has significant and beneficial implications for the development of ECTs’ resilience (Cook-Sather and Curl, 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; Leroux and Théorêt, 2014).

According to Harrison et al. (2005), tailored mentoring can assist in developing critical reflective practice, in a form of researching from the inside, and thus provide a valuable route for mentees to re-enter past experiences and to facilitate both the deconstructing and constructing of their practice.

In addition to this support structure from within the school, finding healthy levels of work–life balance was also important for the ECTs in this study. In particular, having hobbies or interests outside of school, spending time with family and friends away from the work environment, and ensuring that school life and home life were kept separate were all felt to be positive ways of managing work–life balance. These findings support Burke and McAteer’s (2007) assertion that more people want a life beyond work, and thus work can become more effective if employees are able to find ways to integrate their work, families and personal lives in more satisfying fashion. Critical in this regard for ECTs was the need to maintain a positive mindset. Being positive enables educators to understand their impact on students to help them be focused and feel competent, to build healthy relationships with colleagues and students, and to apply a strength-based model that targets every student in the classroom (Brooks and Goldstein, 2008). The ECTs in our study turned to colleagues for support when they recognized feeling overwhelmed or struggling in their working role. Again, our findings suggested that informal mentoring was most valued by ECTs in this respect, which might speak to potential benefits of mentor and protégé pairings that evolve through collegial working friendships rather than formally imposed mentorship pairings.

Furthermore, as Guarino et al. (2006) found, mentoring, collaboration, and networking with other teachers have significant benefits for retention of ECTs.

To best support well-being and flourishing of ECTs, it is important to develop sustainable learning communities characterized by wholeness, connectedness, meaning, commitment and depth of collaborative relationships (Cherkowski, 2012). As noted above, long-standing connections with other empathetic beginning teachers were important for the ECTs in this study. Nieto (2003) argued that collaboration is vital for new teachers to solve the problems of their practice, to build critical and long-standing relationships with colleagues, and to belong to a school community. Connection and collaboration with like-minded peers are beneficial processes that augment beginning teachers’ professional capacity (Anderson and Olsen, 2006) and represent a generative effort to well-being, with teachers expressing renewed motivation, realistic attribution of value to the professional role and good interpersonal bonds (Gozzoli et al., 2015). Overall, our findings revealed a critical role for such aspects as positive emotions (mindset), engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment (outcomes) and resilience (Noble and McGrath, 2015; Seligman, 2011) for ECTs’ well-being. As we noted from the findings, mentoring can be the vehicle through which the flourishing learning climates (Cherkowski and Walker, 2013) can be established, maintained and sustained for beginning teachers to thrive in.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

In this paper, we have undertaken the first steps in exploring the impact that mentoring has on Canadian ECTs’ well-being. First, this paper draws on the selective data analysis of the data from a larger study to elicit the connections between the mentoring support and perceived well-being. A study that is designed to specifically examine this connection...
is commended. We found that multiple forms of mentoring were being used to support ECTs with differing levels of success. However, as we found earlier (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016), due to inconsistencies in terminology and multifaceted offerings of induction and mentoring supports for ECTs across Canada, even with our suggested definitions regarding the formal and informal mentorship, there might have been some ambiguity regarding those kinds of mentoring supports for ECTs. A more longitudinal and larger study of teachers, from preservice through the first five years, could yield deeper understanding of the connection between the mentorship and well-being that we have begun to uncover in this paper. Furthermore, connecting the dots between ECTs’ needs, hopes, and concerns, and those of their school administrators, many of whom are also dealing with excessive workloads and demands, would be illuminating. This broader scope could potentially reveal solutions for leadership and administration of mentorship programs. Finally, the lessons learned from our large sample-size pan-Canadian study could be examined and contrasted with other international contexts in a comparative study.

Conclusions and implications

Based on the findings of this study, we draw several conclusions and suggest implications for policymakers, practitioners and researchers. Our findings showed that the ECTs who did not receive any mentorship indicated significantly lower feelings of well-being from external, structural and internal well-being sources, and conversely, the ECTs who participated in some kind of mentorship demonstrated much higher levels of feelings of well-being. Policymakers should therefore continue to confidently include mentorship as an intentional strategy to support and help ECTs to flourish. However, inconsistent scoring between individuals and their levels of external, structural, and internal well-being suggest that more research should be undertaken to reach a clearer understanding of the nature of factors that impact the effective organization and delivery of mentoring supports and subsequent impact on the well-being of the ECT. This would allow mentoring to be purposefully crafted as a factor in supporting the well-being of ECTs and retaining them in the teaching profession.

In terms of practice, this study has identified that multiple forms of mentoring are being used to support ECTs in the early stages of their careers with differing levels of success. However, there seemed to be some ambiguity as to whether formal mentoring was in place for teachers as they started their careers, with far more informal mentoring being identified than formal. The literature shows that formal mentorship programs are helpful, and yet one cannot often mandate a fitting connection between mentor and mentee. Given that the ECTs noted many instances of benefiting from informal mentorship, we suggest increased efforts to establish a clearer picture of which staff in schools are providing mentoring and what form this mentoring takes. Given that informal mentoring strongly depends on relationship building and social interactions, further studies would do well to explore the impact of changes in workforce, contextual factors, and relational ties on short- and long-term well-being outcomes. Given the instrumental role of school administrators in the induction and mentoring processes of ECTs, such insights may offer an assistive lens to school principals, vice-principals and other administrators by identifying where mentoring is optimally being utilized to help ECTs survive and thrive.

In spite of increased attention to the need for a balanced work–life focus for teachers in policies, the perceived imbalance between work and life demands seems to be more challenging for ECTs than policymakers are aware. Excessive work expectations and intensive workloads need to be given proper attention for their potential negative effects (such as stress, burnout, withdrawal and absence from work) on the beginning teachers’ health and well-being. Likewise, purposeful strength-based approaches should be undertaken to establish generative and prosocial efforts to enhance the connectiveness,
collaboration, collegiality, and resilience-building opportunities for novice professionals within flourishing learning communities. Consequently, building a support network with peers during initial teacher training programs could be a valuable asset for ECTs to develop and utilize as an ongoing support mechanism.

References


Greenberg, M.T., Brown, J.L. and Abenavoli, R.M. (2016), Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools (Research Brief), Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.


Kutsyuruba, B., Godden, L., Matheson, I. and Walker, K.D. (2016), Pan-Canadian Document Analysis Study: Understanding the Role of Teacher Induction and Mentoring Programs in Teacher Attrition and Retention, Queen’s University, Kingston.


**Corresponding author**

Benjamin Kutsyuruba can be contacted at: ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Educators’ perceptions of the value of coach mindset development for their well-being

Kendra Lowery
Department of Educational Leadership, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine high school educators’ (three teachers, a career counselor and a social worker) perceptions of training to develop a coach mindset and the perceived impact of the training on their professional and personal well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – Individual semi-structured interviews and 16 h of observational data of professional development were collected.

Findings – Five themes emerged from the data. Participants challenged themselves to work on coach skills; affirmed the importance of relationships; identified areas of increased skill development; envisioned coach training throughout the school; and applied a coach mindset in other domains. These themes are related to two constructs of psychological capital – efficacy and hope – which contributed to participants’ professional and personal well-being.

Research limitations/implications – The low number and selection of participants make transferability of the findings difficult.

Practical implications – Findings indicate that a coach mindset may increase educators’ well-being as they learn to build positive student, collegial and personal relationships. Recommendations for further research include exploring relationships between the development of a coach mindset, increased positive student outcomes and educator well-being.

Social implications – The development of a coach mindset may lead to increased educator well-being and positivity.

Originality/value – As few empirical studies exist regarding the effectiveness of coach training for teachers, the findings of this study fill a gap in the literature regarding these topics.

Keywords Well-being, Coach mindset, Psychological capital (PsyCap)

Paper type Research paper

Educator well-being is a construct that is important for practitioners, scholars and educator preparation program faculty to understand. Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015) described well-being as an “umbrella-like construct” (pp. 181–182) that encompasses one’s feelings and perceptions of a range of domains including emotional, psychological, social, physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015) suggested that well-being is associated with physical and psychological health, satisfaction, and success in one’s endeavors. Therefore, it is appropriate for educators to consider how to support well-being. Jackson et al. (2006) described teacher burn-out as a construct opposite to that of well-being. Frank et al. (2013) associated a number of factors with burn-out: difficulties with student discipline, lack of teacher accountability, insufficient material resources and inability to self-regulate emotions. Researchers have identified positive psychological resources which educators may be able to access to ward off negative work-related influences and contribute to their well-being (Avey et al., 2010; Hansen et al., 2015; Luthans et al., 2004, 2013; Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015).

Psychological capital, often referred to as PsyCap, is a composite construct rooted in positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship and positive organizational behavior.

The author extends her gratitude to Ball State University for its generous support of this research through an Aspire Junior Faculty Grant.
Psychological capital is related to employee well-being and consists of four positive psychological constructs: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). This construct expands upon two basic theoretical approaches regarding which factors are the greatest determinants of well-being – one’s inherent disposition toward positivity or situational determinants such as life events. Scholars assert that psychological capital can influence a person’s disposition toward happiness or well-being over time and can lead to increased well-being by viewing life events from a positive orientation (Luthans et al., 2013). Many studies have provided evidence of a positive relationship between psychological capital and job performance (Avey et al., 2010; Wright and Cronanzo, 2000; Wright et al., 2007) as well as evidence of negative relationships between psychological capital and job performance, such as burn-out (Newman et al., 2014). For example, results from studies in different work contexts led Wright and Cronanzo (2000) to conclude that “psychological well-being was related to job performance ratings” (p. 91). Wright et al. (2007) found that job performance was highest among employees who reported high levels of psychological well-being and job satisfaction. A few studies have documented similar findings among educators (Cheung et al., 2011; Hansen et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2006). Although this research has value, little investigation into the experiences and perceived benefits of the development of a coach mindset among P–12 educators, and how it relates to their psychological capital and well-being has occurred.

Purpose

This exploratory case study came about as part of a larger project that sought to understand whether, or to what extent, the development of a coach mindset among educators contributes to enhanced relationships with students, increased student engagement, and decreased discipline infractions. Five participants, including three teachers, a career counselor and a social worker (referred to as educators), received coach mindset training in one high school in a metropolitan area. After data collection and analysis, it became evident that educators transferred the benefits of coach training to other aspects of their personal and professional lives. The purpose of this study was to examine high school educators’ perceptions of training to develop a coach mindset and the perceived impact of the training on their professional and personal well-being. The research question was:

RQ1. How did educators make meaning of their participation in training to develop a coach mindset?

As few empirical studies exist regarding the effectiveness of coach training for teachers and the personal impact of such training, this research contributes to a gap in the literature regarding these topics.

Literature review

Leadership coaching has expanded from executive coaching for business leaders to include coaching educational leaders in ways to increase student achievement (Warren and Kelsen, 2013). In traditional coaching models in education, the principal or administrator was the client who received coaching to improve his/her practice (Goff et al., 2014; Huff et al., 2013). Also called executive coaching, leadership coaching is a model “whereby a trained consultant helps an executive to clarify and distil his or her goals, find ways of meeting them, and overcome obstacles towards their realization” (Korotov, 2008, p. 3.15). Principal coaching is intended to increase the capacity of new building principals through job-embedded learning; and for both new and veteran principals, principal coaching aims to bring about improvement in their role as instructional leader (Farver and Holt, 2015; Houchens et al., 2017; Warren and Kelsen, 2013). As instructional leaders, principals develop the skills to provide feedback regarding academic instruction and facilitate support...
for educators. Findings from the first national study of leadership coaching showed that principals believed coaching was beneficial and contributed to raising student achievement (Wise and Cavazos, 2017). These findings supported earlier studies that demonstrated increased principal capacity in various domains and improved student achievement after coaching (Warren and Kelsen, 2013).

An emerging coaching model within education exists where principals develop coaching skills as instructional leaders (Houchens et al., 2017). In recent years, efforts have been made to teach administrators these skills to act as coaches with their staff. Coach leadership training builds the capacity for a coach to serve as a thinking partner with a leader (the client) in order to support the leader’s ability to problem-solve how to continuously improve his or her organization (Kee et al., 2010). The principal-as-coach develops skills to effectively provide feedback in his/her role as instructional leader. To create the foundation for change within a people-oriented approach, the leader must build relationships that facilitate trust (Matthes, 2013). A fundamental tenet of the leader-as-coach paradigm is that the leader acts as a thinking partner who facilitates change rather than one who directs, coerces or tells colleagues what to do. As educational leaders, “Coach leaders create space for thinking and provide language to support it” (Kee et al., 2017, p. 4).

Another coaching model involves lead teachers who act as instructional or professional development coaches to help teachers build capacity in areas such as inclusion (Gallagher and Bennett, 2018), mathematics (Chval et al., 2010), literacy (Biancarosa et al., 2010) or school-wide transformation (Aguilar, 2013). Coaches typically work one-on-one with teachers by observing, modeling and providing professional development (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Chval et al., 2010). Peer coaching models in which educators engage in collaborative feedback based on student data are also emerging (Charteris and Smardon, 2015; Korotov, 2008).

Finally, educators might be trained in student-centered coaching for academics or behavior. Teachers act as coaches “when they establish common goals and activities, build social bonds and support students as they grow in their abilities” (Rickards and Hawes, 2004, p. 69). O’Neil and Hopkins (2002) provided a rich overview of the concept of teacher as coach when noting, “We define coaching in the classroom environment as working with students to increase their self-awareness and capacity for self-discovery, while motivating them to begin a process of continuous learning and development” (p. 402). This takes place through building relationships, co-inquiry, and combining theory and practice. The development of a coach mindset is fundamental to a teacher as coach framework. Kee et al. (2010) outlined the key attributes of this mindset. First, they underscored that coaches believe “in people’s potential in such a way that we stop telling them what to do and teach them how to decide what is the best action to take or task to do given the standards, the expectations, the rules, or the outcomes” (p. 15).

Different coaching frameworks each rest upon common principles such as non-authoritative approaches to leadership, respect for colleagues and understanding the relationship between neuroscience and human change processes. In general, the aim of coach leadership training is the development of a coach mindset. A person who portrays the essential characteristics of such a mindset demonstrates the capacity to establish trust, exhibits effective listening skills, presumes positive intent, facilitates reflective questioning and feedback in lieu of offering advice, and establishes a consistent schedule for structured coaching conversations (Aguilar, 2013; Kee et al., 2017; Robertson, 2016). Scholars have established that leaders must listen and provide meaningful feedback to promote growth among faculty because listening is important for growth (Cheliotes and Reilly, 2018). It follows that these skills should not be reserved solely for principal–faculty relationships; they are also important for faculty–student relationships.

Some practitioner-oriented books outline similar skills needed for educators to coach students effectively (Cheliotes and Reilly, 2018; Smith and Fanning, 2017). Smith and
Fanning (2017) outlined conversations that educators, counselors, mentors or parents/guardians can have with teens about college and career planning. Few, if any, empirical studies are available, however, that demonstrate the impact of the relationship between the training and development of coaching skills among educators and student performance. A search for such studies yielded no results. This study fills a gap in this area of research.

Well-being

Avey et al. (2010) proposed that employees’ psychological capital “serve as cognitive resources and a reservoir from which they can draw to influence their well-being” (p. 19). Several factors contribute to work-related well-being for educators. Factors that contribute to the lack of well-being have been studied extensively. These include burnout due to inadequate material resources, time demands, poor relationships with colleagues, and a poor image of educators within their communities (Jackson et al., 2006). Jackson et al. (2006) tested a structural model of work-related well-being among educators in South Africa. Their model consisted of five constructs of work-related well-being including burnout, work engagement, job characteristics, ill-health and organizational commitment. The researchers concluded that interventions that reduce job demands and increase job resources for educators support their well-being.

Conceptual framework

Psychological capital is “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” (Luthans et al., 2007). It is a composite construct that emanates from positive organizational behavior. Constructs within this approach are psychological resources that must be grounded in theory and research, based on valid measurement, unique to organizational behavior, “state-like” (be malleable, rather than fixed), and “have a positive impact on work-related individual-level performance and satisfaction” (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 542). Originally, four individual constructs that meet the above criteria comprised psychological capital. They include self-efficacy (or confidence), optimism, hope and resilience. Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief about his or her ability to successfully complete a task or execute a skill. Optimism refers to how one explains good and bad events through the lenses of permanence and pervasiveness. Optimists interpret bad events as temporary and good events as permanent; they make specific attributions for bad events and universal attributions for good events. Hope is the combination of a person’s agency and their ability to plan to meet goals or create pathways. Resilience is a person’s ability to recover from challenging situations (Luthans et al., 2004; Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017). The investigation of other positive psychological resources, such as creativity and gratitude, in relation to the above criteria has occurred with varying results (Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015).

Given this conceptual framework, I sought to understand in what ways participants in coach mindset training perceived the development of psychological capital as a result of the training. Given that a key tenet of psychological capital is that it is measurable, there are few, if any, qualitative studies. This study is exploratory regarding the extent to which such a model might be applied to the experiences and meaning-making by participants in a qualitative study. The exploration of experiences provides rich data, which may add depth and offer new insight to results derived from quantitative studies.

Research methods

Data collected and analyzed for this study were part of a larger mixed methods exploratory single case study. This qualitative design allows researchers to interpret and gather interpretations within a bounded system or delimited case (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016;
Yazan, 2015). The bounded system in this study was a high school. The purpose of the larger study was to investigate the applicability of coach leadership training traditionally reserved for administrators to non-administrative P–12 faculty and to explore the ways in which that training contributed to increased student–faculty relationships and student engagement. For the larger study, qualitative data collection included 16 observation hours of professional development, one interview with each participant, and eight observation hours of each participant (40 h total) in their classroom or everyday context. Quantitative data included a series of four pre- and post-assessments regarding participants’ development and implementation of coaching skills. The subsets of professional development observation data (16 h) and interviews were selected for this study because within these two contexts, participants reflected on how they internalized and applied coaching skills to their own lives. This was likely due in large part to the reflective nature of the structure of the professional development (training) and interview questions. These reflections were an unintended consequence of the study and deemed worthy of further exploration regarding educator well-being.

**Context**

Lake View High School (a pseudonym) operates as two separate buildings, in two distinct locations, but as one unit. One building, the traditional high school (THS), is a comprehensive high school for Grades 9 through 12. The second building is the Lake View High School Career Center (CC) where students take career/technical education courses designed to prepare them for a specific vocation. Students attend the CC for half of the school day and the THS for the other half.

**Participants**

After obtaining approval from the university Institutional Review Board, the author met with the principal of the THS who assisted with recruitment for the study. The principal collaborated with the CC director and contacted faculty from both buildings who the principal and director thought might be interested in the training. After participants indicated their interest, the author met with each participant individually, explained more about the study, and invited them to the first training session. All agreed and attended the first training, during which they completed consent forms.

Table I provides an overview of the participants by their assigned pseudonym, position, number of years in education and work location. Four of the participants were female and one was male. The participants represented a range of positions in education as well as years of experience. Jackie and Adam collaborated at the CC, one as a career pathways specialist and the other as a credit recovery teacher. Diana was a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom. Rhonda was a special education resource room teacher also involved with online credit recovery, and Sharon was a social worker. Years of experience ranged from three (Sharon) to 19 (Jackie), with the other participants having six years each. Although Sharon had the fewest number of years in the school district, she had worked for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Professional years of experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Career pathways specialist</td>
<td>Career center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Credit recovery teacher</td>
<td>Career center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Special education resource room teacher</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Traditional high school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Participant profiles
several years in social work-related positions in the community prior to joining Lakeview. Three participants worked at the THS, and two worked at the CC. However, although Sharon was housed at the THS, she often collaborated with CC faculty because she was the social worker for both sites.

Training
Training was conducted by a professor of educational leadership and former P–12 administrator who was also a certified coach through the International Coaching Federation. The coach/trainer had been trained by and is currently on the faculty of a national coaching organization, which trains a variety of leaders including instructional coaches, teacher leaders and school administrators. The coaching organization’s model is focused on the development of a coaching mindset and associated skills among educators so that as coaches they act as thinking partners alongside those they coach, referred to as clients. The trainer was also an independent consultant and coach and had developed the training sessions to meet the specific needs of the educators in this study. While working in a previous position, the trainer had recruited the author to be trained through the national organization as an executive coach for principals, which piqued the author’s interest in exploring how it could be extended to other educators. The author stopped working for the organization two years prior to this study and has no financial or other interest other than exploring how the training could be applied to typical educators who do not hold school-wide leadership positions.

The training was organized into four sessions: a 6 h training on a Saturday in November 2017, a 2 h webinar in December, a second 2 h webinar in February 2018, and a 6 h training on a Saturday in March. Participants were provided with two key coaching texts and were given reading assignments for the three later trainings. Fundamental elements of the training included the development of a coach mindset as a thinking partner and implemented the SCARF model (providing status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness) to enhance motivation, collaboration and engagement (Rock and Cox, 2012). Participants also learned and practiced essential coaching skills that included committed listening, presuming positive intent, paraphrasing and providing effective feedback. Each training session included an ice breaker during which the trainer developed relationships with the participants, direct instruction of a skill, interactive practice of that skill, and reflection on their progress and success with implementing various coaching skills. Participants were paid stipends (through a grant) for training which occurred in the evenings and on Saturdays.

Recruitment and data collection occurred from August 2017 through May 2018. Table II identifies each step of data collection and when it occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>August–October 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full day training session No. 1 – 6 hours</td>
<td>November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-assessment</td>
<td>December 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-hour training seminar (Web Ex) No. 1</td>
<td>January 2018–May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (8 h for each participant; approximately 1–2 h per month)</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full day training session No. 2 – 6 hours</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-hour training seminar (Web Ex) No. 2</td>
<td>April–May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II.
Timeline of data collection
which the training led to changes in their practice with students and others. Questions also inquired what ways, if any, they were planning to further develop and apply coaching skills. Field notes were taken during the training sessions and were typed for data analysis.

Data analysis
The interviews and training observations were recorded and transcribed. During the first cycle of coding, data related to the research question were identified. Then, they were read through again and the author wrote analytic memos and coded the data. Field notes were concurrently analyzed and integrated with the interview data to make meaning of the research question. This led to the organization of codes into larger categories. Some of the participants' passages were more directly related to the research question because the interview question prompted reflection and meaning-making. One such question inquired, “And what impact are you seeing with that in your [class]room?” This led participants to reflect on how they benefited from the training. After multiple rounds of reading and re-reading the transcripts, field notes, memos, and codes, the data were sorted and the author made decisions about what was specifically relevant to the categories and research question. This process resulted in the organization of data into even larger buckets of data, resulting in five themes (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Findings
Five themes emerged regarding how participants responded to or internalized coach mindset training. Participants: challenged themselves to work on coach skills; affirmed the importance of relationships; identified areas of increased skill development; envisioned coach training throughout the school; and applied a coach mindset in other professional and personal contexts. These themes, as related to efficacy and hope, two constructs of psychological capital, indicated that participants perceived the training to influence their professional and personal well-being in positive ways.

Participants challenged themselves to work on coach skills: “I need to work on […]”
Reflective questions asked by the trainer provided a platform for participants to express some vulnerability about where they saw gaps in their practice and areas to develop skills to become more coach-like. Without being prompted, participants used the language, “I need to work on […]” to identify a skill they were or would be intentionally incorporating into their practice throughout the training. While learning about the importance of effective feedback, Sharon said, “I think I need to give more specific feedback” because she tells students they are doing a great job but does not always explain what they are doing that is great. Diana said she needed to try harder to rely on coaching skills rather than blurt. She explained, “I’m too honest. I just say what I need to say, and sometimes it’s not productive, so I need to rein it in a little bit and be honest but appropriately honest.” By this, Diana meant she should be honest but diplomatic, doing her best to provide feedback without disregarding people’s feelings. She acknowledged the need to build communication skills by stating “so definitely some good skills in this little section for me to keep in mind with my honesty.”

Although not using the specific language of “I need to […]” Jackie expressed similar sentiments. She noted, “I have so much work to do still. You think it’s easy, but it’s really – it’s not.” During the first day of 6 h training, she mentioned to Sharon, “I want to go back and redo my conversations I just had with people.” Sharon said that she needs to work on paraphrasing and helping students move forward in problem-solving around their situations. Adam decided that he needed to work on “staying positive with the hardest students” even when they present difficulties or do not believe they can achieve.
Interestingly, participants reflected on how they wanted to increase the ability and accountability of others by “holding them able.” This phrase was introduced in the training and refers to the practice of maintaining high expectations by facilitating others to complete tasks they are capable of doing, rather than doing it for them. For example, during the first training session, Rhonda reflected on her shift away from helping by stepping in to solve students’ problems:

I mean, I’m kind of having a come to Jesus [challenging conversation] almost kind of with myself through listening to this, because it’s – I have always just wanted to help solve the problem that comes to me […] In the grand scheme of things, that’s not helping that person. So I have witnessed that today with myself – that I need to say, “What can I support you with? Instead of just doing it, fixing it for you.”

Participants affirmed the importance of relationships
Sharon reflected that the training “validated [her thoughts and feelings about] how important relationship building is […] and confirmed that for me […] the things that I’m doing, I’m moving in the right direction.” Adam expressed the value of committed listening by explaining that “just taking a minute to listen to them” was important for the development of relationships with students. Jackie reported that students have “been able to open up to me some more and [she is] building some relationships with them. Then they’re more comfortable with me now, so I’ve been seeing a lot of benefit to it.”

Adam saw the connection between SCARF and relationships by noting “and a lot of it relates back to the things – the points in SCARF. When you can say something difficult to a student, but I think it takes prior engagements with that student.” Similarly, Jackie noted:

I find myself really, really consciously thinking through things when I’m talking with students […] and I believe that has helped contribute to […] a more trusting relationship between me and students, and I think that that skill’s going to really, you know, help me throughout the rest of my career.

Participants acknowledged increased skill development
As participants progressed through the training, they expressed more efficacy in executing coaching skills. They progressed from articulating only what they needed to work on to celebrating or acknowledging evidence of their skill development. Jackie stated, “The training has caused me to become a more reflective person.” Adam recognized his growth, as well. When assessing the frequency with which he analyzed his communication skills, he reflected, “I almost never would try to practice or think about how I am communicating or what I am communicating, and now I find myself doing it more often.” By the end of the coach training, he found himself “even reflecting on conversations like how I could have made that conversation go better.” A key part of Adam’s growth was practice. He reflected upon how some skills, such as paraphrasing, were not comfortable at first, like practicing riding a bike with training wheels then gradually releasing them:

Then you have a little bit of success with it, you get some feedback, and then the next time that you do it or you see an opportunity to do it in a real life situation, it is a little bit easier then.

Likewise, Diana said she was uncomfortable with paraphrasing prior to the training, yet toward the end of training, she rated that as an area of growth. Other skills that participants reported developing included being committed listeners. In order to be fully present when having conversations with students, Jackie closed the three doors to her office so she would not be distracted by noise in the hallways or by other people standing outside her door.
Similarly, Sharon closed her door, limited faculty interruptions and said she did not answer her phone during student conferences.

Diana acknowledged that she was “pulling back” from tuning out of conversations where she assumed she knew how the story would play out, and found herself “getting engaged in listening, and not just assuming I know where the conversation is going to end.” She explained that she was “committed to the conversation, so I find that our conversations are a little more productive than usual.” Additionally, when Diana discerned that a student was developing mathematics skills, she also discovered he was selling marijuana through her use of committed listening. She was able to follow up with his mother. In another example of improved listening, Rhonda reported, “I don’t try to interrupt people while they’re still talking now. That was a big gain.” Instead, she takes more notes to remember what people are saying and then responds or asks questions after they are done speaking. Furthermore, Rhonda demonstrated how she exhibits a coach mindset when reporting, “[…] and I can even say that I notice it more on other colleagues and students if somebody’s barging in [when someone else is talking]. I’m like, ‘Hold on a second, let’s let them finish their thought.’”

Additionally, Rhonda shared the growth in her perspective regarding “holding students able” from the first to the second six-hour training. She evolved from having “a come to Jesus” [direct quote] meeting with herself to recognizing that teachers must be trained and held able to address student discipline instead of leaning on other faculty:

I mean, they have to manage that student in their classroom, so I mean, I think like you said, they’re coming to you because they want you to fix it, but in thinking that coach mindset, you have to put it back on them. “Okay, so what […] do you want to do about it?” And then you can kind of help them maybe come up with some ideas for that, if they need to start thinking that process through.

Adam incorporated presuming positive intentions about his students, even when they did not show evidence of it in the moment. He reported that he told a student that he was capable of getting a high school diploma that demonstrated more academic rigor than a general diploma; the student started attending class more and seemed more focused on completing coursework.

In another example, Adam discussed how he shifted his conceptual thinking through encouragement. The incident he referred to occurred during one of the author’s classroom observations. Adam was working on mathematics problems with the student, and when faced with a difficult problem, the student said he wanted to quit. Adam explained, “I then encouraged him. I told him that, you know, he is getting better at it, and he has those skills, and he’s capable of doing that if he’ll just stick it out.” Adam challenged the student to do two more problems with him; then, as incentive, the student could take a break and complete the remaining two at home. Adam recalled, “Sure enough [he] did the next two […] and by the end of the second he said, ‘I’m ready to knock these next two ones out now too.’ So he just went ahead and did them instead of quitting.”

Diana reflected on a moment during which she upheld the expectation for a student in her class to complete a task. Each morning, the students sat at their desks, listened to a song, and Diana approached each student at their desk and greeted them individually. The individual greetings were an opportunity for students to practice their social skills. One morning, Diana stopped at a student, extended her hand, and the student did not extend her hand to shake Diana’s. This student was in a wheelchair and some might have thought she was not capable of shaking Diana’s hand, but Diana knew she could do it. She told the student, “I’m going to wait for you to shake my hand.” The student eventually did it. Diana pointed out:

Normally, I would have said, “Okay, well, maybe tomorrow,” and I would have moved on knowing full well that she was able to do that.” But instead I decided, You know what? I’m going to try today to hold her able to do what I know she can do. She did it. It took a little while, but she did it.
This experience demonstrated Diana’s efficacy at allowing students to demonstrate their capability, while at the same time increasing her sense of self-efficacy regarding coaching skills. Similarly, Sharon upheld expectations for a parent to get a student who missed school for several days. The student apparently could not wake up in time to be ready for the bus. Diana recognized that it was neither her job to criticize or fix the problem. Sharon reported that she asked, “When will [student] be on the bus?”

Participants envisioned the spread of coach training

Participants’ excitement over their training and the results it yielded led to their desire to move forward in their training and to encourage the skill development of their colleagues. While envisioning the benefits of increasing the scope of this professional development, Sharon pointed out the benefits of collaborating with Rhonda since they were going through the training together by expressing, “I appreciate that Rhonda and I work together, knowing that we’re working on this Art of Coaching (book).” Rhonda added, “We can give feedback to each other very quickly.” Diana concurred.

Sharon saw the development of relationships as a key benefit of such training by pointing out:

Relationship building is not only important with our students but also it’s important that we all work here as a team, you know, faculty and staff, administrators, and [the training] can really help with that […] so for me, especially it was a great experience that people [who] were chosen to do this alongside me are people that I respect and are people that I think do a phenomenal job with our students.

Jackie saw opportunities to strengthen collaborative relationships among students, deans and teachers if a coach mindset were developed among teachers.

Rhonda saw possibilities for coaching as professional development because she was excited about the prospect of challenging “the normal and the routine [habits by some colleagues] of figuring out why it’s not possible, so it’s hard to kind of switch to figure out how to focus on results instead, and focus on the positive.” Adam shared his optimism by stating, “I definitely don’t want to lose this […] It’s powerful. And I know some of it, like little bits of it will stay with me forever, even if I didn’t ever look at it again.”

Participants applied coach mindset to their professional and personal domains

Participants expressed how they applied their learning to their interactions with other faculty and in their personal lives. This was an indication of the value they placed on the development of a coach mindset. Participants also reflected on how certain principles of coaching, such as making a clear distinction between requests and requirements, were important as they prioritized extra duties on their jobs. They expressed the challenges of feeling pressured to follow through on requests as if they were requirements, especially if asked by an administrator. Diana reflected:

Sometimes when I think about faculty meetings or I think about if you get approached in certain aspects, whether it be from a colleague or another student or something […] and you give them a no answer, to see their responses, oh well, wait, maybe that wasn’t exactly a request.

Diana also thought about how to be honest and direct in ways that colleagues would not perceive as mean while discussing a challenge with a colleague. She recognized the need to incorporate coaching language into her interactions. Likewise, through discussion with the group, Sharon recognized the need to create boundaries by explaining how much time she typically committed to faculty who approached her during work hours to discuss their personal family issues, which took time away from her role with students. Adam applied learning about discerning the appropriate time to speak vs maintaining complicity with
silence in a situation where some of his colleagues were speaking negatively about another colleague: "[...] and I said, ‘You know, I don’t feel comfortable talking about this topic, and I’m going to remove myself.’" He reflected that as recently as the previous school year he “probably would have sat there and agreed — and not agreed with them, but listened to them, which would give them some affirmation.”

As Rhonda problem-solved about how to successfully balance work–home obligations, she initially thought she was concerned only about her personal life. She discussed the challenges of maintaining a personal life separate from school because “how can you do that when education — in order to be the best, you have to constantly be finding new things?” Through discussion and reflection, she realized that the issue of balance was intertwined with work. She noted, “I need to change my way of thinking because to me over-committing is being productive.” Another example of this application to personal lives was brought forth during a discussion of the request vs requirement. A few participants acknowledged that they repeated this pattern with their children. Jackie said that she felt that learning communication and listening skills had helped her in her personal relationships, “so not only professionally but in my own life, just in my daily interactions with family.” Adam mentioned that he tried to teach some of the coaching skills to his family.

**Discussion**

First, it is important to point out that since this qualitative study does not employ an experimental design, it is not possible to determine a causal relationship between coach mindset training and the development of psychological capital and well-being among participants. Rather, the findings represented how the five participants “interpret[ed] their experiences […] and what meaning they attribute[d] to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). To review, psychological capital consists of four constructs: efficacy (confidence), hope, resilience and optimism. Findings from this qualitative study indicated that participants experienced benefits from coach mindset training in relation to two constructs, efficacy and hope, which in turn have been associated with well-being. Avey et al. (2010) noted that their study “provides preliminary evidence that positive resources such as employees’ (psychological capital) may lead to the desirable outcomes of their (personal well-being) over time” (p. 24). Participants developed increased levels of self-efficacy to be co-thinkers with and supporters of students. In turn, participants expressed hope about the potential of this mindset to transform educational practices within their school, leading them to envision how to create school-wide training opportunities.

Increased efficacy was expressed through participants’ explanations of how they executed new skills and the impact they felt those skills had on their professional and personal lives. Likewise, by focusing on holding students able to complete tasks or perform objectives, the participants acknowledged the importance of fostering self-efficacy among their students. Participants’ meaning-making about why the training was valuable provides insight into how psychological capital is developed. For example, Luthans et al. (2004) asserted that opportunities to develop mastery are “potentially the most powerful approach for developing confidence because it entails direct information about success” (p. 48). Adam expressed the value of such opportunities when he compared the process of practicing listening skills to riding a bike with training wheels. Participants’ continual development and competency with coaching skills were routinely praised by the trainer, which added to their sense of confidence. This was evidenced by statements by participants regarding what they “needed to do,” reflecting not only their appreciation for the importance of the skills, but also their willingness to develop the skills through practice and ongoing reflection. The themes that arose from the data indicated that participants challenged themselves to work on coaching skills, identified areas of increased skill development, and applied a coach mindset in other contexts; these themes demonstrated increased levels of efficacy among the participants.
Another area where participants expressed the development of psychological capital was through hope. Although participants did not use the word “hope,” they expressed agency through their willingness to keep practicing coaching skills and articulating the need for pathways (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Newman et al., 2014) for increasing access to coach mindset training in their schools. As they envisioned how to create school-wide training opportunities, participants demonstrated the “pathways components of hope,” which is distinct from “efficacy and other primarily agentic resources” (Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015, p. 181). Hope was also seen in participants’ willingness to develop positive relationships with students through committed listening and providing valuable feedback. That is, they committed to developing their proficiency at the skills because they were hopeful that development of those skills would reap benefits. Interestingly, Luthans et al. (2013) introduced the construct of relationship psychological capital to describe one’s ability to draw upon “hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism in making positive appraisals of relationships and probability for relationship success based on motivated effort and perseverance” (p. 122).

Evidence of increased efficacy and hope is related to well-being because participants described their experiences regarding the development of these constructs as positive. For example, related to efficacy, Diana described how she became more skilled at paraphrasing and committed listening, Adam recounted how he coached a student to complete a mathematics assignment, and Jackie said she wanted to redo some conversations she had with people because she would do them differently using some of the coaching skills. Regarding hope, Rhonda and Sharon envision the benefits of expanding the training school-wide. These positive appraisals indicated the impact their skills had on their efficacy and hope. These two constructs of psychological capital, in combination with others, contributed positively to work and relationship domains such as job satisfaction—all of which contribute to psychological and overall well-being (Avey et al., 2010; Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015).

Limitations
Limitations of the study include the small population that was selected. Additionally, all five participants demonstrated a propensity toward a coach mindset. Although a predisposition toward coaching was not a selection criterion for study participation, it may have been something the high school principal and director considered when they identified willing participants for the study. As educators to whom students often turned or were sent to after failing, struggling, or being pushed out of the core content, the five participants were likely pre-disposed (some mentioned that they were excited about the study because of this) to have better than average relationship-building skills. It is unclear if others will find the same value in coach mindset training.

Implications and conclusion
None of the educators in this study were general education core content teachers who typically have contact with a large cross-section of students. Further research and training that includes core content teachers is important, as students often feel pushed out of core academic classes. Scholars, including Yousef-Morgan and Luthans (2015), have asserted that studies about psychological capital must be scientifically rigorous and measurable. Therefore, most studies are quantitative. However, there is potential to examine aspects of these constructs and mechanisms through qualitative designs and methods.

As researchers continue to uncover a relationship between psychological capital and well-being, more questions can be asked. Avey et al.’s (2010) study of the relationship between psychological capital and employee well-being over time indicated that psychological capital “may be a positive resource used to enhance” (p. 25) employee well-being.
This study supports previous findings that when professional development is valuable and relevant, educators are more likely to commit to improvement and apply it in their work lives (McKeown et al., 2018). The professional development program investigated in this study contributed to increased psychological capital in the areas of self-efficacy and hope, enhancing the potential for increased educator well-being.

References


**About the author**

Kendra Lowery, PhD is Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and the Assistant Dean for School Engagement in Teachers College at Ball State University. Her research interests include: leadership practices in P-12 schools that promote social justice with a focus on racial equity, school desegregation, arts-based educational research, and the development of students and faculty in P-12 and higher education contexts. Kendra Lowery can be contacted at: kplowery@bsu.edu
“I love this stuff!”: a Canadian case study of mentor–coach well-being

Trista Hollweck

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report on a qualitative case study that examined the potential benefits, challenges and implications of the mentor–coach (MC) role as a supportive structure for experienced teachers’ well-being and sense of flourishing in schools.

Design/methodology/approach – The qualitative case study used data collected from surveys, interviews, focus groups and documentation. Data were coded and abductively analyzed using the “framework approach” with and against Seligman’s well-being PERMA framework. In order to include an alternative stakeholder perspective, data from a focus group with the district’s teacher union executive are also included.

Findings – Using the constituting elements of Seligman’s well-being (PERMA) framework, experienced teachers reported positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment from their MC experience. However, the MC role is not a panacea for educator well-being. Rather, the quality and effectiveness of the mentoring and coaching relationship is a determining factor and, if left unattended, negative experiences could contribute to their stress and increased workload.

Research limitations/implications – The data used in this study were based on a limited number of survey respondents (25/42) and the self-selection of the interview (n = 7) and focus group participants (n = 6). The research findings may lack generalizability and be positively skewed.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the current lack of empirical research on the MC experience and considers some of the wider contextual factors that impact effective mentoring and coaching programs for educators.

Keywords Well-being, Mentoring, Coaching, Induction programmes, Mentor–coach, Professional learning and development

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Schools need to be healthy, safe, supportive and productive sites where every child can flourish academically, socially and emotionally. With academic learning and well-being inextricably linked, international educational systems are focusing on the promotion of student well-being (Cherkowski and Walker, 2016; OECD, 2017; Seligman, 2011). Relatedly, teacher well-being has also been the subject of increased enquiry in educational discourse and research agendas (see Cherkowski and Walker, 2018; Hobson and Maxwell, 2016; Kidger et al., 2016; McCallum and Price, 2010; Ott et al., 2017). Considering the international consensus within research that teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to student success, satisfaction and achievement (Danielson, 2011; Hattie, 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2016; Sanders and Rivers, 1996; Strong, 2011), it is no surprise that there is interest in how the well-being of teachers influences the quality of their work (Roffey, 2012). As stated by Parsons (2018), “In short, students thrive when teachers thrive” (p. 231).

The author gratefully acknowledges financial support for this doctoral research project from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The author would like to thank the participants in this study for sharing their experiences, the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and detailed feedback, Pam Firth for editing expertise and Drs Benjamin Kutsyuruba and Lorraine Godden for their encouragement and support in developing this paper.
What does well-being mean, and what are some of the conditions, forces and influencing factors that support educators’ well-being in schools? Can taking on a mentoring and coaching role increase teachers’ well-being? These are some of the questions that prompted a qualitative case study to examine the lived experiences of mentor–coaches (MCs) in a small Canadian school district. Data collected from surveys, interviews, focus groups and documentation were abductively analyzed (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) with and against Seligman’s (2011) PERMA[1] well-being framework to explore the potential benefits, challenges and limitations of the MC role as a supportive structure to cultivate experienced teachers’ well-being. Whereas most research literature examines the impact of mentoring and coaching on new teachers, this study examined the impact on the MC in relation to well-being and aimed to contribute to a growing research base that responds to the question: “What’s in it for the mentor?” (McCorkel et al., 1998, p. 93; Holland, 2018, p. 110). In this study, most participants reported that being an MC was a meaningful experience and positively contributed to their sense of well-being. However, for others, negative mentoring and coaching relationships were reported to be emotional and added to their workload and stress level. Thus, although the MC role was found to offer powerful benefits to experienced teachers, it is not a panacea for teacher well-being.

The context of the study
The Western Quebec School Board
The “case” (Yin, 2014) of this study was an English language school district in the Canadian province of Quebec. Whereas geographically the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB) is comparable in size to the country of Ireland, its population is small and comprised of 7,298 students, 450 teaching staff, 22 principals and 8 vice-principals (WQSB, 2018a). Historically, the large distance and varying contexts of its 25 schools have made attracting and retaining teachers challenging, especially in its northern and rural schools and in specialized subject areas of French and Special Education. To date, almost 25 percent of the teaching staff (110/450) are within their first two years in the WQSB. Researchers have shown that the constant hiring and training of teachers make building collaborative cultures challenging and is detrimental to student learning (Guarino et al., 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Karsenti and Collin, 2013; Kutsyuruba and Walker, 2017; OECD, 2005). In an effort to better support all teachers new to the WQSB, as well as ensure effective teaching and learning across its schools, a two-year mandatory Teacher Induction Program (TIP) initiative was implemented in 2009.

Teacher Induction Program
With education a territorial and provincial responsibility in Canada, the Ministère de l’Éducation et Enseignement supérieur (MEES) establishes the aims and directives for the Quebec education system. It also governs, licences and regulates the teaching profession. However, since the province is anchored in a decentralized model, individual school boards and schools are responsible for the hiring, evaluation and professional learning (PL) and development of their teachers. As such, although the MEES provides guidance around teacher mentoring and induction (Kutsyuruba et al., 2013; MELS, 2003), the TIP was developed and implemented by a volunteer committee comprised of district administrators, consultants and teachers. The TIP has three aims: first, to retain effective teachers new to the district (called teaching fellows), second, to provide leadership and professional growth opportunities for experienced teachers as MCs[2], and third, to improve the teaching and learning across all district schools (Hollweck, 2017). The TIP is most closely aligned with H.K. Wong’s (2004) definition that induction is “a process – a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process – that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning
program” (p. 42). Through its three pillars – PL, a mentoring and coaching fellowship (MCF) and teacher evaluation – the TIP aims to balance quality assurance with support and professional growth. However, as Hollweck (2017, 2018), Hollweck et al. (2019) has argued elsewhere, tensions exist. This paper focuses on the MCF pillar and examines the experience of MCs through Seligman’s (2011) PERMA well-being framework.

**Mentoring and coaching fellowship**

Researchers have shown that effective mentoring and coaching supports the PL and development of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012; Matsko, 2010; Stanulis and Floden, 2009; Villar et al., 2003; Wong, 2002, 2004). In the WQSB, all TFs in their first year of the TIP, regardless of previous teaching experience, are paired with an administrator-selected MC. As outlined in the “TIP Handbook” (WQSB, 2018b), MCs are ideally experienced “master” teachers from the same school, grade and subject area as the TF. However, depending on the school context and the number of TFs, distance MCs are sometimes engaged, and teaching expertise and experience vary. Researchers have argued that the mentoring and/or coaching role can also offer powerful benefits to veteran teachers, such as professional renewal, leadership opportunities and PL and development (Bullough, 2012; Campbell et al., 2017; Carver and Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Ganser, 2006; Hobson et al., 2009; Moir and Bloom, 2003; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). This study examined these benefits in relation to teacher well-being.

The terms mentoring and coaching are often ill defined, conflated or even used interchangeably in the research and practice literature. In the WQSB, mentoring and coaching are conceptualized as two distinct, yet complementary, approaches anchored in a collaborative and reflective relationship (Campbell and van Nieuwerburgh, 2018; CUREE, 2005; Fletcher and Mullen, 2012; Knight, 2007; Moir and Bloom, 2003; Sharpe and Nishimura, 2017). Whereas mentoring is understood as more of an advocacy approach that is informal, directive and long term, coaching on the other hand is understood as an inquiry approach that is more formal, facilitative and short term (Hollweck, 2017). As shown in Figure 1, the stances are interconnected and positioned along a continuum within the WQSB’s TIP.

![Figure 1. Mentoring and coaching in the TIP](image-url)
The mentoring and coaching literature is clear that good teachers are not always effective mentors or coaches, and that training and support is essential (Bullough, 2012; Campbell and van Nieuwerburgh, 2018; Gareis and Grant, 2014; Schwille, 2008; Timperley, 2001; Wang et al., 2008; Wexler, 2019). In the district, PL activities are offered by TIP consultants and external providers and are designed to support MCs in improving their coaching skills (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Through these activities and experience, study participants reported enhanced understanding of when and how to use either a mentoring or a coaching stance in response to the needs of their TF.

In the MCF, learning is understood as social and situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2015). As a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), the MCF has a defined shared domain of interest, whereby the MC and TF work together as a fellowship or learning community to develop a shared practice by focusing on four key elements: the practice of teaching, navigating school and district culture, what it means to be a teacher in the WQSB and the formation of a teaching identity. Outlined in the "TIP Handbook," the TF engages in regular mentoring and coaching sessions with their MC, reciprocal formal and informal classroom observations, as well as ongoing and documented goal setting and reflection in a "reflective record." The MCF also provides each MCF pair with two district-funded “fellowship days” that can be used to observe teachers in different classes and/or schools. Indubitably, the district’s high-stakes (job or no job) evaluation policies frame the MCF and inform what teaching and learning looks like in the district (Hollweck et al., 2019). However, since schools and school districts are “landscapes” of interconnected communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), positive and effective mentoring and coaching relationships have the potential to support, nurture and promote well-being within and across schools and the district (Daly and Stoll, 2018). An overview of the scholarly and theoretical literature related to well-being follows.

**Literature review**

**Stress, burn-out and toxic schools**

Students need passionate, competent and committed educators. Yet, teachers and administrators are the professionals reporting the highest levels of negative emotion, job stress and burn-out across many countries (McCallum et al., n.d.; Sutcher et al., 2016). Since teacher stress and burn-out have been shown to decrease teacher effectiveness (Cook et al., 2017), it is important to consider the difference between healthy stress and toxic stress. Whereas healthy stress has been shown to help challenge, motivate and develop people, toxic stress refers to the type of stress that occurs when demands consistently outpace one’s ability to cope (Aguilar, 2018). When left to fester, this type of stress can not only lead to individual burn-out but can also infect the culture of the learning environment and even contribute to the creation of “toxic schools” (Woodley, 2018).

Toxic stress also differs from burn-out, which refers to a distinct condition of exhaustion that results from prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. In the research, toxic stress is characterized as physical and emotional fatigue, apathy, disengagement, frustration, anger, depression and dysfunction (Curry and O’Brien, 2012; Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach and Schaufeli, 2017). According to Aguilar (2018), “Toxic stress first manifests as decreased productivity, and escalates to more serious symptoms such as anxiety, dissociation, frustration, and eventually, burn-out” (p. 4). There are three burn-out dimensions used in the Maslach Burn-out Index: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burn-out as the “index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will” (p. 17). Not surprising, research shows that educator stress and burn-out factor heavily in teacher turnover rates (Curry and O’Brien, 2012; Howard and Johnson, 2004).
There are many multifaceted factors contributing to toxic stress and burn-out that can differ based on a teacher’s personality, experience and even career stage. Whereas researchers have linked burn-out to job attrition in early career teachers, job withdrawal in experienced teachers manifests more as frequent absences, loss of motivation and engagement or reduced self-confidence and self-esteem (Aguilar, 2018; Howard and Johnson, 2004). Toxic stress and burn-out have also been found to be more prevalent in teachers who have dysfunctional relationships with colleagues and/or administrators, and who work in urban areas, secondary contexts and hard-to-staff areas such as special education, mathematics, science and foreign languages (Aguilar, 2018; Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017; Howard and Johnson, 2004). Contributing factors are work intensification, punitive accountability systems, frequency of disruptive student behavior, issues with parents, low level of agency in policy-making procedures and even “compassion fatigue” (Ott et al., 2017) described as the feeling that teachers are unable to support the well-being of students (Day et al., 2007; Hargreaves, 2003; Kane and Francis, 2013; Koenig et al., 2018). With constant change and contradictory, under-resourced and imposed reforms also frequently linked to educator stress and burn-out, caution must be taken in the discussion of yet another teacher well-being initiative, such as mentoring, coaching or teacher induction.

Well-being and flourishing

Well-being and flourishing literature have re-emerged as strength-based alternatives to teacher stress and burn-out. The majority of the derivatively labeled “happiness” literature is found in the field of positive psychology (Hone et al., 2014). For founder Martin Seligman, positive psychology is described on his website as:

[...] the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. (Positive Psychology Centre, 2019)

Positive psychology is about the concept of well-being. In his book *Flourish*, Seligman (2011) defined well-being as a multidimensional construct that bridges the hedonic aspect of feeling good (positive emotion) with the eudaimonic aspects of living well (relationships, purpose, mastery, growth and autonomy). Five contributing well-being elements together form the acronym PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, (positive) relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Each element has three properties:

1. it contributes to well-being;
2. many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements; and
3. it is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity) (Seligman, 2011, p. 16).

The combination of these five elements ultimately contributes to human flourishing (Goodman et al., 2018). Flourishing is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) as a state in which every individual can realize his or her own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully and contribute to his or her own community. In this research study, well-being is considered a key component of human flourishing, but the terms are not synonymous.

More than mere “happiology,” Kristjánsson (2017) argued that the re-emergence of flourishing theories harkens back to the Aristotelian ideal of the good human life (eudaimonia), and that the “best theory” is pluralistic – both objective and subjective – with different pathways leading to human happiness. However, one of the major challenges for educational researchers is that there are a number of competing theories and visions for
well-being and flourishing in the scholarly literature. Additionally, there is no stable and uncontested definition or measure for well-being (Cherkowski and Walker, 2016; McCallum et al., n.d.; Wong, 2011b; Wong and Roy, 2017). Best summed up by Kristjánsson (2017), “by broaching the topic of human well-being, one inevitably enters into a welter of controversy” (p. 28). Huppert et al. (2005) defined well-being in broad terms as a positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish. In the field of education, researchers have linked teacher well-being to the nature of their work (Nias, 1981; Shirley et al., in press). Specifically, teachers’ work should buoy their sense of purpose (Pink, 2011), increase competence and mastery (Pink, 2011; Ryan and Deci, 2000), be anchored in “collaborative professionalism” based on solidarity and solidity (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a, b), support a sense of “collective efficacy” (Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018) and lead to a sense of accomplishment (Pink, 2011). In summary, teachers flourish when they are working as a collective doing meaningful work that is achievable and makes a difference in the lives of students.

Problematizing well-being and flourishing

Although a detailed critique is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Seligman’s (2011) well-being theory and positive psychology in general are not without their critics. According to Wong and Roy (2017), “Seligman’s PERMA theory of well-being is, strictly speaking, not a formal theory, but rather a listing of phenomena that have been shown to be related to well-being” (p. 147). Since other elements could easily be added to this list, such as Duckworth’s (2016) grit and H.G. Koenig’s (2011) spirituality, PERMA should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of basic conditions or underlying mechanisms of well-being. In referencing his own positive psychology 2.0 “deep and wide” theory, P.T.P. Wong (2011a) made the case for a more balanced and inclusive approach in positive psychology, which integrates the complex interaction between both negative and positive phenomena in order to optimize positive outcomes across situations and cultures.

Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008), Wright (2013) and Warren and Donaldson (2017) are also critics of Seligman’s (2011) seemingly culture-transcendent and universal concept of human well-being. They argued that there are significant cultural differences in the definition of well-being and criticized positive psychology researchers like Seligman for excluding non-hegemonic cultural contexts in the discussion of well-being. Crivello et al. (2009) argued that well-being must be considered “a socially contingent, culturally-anchored construct that changes over time, both in terms of individual life course changes as well as changes in socio-cultural context” (p. 53). Also, Margolis et al. (2014) cautioned that it is unrealistic and unsustainable to place the sole responsibility for teacher well-being on the teachers themselves. As Berryhill et al. (2009) stated, “making changes in individuals when the system is part of the problem leaves basic structures intact and is unlikely to affect the problem […] Therefore, policymakers should consider making changes for teachers rather than in teachers” (p. 9). Finally, concern was also levied by Wright (2013) against the corporate agenda that links well-being to increased productivity and performance in the workplace.

Ultimately, well-being and flourishing remain complex and contentious issues (Forgeard et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2018; OECD, 2013, 2015; Tomyn et al., 2013). Additionally, Seligman’s PERMA framework is only one of many models that researchers have used to measure well-being (see Diener, 1984; Huppert and So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Deci and Ryan, 2008; Ryff and Singer, 1998). However, Seligman (2018) argued that “PERMA is a good start on the complex work-in-progress that will result in an adequate theory of the elements of well-being” (p. 335). Recent empirical work comparing PERMA to other models (see Goodman et al., 2018; Hone et al., 2014) offer researchers new ways to measure teacher well-being and conceptualize what it means for educators to flourish in schools. In this
study, Seligman’s holistic PERMA framework was used because it remains, in spite of the criticisms and critics, the most widely adopted well-being measure in the Canadian educational literature (see Cherkowski and Walker, 2018; Shirley et al., in press) and as such was found to be a useful model to examine the relationship between the MC role and experienced teachers’ well-being in a Canadian school district.

Methodology
This study is one part of the researcher’s larger qualitative doctoral project that examined the lived experience of MCs working in the WQSB. Its guiding research question was:

**RQ1.** In what ways (if any) did the well-being of experienced teachers increase as a result of being an MC?

The researcher identifies as a pragmatic social–constructivist and is interested in the processes of interaction between individuals in specific contexts, especially schools. Mentoring and coaching are conceptualized as social phenomena that require “in-depth” exploration. As such, Yin’s (2014) case study design was selected as a strategy of inquiry because it “comprises an all-encompassing method – covering logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 17).

Rigor and transparency in the research process are essential in the production of ethical and credible interpretivist research (Court and Abbas, 2013; Gale et al., 2013; Savvides et al., 2014; Spencer et al., 2003). In this study, the researcher was positioned as a “pracademic” (Posner, 2009; Runkle, 2014; Susskind, 2013; Volpe and Chandler, 2001; Walker, 2010) – a “boundary spanner” (Katz and Earl, 2010, p. 48) who embodies the dual role of academic and practitioner. This unique positionality raised methodological issues and challenges. As an “insider” and co-coordinator of the TIP in the WQSB, the researcher was afforded greater access to the program’s history, documentation, key stakeholders and ongoing practice, and easily recruited volunteer participants during the data collection process. However, there were ongoing concerns whether participants would be honest and critical of the TIP. Critical perspectives were sought and data from a focus group with three members of the district’s union executive (the Western Quebec Teachers’ Association (WQTA)) were included. Transcripts and interpretations were member-checked to increase credibility.

**Data collection and participants**
Using Yin’s (2014) case study protocol, data were collected using multiple methods: surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and TIP documentation. An anonymous online survey was completed in June 2016 by 25 of the 42 MCs. Participants’ experience as MCs ranged from one to eight years. From the survey respondents, six volunteers participated in a follow-up focus group held at the end of June 2016. Concurrently, data were collected from two semi-structured interviews with another seven different MCs in January 2016 and June 2016, respectively.

**Data analysis**
Data were coded and abductively analyzed (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) using the “framework method” (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). This rigorous and transparent analytical matrix or data management tool enabled the researcher to move back and forth across as well as within individual participant “cases” until coherent codes and categories emerged (Gale et al., 2013; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). There were nine distinct methodological stages in this study: transcription of the interviews and focus groups, familiarization with the data from all sources, initiation of open coding from the raw data in the interview and focus group transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2015), categorization of initial codes by
individual MC “case” in order to retain the emerging unique narratives, application of Yin’s (2014) “pattern-matching analytic technique,” whereby the pattern of similarly coded and categorized data were abductively analyzed with and against a priori themes from Seligman’s (2011) PERMA well-being framework, exploration and interpretation of the relationship and/or causality between the empirical categories and the a priori themes to surface unexpected insights and emerging tensions, summarization of the data by category and theme with the inclusion of interesting or illustrative quotations by MC “case,” member-checking the unique codes, categories and pertinent quotations with the participants, and finally, reporting on the study’s findings in relation to the guiding research question.

Findings and discussion
Overall, the findings indicated that being an MC in the WQSB provided important benefits for experienced teachers and supported their well-being. Empirical data were analyzed with and against Seligman’s (2011) PERMA well-being framework to highlight the ways participants reported positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishment. However, tensions also emerged in the study around the influence of clarity transparency and challenging MCF relationships.

Positive emotion
The hedonic “positive emotion” element is a cornerstone of Seligman’s (2011) well-being theory (p. 16). It is a subjective variable and best measured through self-report. All questionnaire respondents agreed with the statement “I found the mentor–coach experience enjoyable this year,” with 60 percent strongly agreeing. All interview and focus group participants also described the MC experience as “enjoyable,” “rewarding,” “fun,” “enriching” and “fulfilling,” even if they had also reported having a more challenging MCF experience. For example, Winnie[3] described her year as having “ups and downs like a rollercoaster,” but ended her interview describing the MC role as “not even a job, it is fun. I love this stuff!” Similarly, Valerie reported experiencing relationship challenges with her TF but stated, “The overall experience, I love it. I just love it […] It has been very rewarding, and I find that I am learning a lot from the varied experiences – positive and negative.”

Positive emotion emerged in this study as related to high job satisfaction, passion, excitement and pride. For Tim, enjoyment was linked to personal and professional growth: “Getting better is exciting and you get pride in your profession. I am good at what I do because I work at it.” Experienced MCs also reported sustained excitement and job satisfaction. As stated by Valerie, “I feel like I am getting more out of the program then I am actually giving.” Reflecting on her eight years in the role, Laurie noted, “I think it has been one of the greatest highlights of my career.” Although Seligman (2011) argued that the positive emotion variable is purely a subjective measure, the researcher noted a palpable sense of positive energy, passion and vibrancy emerging from participants in this study. This positive energy was also addressed in the MC focus group:

If you look at this room, you are all so positive and glowing with enthusiasm and happy […] you couldn’t have picked a better group to volunteer! But really you can hear the enthusiasm around the room and the ownership of this program and personal ownership and you think, wow!

Engagement
According to Seligman, “engagement” is also a subjective well-being element best measured through self-reporting. It is most often reported in a retrospective state since “thought and feeling are usually absent during the flow state” (p. 17). Engagement was described by Bakker et al. (2008) as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized
by workers who are full of energy (vigor), strongly involved in their work (dedication) and often fully concentrated and happily engrossed in their work activities (absorption). All questionnaire respondents agreed to the statement that the MC role made them a more reflective and effective practitioner. Engagement was also reported by interview and focus group participants, regardless of whether their MCF experience was positive or negative. For example, Cathy reflected that despite a difficult relationship with her TF:

[…] it keeps you fresh and challenged […] For me it was a learning experience and now I will know what I will do different next time because it is not like you can get more PD [professional development] on how to get along with someone you don't get along with. 

MC engagement was understood in this study to derive from ongoing and job-embedded PL, intrinsic motivation and a focus on reflexivity. In total, 76 percent of questionnaire respondents strongly agreed that being an MC promoted their professional growth. They described in their comments that the role made them “more accountable to myself,” “keeps me on my toes,” “keeps us from getting stagnant in my growth” and “forces me to practice what I preach and not get comfortable and slip!” When asked what value being an MC brought to them, one participant noted:

It has tremendous value. I have challenged myself in ways that I have never been challenged before. I have also learned a lot about myself. It’s almost like a reminder to yourself to reflect and grow constantly. It also keeps me on my toes and keeps me accountable. I like that I have to better myself and challenge myself constantly. (Questionnaire)

This view was echoed by interview and focus group participants. For example, Winnie remarked, “I like that I am able to improve as well and that it is not just focused on my teaching fellow growing, but it is focused on me as well.” For many participants, learning to be an effective MC was most engaging. For Laurie, although mentoring was “a more natural stance,” she stated:

You learn how to be a better and better coach, right? I think back to my first teaching fellow and I know that I was a great mentor for her, but I probably didn’t push maybe as much as I do now. Now I push – when I push them it is because I believe in them and I believe in the program.

In this study, participants reported that it took them around three years to be effective as both a mentor and a coach. However, participants also reported that since every TF and MCF situation was different, there were always new opportunities to learn and improve as an MC. This is best summed up by Valerie who was working with a struggling TF as an experienced MC: “It was quite a few new learning opportunities for me because it was out of my comfort. This is not what I was anticipating as a seasoned teacher and mentor–coach.” Sustained positive engagement through learning to coach is well documented in the research literature. As stated by Lofthouse (2019):

[Coaches] go on to experience coaching as itself a formative process, one through which they learn more about themselves, the educational contexts, dilemmas and opportunities and of their own skills and capacity for coaching. Coaching in education is not a static practice with a pre-determined and acquired skills set, but one which seems to evolve over time. (p. 40)

Positive relationships

Positive relationships and the care and concern for others is a critical element in well-being (Seligman, 2011, 2018). Deci and Ryan (2008) position “relatedness” in their self-determination theory as one of the basic human needs. In this study, enduring PL relationships and friendships also emerged as one of the most valuable components of the MCF. All MC questionnaire respondents reported positive relationships with their TF. For one respondent,
“The most valuable aspect [of the MCF] is the relationship that is built and hopefully lasts as a reciprocal professional support.” The benefit of enduring relationships was also highlighted in the MC focus group: “As a past coach, someone who has been around for a long time, I have people that I have coached and we are still really good friends and we share things back and forth.”

Teachers flourish when they build empowering relationships that focus on PL and collaborative work (Parsons, 2018). Effective teacher collaboration can build a sense of collective efficacy or a shared belief that working together can improve student learning and achievement (Donohoo, 2017; Hibbert et al., 2018). In this study, positive relationships were often described by MCs when they had managed to find an effective balance between support and challenge. In describing her relationship with her TF, Laurie noted:

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

Hence, the MC role was not only about being an advocate, cheerleader and friend to the TF, but also hinged on the MC’s ability to set high expectations and encourage professional growth. For Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a, b), this type of relationship is an example of collaborative professionalism described as “deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry” (p. 3, emphasis in original).

From this study, positive MCF relationships hinged on trust, comfort and safety (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). Vulnerability also emerged as a key ingredient, although it was not automatic. As defined by Brown (2015), vulnerability “is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. Being vulnerable and open is mutual and an integral part of the trust-building process” (p. 45). Alice described the role of vulnerability in the MCF: “It is the job of the mentor–coach to really give their teaching fellow the confidence to show their fallibility.” However, she also recognized the inherent challenge: “Maybe it is too difficult to let yourself be that vulnerable. […] You can say it but to actually do it, it is asking a lot of people […] especially when you are trying to get a job.”

Laurie argued that the vulnerability of TFs should not be taken lightly: “If they have to grow then they have to bare it all so I feel really grateful that I have been that trusted person for so many of them.” Although many MCs in this study did experience positive relationships, for those who struggled it was often because trust or vulnerability was lacking. Best summed up by Cathy, “If you are a coach and you don’t have that connection and they are afraid of you or afraid of making a mistake then there is a disconnect in that.” Ultimately, positive MCF relationships are more than friendships. Rather, they are safe, supportive and trusting professional relationships anchored in mutual respect and reciprocal learning, which facilitate open and honest professional dialogue about teaching and learning.

Meaning
Seligman (2011) defined his fourth well-being element “meaning” as “belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self” (p. 17). Service matters to teachers (Parsons et al., 2006; Stevenson, 2019). In this study, participants noted that the opportunity to make “a contribution to my school community and colleagues” (Questionnaire) was the most rewarding aspect of being an MC. Best summed up by Laurie, being an MC was “a really honoured role and it helps me feel like I am doing something greater than just working within my own little classroom.” For many participants, the role offered them a chance to give back
for all the support they had received when they started as new teachers. For others like Valerie, it enabled her “to pass along best practices that helps to build sustainability within the school and ultimately within the board.” Improving the quality of teaching in their school was noted by many participants: “We are not sitting behind a desk. It is high stakes. We are interacting and impacting how many humans in our career?” (MC Focus Group). As such, being an MC is a meaningful role because it gives experienced teachers an opportunity to influence the teaching practice in their schools. Described by Cathy:

Ideally all students get attention and support but when I go into another class and I see the way some of these students are treated, it breaks my heart [...] we are losing and failing those students. [...] so getting [my TF] to recognize that is really important.

For Laurie, being an MC also facilitated the opportunity to spread her educational philosophy and teaching approach with her TF:

We are educators and tasked with teaching the curriculum. As critical educators, we have to question it too [...] It is an activist pedagogy, but I think that helps new teachers understand that questioning is part of being a critical thinking educator which I think we all have to be.

Accomplishment
The final well-being element in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA framework is described as a sense of “accomplishment” or achievement. In this study, accomplishment emerged for MCs in three ways: through the success of their TF, their competence as an effective MC and their influence on the school culture. For union executives, tying the MCF to successful summative evaluations was problematic: “The mentors do feel like they are having an impact on the new teachers. Whether or not that is measurable is another story. But at least in their minds they feel as though they are getting them through the TIP. That’s their goal” (WQTA Focus Group). For some study participants, the MCF impact was obvious and measurable. For example, Winnie noted:

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

Accomplishment for Winnie was also related to the fact that her TF no longer wanted to quit teaching and had begun to recognize some of her strengths: “I guess I can really see the differences between who she is now and who she started out as and it is nice to think or hope that I had an influence on that.” The influence of the MC on a TF’s practice emerged often as a source of accomplishment. As stated by Valerie, “I look at the staff who have gone through the program and I think wow they are exceptional, truly exceptional. Within this program, that is what we breed – isn’t that amazing?” The influence of the MCF on a teaching staff was best summed up by Laurie:

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

Tensions emerging from the study
Whereas being an MC contributed to the well-being of all participants in this study, caution must be taken in generalizing this to all MCs across the WQSB, especially considering the
survey’s 60 percent survey response rate and the voluntary participation of MCs in the focus group and interviews. Although the district leaders attributed the low participation to “end of year busyness” (TIP Team Focus Group), the union executives revealed that “we have [MCs] in our board who feel that they can’t honestly say that I am done with this program. They feel like there will be ramifications from administration or from the board.” Thus, caution must be taken that the MC role does not become a panacea for educator well-being in the WQSB. Best summed up in the union focus group, “If you get the right person and pairing and it works – then it is good.” Challenging relationships, unsuccessful TFs and the TF’s lack of engagement in the MCF process emerged from this study as having the potential – if left unattended – to contribute to MC stress and increased workload.

For Seligman (2011), the combination of all five PERMA well-being elements ultimately contributes to human flourishing. For Cathy, although she described her relationship with her current TF as “a mild whatever” she still considered being an MC a “positive learning experience.” However, she also noted that if her experience had been “really bad,” she “would need someone to step in.” Another participant recommended that the district leaders might want to develop “a bit of a catch so that if [the relationship] is not working there’s another try” (MC Focus Group). Also, the emotional involvement and increased time commitment needed to support struggling TFs was an area of concern raised by participants. Best summed up by Valerie:

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

The emotional toll of the MCF was not always because of a struggling TF. For Alice, the TF’s teaching context needed to be addressed:

> I think we just put [TFs] in really difficult positions and expect them to work miracles. They leave. I would have left […] For another teaching fellow I coached [working in this same context], it has been really hard on him emotionally and health-wise […] and I can see it in him, and it is really hard to watch.

Other participants reported that it was both time consuming and emotionally draining when they were working with TFs who were unable or unwilling to make changes to their classroom. For some MCs, like Mary, these challenging MCF experiences resulted in their having to “take a little break from it.” As she stated:

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

Although Mary had since returned to the MC role at the time of her interview, she credited her supportive administrator and the opportunity to debrief confidentially with other MCs in her school and the TIP team for helping her work through this negative MCF experience.

Finally, tensions also emerged in this study around the need for greater clarity and transparency around the MCF process for teachers not involved in the TIP and how MCs were selected. According to one union executive, “I find at the school level people feel like they are stepping on other people’s toes. They are not holding that [MC] title […] and you know when you are a more seasoned teacher and you have been overlooked, I know that has definitely caused some ripples at our school” (WQTA Focus Group). Conflict among colleagues was also highlighted by other participants. In his interview, Tim recounted the experience of one “jaded” MC in his school. He questioned whether greater clarity around the MC role and more involvement by other teachers in the school might have led his colleague to return to the MC role and not have felt “blamed” for her struggling and
ultimately unsuccessful TF. Union executives also suggested that the MCF simply reproduced the status quo: “You might only be getting one perspective as a new teacher. You are being told this is how you do it and then all of a sudden it is turned into a cookie cutter approach” (WQTA Focus Group). The danger of mentoring and coaching becoming “performative” (Ball, 2003) has been discussed in the research literature (Lofthouse, 2019; Stevenson, 2019). For MCs like Laurie in the WQSB, the role is not about reproducing a “mini me” but can be an enriching leadership opportunity and a chance to role model that experienced teachers are “always learning and changing and growing and working within the system and pushing against it at the same time.” Thus, clarifying the purpose and process of mentoring and coaching across the WQSB remains an area that needs further consideration in order to cultivate MC well-being.

Conclusion and implications
Overall, this Canadian case study found that being an MC increased experienced teachers’ sense of well-being. Data from interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and TIP documentation were abductively analyzed with and against Seligman’s (2011) PERMA well-being framework to reveal the presence of all five well-being elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Ultimately, participants reported that being an MC in the WQSB was an enjoyable and rewarding experience, even when they experienced a challenging MCF relationship. Additionally, participants reported that the MC role helped them to develop positive and trusting collegial relationships, supported their PL and development and engaged them in challenging and meaningful collaborative work. With teacher stress, burn-out and attrition a concern for many educational jurisdictions, an induction program developed to support and retain TFs that is also found to offer powerful benefits to its experienced teachers is worth maintaining, funding and improving. Thus, these findings have important implications for the case study context, the WQSB. First, clarity around the key terminology and transparency of the selection criteria, roles and responsibilities of the MC must extend beyond the MCF and across the school district. Second, administrators play a critical role in the selection and pairing of MCs and TFs, providing support during challenging MCF situations, and encouraging flexibility in the role. Third, MCs need meaningful PL activities and support to better understand how and when to use a mentoring or coaching approach in response to the needs of their TF. Fourth, MCs need a supportive MC community to share best practices and discuss MCF challenges. Fifth, the district must be open to critical feedback in order to adapt and improve the MCF process.

Although small in scale and not generalizable across contexts, this study provides a Canadian example of how effective mentoring and coaching embedded into a TIP has the potential to cultivate MC well-being. However, further empirical research is warranted. In particular, future studies might consider other models than Seligman’s (2011) PERMA framework to measure MC well-being. Also, future research is needed to explore the influence of the MCF on teacher attrition in the WQSB in relation to the international teacher well-being and attrition literature. In particular, it would be useful to examine how the experience and skill of the MC influences the TF’s success and/or decision to stay in the school district. Finally, future research examining the relationship between educator well-being and student achievement is warranted, especially considering the findings from this study that indicate the MC role increases experienced teacher well-being. Specifically, does the increased well-being of MCs influence the well-being of TFs, and what is the overall influence of teacher well-being on student learning and achievement? For Hargreaves et al. (2019), “There is no student wellbeing without teacher wellbeing” (p. 97). Thus, any program that is shown to support teacher well-being and has experienced teachers like Winnie proclaiming, “It is not even a job, it is fun. I love this stuff!” is an important contribution to the field of education and worth celebrating.
Notes

1. The PERMA acronym stands for positive emotion, engagement, (positive) relationships, meaning and accomplishment and will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

2. The terms teaching fellow and mentor–coach will be explained in more detail later in the paper.

3. All MC names from the interviews are pseudonyms.

References


Villar, A., Moir, E., Barrett, A., Strong, M., Baron, W., Fletcher, S. and Aichinstein, B. (2003), Reflections, A Publication of the New Teacher Center, Vol. 1, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA.


Further reading


About the author

Trista Hollweck is PhD Candidate at the University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Canada. Her doctoral research project is a qualitative case study of the Teacher Induction Program in the Western Quebec School Board. Her research areas include teacher induction, mentoring and coaching, professional learning and development, restorative justice and teacher evaluation. Trista Hollweck can be contacted at: tholl075@uottawa.ca

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Mentorship for flourishing in schools: an explicit shift toward appreciative action

Sabre Cherkowski
Okanagan School of Education,
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, and
Keith Walker
Department of Educational Administration,
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – Building on findings from research designed to bring to description teachers’ own understandings of what it means to flourish in their work, the purpose of this paper is to show how principals and teacher-leaders in schools are agents capable of building developmental relationships and mentoring cultures that can orient and support teachers toward well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual paper is anchored with findings from a multi-year qualitative research project that was designed using perspectives from positive organizational studies and positive psychology scholarship. The research methods encompassed collaborative and generative use of appreciative inquiry and strength-based research activities in school districts in both British Columbia and Saskatchewan, Canada. Data used to build this conceptual paper are from appreciative focus group conversations with teachers and principals over the course of two years. Conversations were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were thematically analyzed using the research literature framing the study.

Findings – This paper offers four domains of inquiry and a model for flourishing schools that encourages principals and teacher-leaders to develop habits of mind and heart to build developmental relationships in ways that help both mentors and mentees to embody and enact positive, appreciative and generative ways of noticing, nurturing and sustaining the work of teaching and learning; all with aspiration to sustain and enhance the well-being of every member of the school community.

Practical implications – This paper offers conceptual models and storied descriptions that can aid mentors in noticing and nurturing more developmental relationship approaches to mentoring for well-being as opportunities to build mentoring relationships from appreciative and growth-based habits and approaches. As these relationships are built across the school, positive mentoring cultures may foster and grow in ways that promotes a flourishing-for-all approach to teaching and learning.

Originality/value – This paper contributes a different and complimentary perspective to research and practice on mentoring, offering a positive organizational perspective that highlights and promotes the perceived and evidenced benefits of deliberately focusing on what goes well and what provokes vitality in schools. The conceptual models in this paper offer tools for mentors and mentees to develop and foster in others appreciative and positive capacities for positive mentoring.

Keywords Mentoring in education, Mentoring for staff development, Well-being, Mentorship for flourishing, Positive mentoring

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In this paper, we explore the benefits that mentorship with an explicit focus on teacher well-being promises to make on teachers’ work lives, on overall school health and on students’ learning experiences. Teacher well-being has become an important aspect of research for school improvement (Kern et al., 2014; Naghieh et al., 2015; Parker and Martin, 2009). Findings indicate increased stress and burnout leading to attrition among early career teachers (Kutsyuruba and Walker, 2017; Le Cornu, 2013) and decreased motivation,
engagement and commitment from those teachers who struggle to carry on, despite their lack of well-being (Brown and Roloff, 2011; Gu and Day, 2007; Pillay et al., 2005). Acton and Glasgow (2015) argued that the stressors for teachers are increasing as the social, political and economic demands become more narrowly focused on market based and competitive approaches to schooling. However, these authors suggested that attending to stress reduction is insufficient; they suggested that “compiling more knowledge on the factors that support and enhance teachers’ well-being is important in encouraging greater sustainability within the profession” (p. 100).

Grounded in research findings from scholarship in positive organizational studies and positive psychology that has illustrated the benefits accrued from a focus on strengths that leverage and mobilize development and improvement (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron and Caza, 2004; Fredrickson, 2008), we designed an exploratory, qualitative research project to uncover and describe the perceived and evidenced benefits of deliberately focusing on what goes well and what provokes vitality in schools. Through this research, we offer perspectives on teacher well-being by exploring what it means to flourish within the many demands, stressors and challenges of teaching. Of course, teaching is fundamentally a relational vocation, so our attention was on how teachers thrive, develop and perform in this social environment.

Assuming a positive organizational studies perspective meant that we paid particular attention to capacities such as happiness, resilience, optimism and compassion, which have been found to shift those in organizations toward improvements in commitment, innovation and overall organizational health (cf. Achor, 2011; Cameron and Caza, 2004; Cameron et al., 2003). From this perspective, we assert that the pursuit of well-being is at the heart of organizing school communities and professional learning communities. Under school conditions where developmental relationships and the importance of well-being are highlighted, everyone in the school learning community is more likely to flourish (Cherkowski and Walker, 2016, 2018).

Effective mentoring has been found to improve teacher retention as supportive and encouraging relationships anchor early career teachers through the challenges and stressors inherent in teaching (Hobson et al., 2009; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). Building resilience and well-being through all career stages can improve teachers’ sense of motivation and commitment, leading to improved effectiveness (Day and Gu, 2009). In this paper, we draw connections from the findings of our research on flourishing in schools (Cherkowski and Walker, 2014, 2016, 2018; Cherkowski et al., 2018) to conceptualize positive mentoring with an explicit focus on well-being through appreciative, strengths-based and inquiry-oriented processes for building developmental relationships.

Paying attention to what works well and noticing what happens, as a result of this positive shift of attention, reflects a perspective drawn from appreciative inquiry (AI), a method of engagement for change processes for teams, organizations or individuals (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). AI proponents recognize that an organization is a network of relatedness that seeks to build connections among people as they dialog together about past and present capacities (Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006, p. 231). From an AI perspective, one is well advised to pay attention to principles and practices in context that amplify a positive core of personal, interpersonal and organizational capacities and energy. This positive core is uncovered through intentionally noticing what works well and what makes people come alive as they move toward their desired futures. This inquiry can be a transformational process for individuals and groups of any size (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2012; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney and Trusten-Bloom, 2010).

Broadly, we understand mentoring as a learning process wherein relationships are the structures through which individuals and groups engage in conversations and experiences that help promote ongoing growth and development. These developmental relationships
have benefits for both the mentees and the mentors (Hobson et al., 2009). We think that the engagement in positive mentorship, as an effective means for teacher development, has enormous potential for encouraging team members and individual teachers to notice what is working and to focus on their experiences such that it reinforces the most fruitful aspects in their work, and the most fulfillment in their vocations.

Positive mentoring moves beyond the assumption that mentors and mentees engage in relationships with good intentions toward working well together. Based on findings from our research on teacher well-being (Cherkowski and Walker, 2016, 2018; Cherkowski et al., 2018) and from research in positive organizational scholarship, we suggest that positive mentoring is a purposeful focus on creating conditions for learning relationships that notice and nurture what works well in order to generate more of what is desired (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). This is a fundamentally different professional learning mindset than a deficiency-oriented mindset: one often seen and experienced in schools and research wherein there is a focus on fixing the identified problems and bolstering known weaknesses (Dweck, 2006). Elsewhere, this has been referred to as a maieutic approach to mentorship (Sanga and Walker, 2011).

Additionally, we align the construct of positive mentoring with research suggesting a collective, community approach to supporting mentor development can create conditions for ongoing professional development (Holland, 2018), and research that highlights the importance of supportive and encouraging relationships among colleagues as essential for teacher well-being (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Retallick and Butt, 2004). In this paper, we argue that an intentionally appreciative and positive perspective on what it means to build conditions for positive developmental relationships is a potential area for further developing research and practice on mentoring. With this appreciative focus, we propose that mentors can amplify meaningful learning for these adult learners by giving attention to relevant learning relationships sustained over time, creating good-fit conditions for supportive growth and learning and providing opportunities to connect with external sources of learning throughout the process (Barnett et al., 2017; Jarvis, 2004).

In this paper, we propose a conceptualization of positive mentoring, building on our findings from our research on teacher well-being. Through examples from our research, which offer teachers’ perspectives on what it means to flourish, we suggest conditions conducive to the exercise of this positive mentoring, highlighting the benefits and potentials for furthering professional growth and development when focusing on what works well and what makes teachers feel alive, engaged, connected and on purpose in their work (Cherkowski and Walker, 2018). These examples are illustrative of conditions that these teachers tended to appreciate as they described what it meant to flourish – conditions that we suggest positive mentors may choose to co-create with mentees, toward appreciative, positive approaches to developmental relationship building.

In the next section, we offer a brief overview of the flourishing in schools research from which we have drawn the examples of teacher well-being. We then describe both the literature and the conceptual model that framed our research. We provide this overview because we believe that the pursuit of flourishing-for-all provides the strategic context for mentoring for well-being. This approach of coupling mentoring initiatives with well-being represents a shift toward an appreciative perspective and opens spaces for learning conditions that encourage and promote teacher well-being. We advocate this model as an example of a tool that may be used to build positive mentoring experiences.

Overview of research on flourishing in schools and importance of mentorship

Stories of teachers’ experiences of burnout, exhaustion and disengagement are all too familiar to those who conduct research on teaching and leading in schools. Teacher burnout is referred to as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization – a negative, cynical
attitude toward one’s work – and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007), also described as feeling worn out or empty (Carmona et al., 2006). Some of the main contributors to burnout include time pressures, threats to a teacher’s identity, feeling powerless and a general feeling of not doing an important and meaningful job. Burnout in the education system has associated costs, including higher health care expenditures, greater absences, greater disengagement and lower teacher retention (Carmona et al., 2006; Froeschle and Crews, 2010; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007, 2009).

Given these all-too-common conditions and circumstances, we sought to explore how teachers and other school leaders experience their work from a flourishing perspective, to build and grow models of school improvement that honor and recognize the wholeness of teaching, the challenges and complexities as well as the joys and successes. Inquiry is a powerful tool for fostering developmental relationships (mentorship), helping us to learn more about how it is that persons and schools of people flourish. This is a whole-person perspective, through inquiry, that offers opportunities for educators to notice and nurture what works well in order to grow more of what they seek in their work. A positive organizational studies perspective does not deny the challenges, sufferings and challenges that are naturally a part of all human-centered systems (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Worline and Dutton, 2017). Rather, this perspective contributes to building a sense of accomplishment, health and contentment at work and in life, even while there are traumas, sufferings and setbacks (Seligman, 2011). First, we provide a brief overview of the literature that informed the development of the conceptual framework that guided our study, and then we describe the case study from which we drew the findings that guided our development of the notion of positive mentoring advanced in this paper.

A positive approach to thinking about schools as sites for flourishing
As indicated, research findings in positive psychology and organizational scholarship have influenced our thinking about school improvement research and practice. Positive psychologists focus on the development of positive outlooks, habits and mental models. This is a shift away from the more prevalent deficit-model approach of trying to repair what is negative, deficit and destructive (Achor, 2011; Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Ben-Shahar, 2008; Carr, 2004; Keyes et al., 2012; Seligman, 2002, 2011). Experiencing positive relationships and positive emotions, virtues and strengths, as well as creating opportunities for noticing meaning through engagement and achievement, can contribute to a sense of flourishing in life (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005; Park et al., 2004; Seligman, 2002, 2011). Interventions that improve or promote well-being are abundant and include such activities as regular journaling about gratitude, engaging in anonymous acts of kindness, pursuing goals and learning to forgive (Lyubomirsky, 2007). The literature is less evident when it comes to connecting the roles of leadership, mentorship and developmental relationships as means to promote and sustain well-being. Research shows that experiencing positive emotions improves mood and feelings of life satisfaction, which can lead to a sense of broadening and building of resources and capabilities in other areas of our lives (Fredrickson, 2008), however, nurtured.

Positive organizational studies research focuses on the goodness, virtuousness and vitality in organizations and the people who work within them (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Cameron et al., 2004). Again, positive organizational scholars do not deny the existence of negative, stressful or traumatic experiences at work; however, they intentionally focus on the positive deviance (positive but exceptional behavior) to learn how these individuals and groups access and use their strengths, virtues and positive human capacities within organizations (Carr, 2004). Studies on positive emotions at work confirm Fredrickson’s broaden and build theory by showing that activities such as negotiating are more effective from a positive emotional stance (Kopelman et al., 2006). Organizations where relationships
and quality connections are emphasized also reflect increased individual and team resiliency (Stephens et al., 2013; Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Research on virtues, such as compassion at work, reveal these as catalysts for increased retention, organizational commitment, employee performance and productivity and organizational citizenship (Lilius et al., 2008; Worline and Dutton, 2017; Youssef and Luthans, 2004, 2013).

Taking these perspectives to guide our inquiries, we conducted our research with teachers, school leaders and school learning communities. This resulted in our development of a conceptual model (Figure 1) that highlights the importance of relationships, shared meaning and a sense of belonging as essential elements for professional learning and school improvement (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Mitchell and Sackney, 2009; Stoll and Louis, 2007).

In this model, flourishing is a continuum of experience (Keyes, 2002) and is experienced as a combining of several elements that each serve as a good end toward which one might strive (Seligman, 2011). The model highlights three key domains of the school organization (subjective well-being, leaderful mindsets and adaptive community) and three professional virtues (compassion, trust and hope) that interact and intersect in a variety of ways to host contexts in which a sense of flourishing may be experienced. The pursuit of well-being is the telos, or chief end, of teaching and learning in schools, in part because subjective well-being is vital for schools. We know that teachers’ well-being is linked to student achievement (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Zins et al., 2004) and research on the mindful management of stress (Roeser et al., 2013). More broadly, well-being may be thought of as “people’s positive evaluation of their lives, which includes positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction and meaning” (Diener and Seligman, 2004, p. 1; Seligman, 2011). A focus on positive emotions enlivens people’s further resources for intellectual, physical, social and psychological capabilities (Diener, 2009; Fredrickson, 2008; Fredrickson et al., 2008).

This appreciative perspective on well-being for teachers offers an alternative to the often-identified focus on burnout, stress and difficulties in teaching and may further encourage teachers’ commitment and motivation (Gu and Day, 2007).

Appreciative conversations with teachers as a means of mentorship

The examples of teacher well-being that we present here were collected through focus group conversations with teachers and administrators in elementary and secondary schools. We designed these conversations to focus on appreciative, strength-based and generative questions. These teachers and administrators worked in small- or medium-sized and rural schools (400–800 students). We invited them to attend focus group conversations during...
Over the course of two years, we met with 43 teachers and administrators in conversation groups that ranged in number from three to eight; each conversation lasted between 45 and 60 min. The questions and conversation prompts were appreciative in nature. For example, we asked participants to think of times when they felt really alive and well in their work and to describe for us what was happening at that time. The conversations were organic in nature. By this, we mean that we did not prescribe the direction of the conversations but rather followed the threads of the conversations, prompting where necessary to continue their thinking. These conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. Each participant is represented by a pseudonym.

We used the conceptual model (Figure 1) as an overarching guide for analyzing the data and started with the domain of subjective well-being as our particular focus. The transcripts were coded at an individual level by three members of the research team. We engaged in initial coding by reading the transcripts with the subjective well-being domain in mind and noticing instances and descriptions that resonated with the research literature that we used to build that domain. As we read the transcripts, for instances and descriptions of subjective well-being, we noticed most of the conversations described well-being in relation to students or to colleagues, rather than as an individual aspect of their work. These participants also described well-being as an active pursuit—needing to actively seek out what made them feel good at work. While reading the descriptions and the stories from these participants, we could see how these educators created opportunities for well-being or perhaps capitalized on what they knew about needing certain things for their well-being.

After comparing our initial codes (e.g. autonomy is valued and respected; working together toward an important outcome; attending to one another is our work; we give and receive care and support at work; we trust each other and feel safe to take risks in our work; courage to do what is right for our students), we placed them in two categories—flourishing with students and flourishing with colleagues. Within these two categories, we noticed first that teachers described flourishing as creating positive experiences for and with students and finding meaning in the moments of student success, and, second, that teachers created positive experiences with colleagues and found purpose in collaborating as a part of a bigger team. A number of themes, and the stories that shape them, offer insights for thinking about positive mentoring as an opportunity to build developmental relationships focused on thriving, growing and learning from what is working well for mentees.

Finding joy with students through inquiry

I didn’t come to that realization, that understanding, that the focus on the relationships [was huge for] the real, authentic, fun of teaching until I felt it in action. And I was able to go, “whoa, what is different about this? What is different right now that this is so great?” (Cameron)

Cameron was a relatively new primary teacher, with only five years of experience. When we talked with her about what made her feel a sense of flourishing at work, she shared how she had recently learned to enjoy herself more in her work and to notice when she was having fun with her students. That shift in her thinking had contributed to her feeling good more often in her work. The stories shared about what made participants feel a sense of flourishing, of feeling alive, engaged and inspired in their work usually started with
reference to their students. They felt a sense of thriving when they saw their “kids” doing well and becoming more engaged with their own learning. We suggest that effective mentoring makes room for teachers and school leaders to reflect with one another about these experiences.

Samantha had been an elementary school literacy resource teacher for over 15 years and worked with many children with challenges academically and who grow up in lower socio-economic families. She stayed motivated and engaged in her work by remembering the positive impact she can have on her students. She explained:

The key to a happy adult is a happy childhood. And sometimes when kids come to school, you are their happy childhood. You are making that happy childhood for them. So that is what I would do. I would make [each day] a beautiful, happy childhood for kids.

Moreover, Samantha learned to savor the time she spends with her students:

I just think it’s important to step back and look at the kids and just live the moment a lot too, as opposed to worrying about what’s going to happen next. [...] I can forget to find the joy in teaching. But if I do it the other way and [be in the moment], I can go with the kids and go with the flow and adapt. I can adapt the means to the end. So, if I know what the end is that I want, how I get there is adaptable.

Carly, a secondary school teacher in a collaborative teaching group, found energy and inspiration from her students:

I get inspiration from the success of the kids. When I see them and they are just working and they are getting it, and they are just building on their knowledge, it’s huge. And then that inspires me to keep going and do more and say, “how else can we do this?”

Similarly, Tanis, an elementary school teacher, shared how she enjoyed watching the students develop a love of being at school:

[Some of the kids] aren’t overly engaged in some things but because of what we do and how we do it, they’re in. They are clicked in. They are ready to go. They are interested and wanting to come to school. We get kids that start the year out saying, “oh I don’t like school. I don’t want to be here.” By Christmas they don’t want to miss school. They come here deathly ill sometimes because they don’t want to miss [laughing]. They want to be here. It’s what we do and it just makes it fun and easy for us; seeing those successes in the kids is just awesome.

These teachers found moments of flourishing when they recalled times of joy with their students. Teachers can learn to increase the frequency of these happy moments when they strengthen their mindfulness to recognize these times in the midst of them happening. A mentoring relationship which focuses on conversations about what is working and on well-being will bring these experiences to mind, heart and reinforced practices. Naturally, the experience of teachers connecting with their students is contagious and can lead to positive school experiences for students. Learning communities are stronger when everyone in the community is engaged in moments that elicit joy.

As we met with these teachers, our inquiry into what gave them joy reminded them about what was and had been working well for them. As researchers, we did for these teachers what positive mentors are able to do through their times of conversation with mentees. Positive mentors focus attention on what matters most to their mentees as we did; they engage teachers in continuous conversations that purposefully evoke and elicit positive capacities and experiences at work, such as joy.

**Awareness of feeling cared for and connected to colleagues**

There were also shared stories about how positive experiences with their colleagues had enabled teachers to have more success with the students. This gratitude for the support of their colleagues was entailed in descriptions about what it meant to flourish. For example, Kloe had
been an intermediate and primary school teacher for over ten years. As she was thinking about what mattered most to her in her work, she shared what she thought was probably a small moment for her colleague but one that had a big and positive impact on her:

One day I wanted to try the snowshoes [with my class] and I thought, “is that just crazy of me to want to do that?” And [my colleague] said it will work but [I] might want some help. So, [he] said he would just bring [his] whole class out and help [me] put them on. He just immediately dropped everything he was doing and came out and helped us out. Yeah, it was crazy, but it worked and the kids loved it.

Having fun with colleagues during breaks was another important aspect of how teachers described their flourishing. For example, Linda, a primary teacher with over 20 years of experience, described:

Oh, there’s lots of fun with students for sure, so many times. I mean it’s nice sometimes to have another adult in the room because you will catch their eye over the heads, because they are funny. And the stuff that they do is funny and they have fun and stuff like that. Actually, the staff is a fun staff. I like getting to the staff room and sitting down, sharing our stories and stuff like that.

When she talked about what it meant to her to flourish in her work, she described how she appreciated the opportunities to connect with her colleagues to share a laugh, tell a joke and even play gentle pranks on their administrator. This theme of flourishing as finding a way to connect and share the ups and downs with colleagues was evident across many of the stories we gathered at the various school sites for this study.

Christa, a primary school teacher, shared about the necessity of having colleagues to support and share the challenges at work:

Some people have joked at some of our meetings that we are an alternate school [in low socio-economic area] It kind of hurts my feelings because I don’t think it is, but I think because it can be challenging you really need your co-workers to talk problems out or get through things or just to laugh with right?

Knowing they had the support and fellowship of colleagues was an important part of our participants’ sense of well-being at work. James, who worked as a part of a collaborative teaching team at the elementary level, described:

[...] and before, it used to be fun to come to school to interact with the kids, but now working with these two, it’s a lot of fun just to be able to share ideas. We have not one brain going, but three brains trying to put our ideas together. It’s pretty neat too to be able to take these kids and [do] what we’ve decided to do. We each of us take a certain section and specialize in that section and then the kids rotate between our classes. And then we get better every time we teach.

From these types of stories, we learned about the importance of robust collegiality, where teachers felt supported, appreciated and where they had some fun and laughter. While an ongoing, one-to-one mentoring relationship can be incredibly formative, so too can a network of peer mentors and vital friends in the workplace who support one another’s well-being and are around to provide practical support. Evan, another teacher in this collaborative group, emphasized the importance of his own engagement as an important element in how he felt alive and energized in his work:

The core idea [of our collaborative teaching] has been student engagement [...] but also how can we engage for us? We have a great time [...] every day we meet in the morning briefly and every day after school we meet, probably many times we discuss at lunch. Everybody has an idea and we run with our ideas. It’s just great. You couldn’t ask for a better place to work, or a better group of people to work with. It’s fun. It’s engaging for us, it’s engaging for the kids and it’s great.

Feeling cared for by their colleagues was an opportunity to connect and to enjoy each other; it was a sustaining part of these educators’ practice. They described how connecting with
colleagues was a part of what made the work possible, and that they relied on what they could get and give to their colleagues to help keep them motivated and nourished. Diana, who had been teaching at the primary level for over 20 years, summed it up when she shared:

If you come into the staff room and you are down, like you really you had a bummer morning, maybe the kids haven’t listened or you are not feeling yourself, having a little bit of a laugh [with staff] kind of gets you rejuvenated again.

When asked about times when they felt that they were flourishing in their work, many of the participants talked about collaborative teaching assignments and arrangements. For example, Rebecca explained how working with three other colleagues in a team to teach Grade 8 students in a cohort had helped her find even greater meaning in her work:

I love teaching. I love this profession, but when you’re in a situation where you are teaching certain content or curriculum in an isolated way, sometimes it is really difficult to bring meaning to what you are teaching because it is so separate.

Collaborating with a group of colleagues to constantly improve in their teaching and learning was essential to their sense of flourishing. Janet, an administrator, described what she had noticed about the benefits of teaching with a team of teachers who you care about and who care about you. She said:

I think there is more an aspect of family [in a team] because you can see how well everyone has each other’s back. I know if someone is having an off day, you have your teammates to pick you up. And if you throw out an idea you have your teammates [who sometimes feel like your] family to help you to grow. So, you have their enthusiasm to help with that too.

Finding purpose, support, connection and inspiration for their work with their colleagues was a common theme across many of the stories. Using a positive lens to guide the narratives provided opportunities for the participants to share with us what made them feel alive, energized, engaged and inspired in their work. Again, as we came alongside these educators with our inquiry, we found that our questions provided a context for them to remind themselves of what was working well. We suggest that mentoring cultures that similarly foster AI will generate the same kind of energy and focus.

Connecting back to our purpose for sharing these illustrative stories of flourishing, we believe all schools are capable of building developmental relationships and mentoring cultures that can orient teachers to the same sensibilities and out-loud realizations and epiphanies that these teachers experienced. When principals, teacher–leaders and colleagues make well-being the focus of their engagement, so many other benefits are likely to be forthcoming. Creating connections to experiences of joy with students and care and meaning with colleagues were crucial to fostering and sustaining a sense of well-being at work for our participants. In the next section, we connect these findings to what it could mean to develop positive mentoring relationships through an appreciative focus or perspective.

Learning to grow the positive in mentorship

There are benefits and payoffs at work when employees have opportunities to establish and benefit from “high-quality connections” (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003; Stephens et al., 2013). These quality relationships are characterized by the presence of mutual positive regard, trust and shared active engagement (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003, p. 3). High-quality connections produce a kind of energy and vitality that contributes to increased and improved organizational health (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003), which in turn promotes joy, excitement and fun in the workplace. As with the participants in our study, experiencing high-quality connections at work creates a virtuous cycle of wanting to create more of these connections for others and oneself (Stephens et al., 2013). Networks of connections produce a high level of
positive energy and vitality (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003, p. 10). High-quality connections, such as those typified by positive mentor–mentee relationships, contribute to improved communication, increased innovation and resilience in the face of mistakes and failures. Our studies (Cherkowski et al., 2018) have found these networks of support and relationships provide strong contributions to adaptive capacities and change in the workplace (p. 17).

As shared through the examples of participants’ stories, there are benefits to noticing and attending to well-being and to creating conditions for teachers to learn to develop appreciative perspectives of their work (Cherkowski and Walker, 2018). We suggest that these appreciative processes are strongly supported by mentors who understand and are committed to seeing human flourishing as a primary end of developmental relationships, helping others to see the possibilities for growth and learning. One way that mentors might do this with their mentees is to instill routines and habits for appreciation and positive evaluation of their work. We use an example, shared by an administrator, as a way of illustrating how creating conditions for connecting and coming together to enjoy the various highlights at work will bolster and develop resilience amid the inevitable challenges. These are opportunities to build positive developmental relationships, whereby teachers experience moments of connection, care and kindness. This example from Stella, a middle school principal, highlights the power of her using what was already available, in terms of time and space, to shift perspectives toward well-being. She described her use of a very challenging situation as an occasion to offer her staff members an opportunity to unwind and connect:

After we had had our bomb threat, I went and bought a ton of ice cream and whip cream and chocolate and gooey stuff, right? And I put it out on the staff room table and said, “help yourself!” And people were doing really weird things with the food and having fun, just having fun right? We were so stressed. And so that was cool. It was just stupid and funny, and it was neat to see. Because they were so stressed and just to let it go. I said, “let’s hold our bell for a little longer, let’s just hang out here and relax.”

Stella may have been naturally attuned to finding the positive in challenging situations; however, we do know that what Seligman (2011) referred to as our “reflexive reality” is a resource available to each of us all the time, and this resource allows us to choose how we interpret and respond to any given situation (Gergen, 2009). Positive mentors pay attention to how they choose to interpret and respond to others in their work; they use opportunities to create conditions for mind and heart shifts with individuals and groups. From an appreciative perspective, mentors see their role as bringing out the best in their staff members and colleagues. Positively focused mentors attend to conversations that build positive and generative relationships not only between themselves and mentees, but also among mentees to encourage the growth of positive and supportive learning networks.

Positive mentoring means learning by inquiry to notice and build on what is working well to grow more of what is wanted. This is about learning to notice and nurture strengths and talents, and learning how to engage others in conversations that evoke an appreciative, generative focus on growing work. An example of this is learning how to guide teachers to notice the joy in their work with students and colleagues. In part, positive mentoring entails inquiry that focuses attention and language on positive experiences and domains (Figure 2). We conclude by proffering that mentorship with a flourishing and well-being emphasis may be facilitated through a mentoring-by-inquiry approach.

The domains of mentoring inquiry

Mentors and mentees enter into tacit, informal and taken-for-granted psychological contracts (Schein, 1990) to forge mutually held expectations. Sometimes these contracts subliminally slip into behaviors grounded in deficit reduction, failure management, comparison assessments and artificial performativity that objectifies the mentee as a person. In the previous sections, we
proffered an approach that privileges the positive and suggests a greater attention to fostering conversations and mutual inquiries about well-being and what works as a function of mentoring. Following the work of Sanga and Walker (2011), when the layers of such a psychological contract are peeled back, there are a number of foci around which positive developmental relationships revolve and evolve. In Figure 2, we have depicted one way of seeing the domains, or infrastructure, of a mentor’s and mentee’s positive (vs pathological) psychological contract. We also acknowledge that school cultures and networks of mentorship will benefit from consideration of these same domains. Two claims that we offer here are the attention of the developmental relationship ought to give priority to an undergirding inquiry about what is working well for the mentee and the most fruitful and fundamental agenda for the developmental relationship will be encouraging the mentee’s well-being across these domains.

In Figure 2, four broad domains are depicted for this attention and agenda. As Sanga and Walker (2011) explained:

In the wider and purpose-focused sense, mentors may ask questions connected to mentees’ identity (being or personhood, community of origin, context for personal hardwiring, etc.), their relationships, or acts and manner of relating to others or to certain causes. Questions may encompass mentees’ desire or need to discern, find guidance, be affirmed, or to envision their preferred future or their strategic directions. A third domain may be that of assisting mentees to deeply reflect or to explore possibilities or unfamiliar understandings. And then there is the domain of working with mentees in the performance or doing of particular tasks or perhaps finding the courage to tackle a difficulty or stretch beyond their normal comfort zones – to dare or take a risk. (p. 275)

As the inner circle elements of Figure 2 depict, mentors may agree with mentees to focus on their being mindful of what their experience, expertise or even their conscience has already told them (latent or tacit understandings). Humans have rather incredible well-being regulation systems that sometimes can be encouraged into active duty. Mentees are well
served when asked questions about their priorities, convictions, habits and behaviors. Instilling hope, fanning discovery of passions and attention to one’s strength in association with purposes is a key to success, fulfillment and well-being for anyone. Mentors who animate flourishing will come alongside mentees to help define and describe what “success” and “well-being” look like for them. Again, “What is working?” and “How might you get more of this happening for your work and life?” become the core pursuits of mentors who see their role as fostering mentee flourishing. Of course, it is a key role of mentors to provide the reminders and reinforcement for these alignments (Sanga and Walker, 2011).

When mentoring for flourishing, the best conversations are those that generate well-timed, critical and constructive engagement and invite imagination; these will provide great value for goal attainment and lifestyle choice alignment. The fundamental needs of flourishing mentees are related to the day-to-day fulfillment of promises and obligations that come with various, and sometimes conflicting, life roles within limitations of resources and the constraints of context, time and capacities. Sanga and Walker (2011) suggested that mentors ask questions that privilege promise keeping (to self and others) and shed light on life balance and well-being. Supporting a wholesome life journey for mentees is imperative. To reiterate, effective mentors reflect the healthy view that mentees are whole persons who thirst for well-being and fulfillment. In other words, the spirit, soul (mind, emotions and will) and physical (behavioral) dimensions of mentees ought to be touched by mentors’ influence. Mentees’ integrity (wholeness and well-being), authenticity (true self), influence (difference-making capacity) and performance are important in any efforts to adopt a mentorship-for-flourishing approach.

**Mentoring for flourishing: focusing developmental relationships on well-being**

Pay attention to positive relationships makes an important contribution to positive leadership (Cameron, 2008), and this attention is an essential aspect of building mentoring practices that result in flourishing. As an example, an evocative approach to mentoring, offered by Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) focuses on an appreciative and growth-oriented model that leads to transformation in teachers’ practices. Developed on principles of adult learning and growth-oriented psychologies, evocative mentors attend to five animators in their work with their mentees: consciousness, connection, non-violent communication, competence and creativity. These animators align well with the descriptions of well-being shared by the educators in our research, especially where they gained a sense of well-being through positive connections, feeling cared for and experiencing their work as a positive contribution to the ongoing improvement of the lives of those in their school. As indicated earlier through the four domains, depicted in Figure 2, mentors who attend to stories, listen and ask questions about what works can make a positive difference in the lives of teachers. According to Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010), evocative mentors build relationships through communication that help teachers to grow self-awareness of what is happening in their work and lives, focusing on attending without judgment and being fully present.

As we have advocated, mentoring for flourishing means starting from the assumption that teachers are whole, competent professionals; they are not missing or lacking in areas that need to be fixed. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) suggest that appreciative, strength-based mentoring approaches help teachers to meet and exceed the standards of their profession through uncovering their strengths and talents. They stated, “There is no one universal path to competence in any profession, unless that path is the love of learning and a commitment to continuous performance improvement” (p. 15). They claimed that mentoring from an appreciative, growth-oriented approach means framing experiences as a win–learn experience, empowering creativity and a desire to learn from mistakes (Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Appreciation is the lens through which to frame learning so that creativity can be embraced, rather than feeling that mistakes in learning will be met with a
critical, judgmental or blaming approach. We note their suggestion toward a developmental perspective as insightful for positive mentoring:

Rather than focusing on how [mentors] can improve teacher performance, often through constructive criticism and advice giving, we focus on how [mentors] can improve our relationships with teachers, so that teachers get motivated and empowered to improve their own performance and quality of life. (Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 18)

As shared by the educators in our study, feeling a sense of connection, caring and contribution to improving the lives of students, colleagues, families and staff within the school were important aspects of what it meant for them to feel well, whole, engaged and alive in their work. We suggest that mentors who build developmental relationships for flourishing can make important contributions to the overall quality of life and learning in schools. Mentoring for flourishing can mean learning to perceive which domain of inquiry is important to a teacher (Figure 2), inquiring about what is working for them (where do they find joy, caring and connection), and then encouraging them in their pursuit of more of these sought-after elements of well-being.

Concluding thoughts
Using selected stories about what it can mean to flourish in schools and four domains of inquiry that can be used to guide developmental relationships and provide a “big picture model” of various qualities in flourishing schools (including the importance of subjective well-being), we designed this conceptual paper to highlight the benefits of an appreciative shift in mentoring toward a focus on well-being. Findings from the positive sciences highlighted the benefits and potentials of framing positive developmental relationships (mentoring) as central to the work of teaching. We suggest more research on what it means to create conditions for positive mentoring cultures in schools, where there is ongoing encouragement of both mentor–leaders and teachers to notice and nurture well-being through deliberate attention to building appreciative, strengths-based developmental relationships. Placing well-being at the center of mentoring evokes the sense of purpose, professional calling and deep connections with others in their work that encourages teacher well-being (Gu and Day, 2007) and contributes to co-creating flourishing-for-all school cultures.

References


About the authors
Dr Sabre Cherkowski, PhD, is Associate Professor in the Okanagan School of Education at the University of British Columbia. She teaches and researches in the areas of leadership in learning communities, professional development and collaboration, mentoring and coaching and diversity and education. Much of her current research focuses on well-being in schools. Dr Sabre Cherkowski is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: sabre.cherkowski@ubc.ca

Dr Keith Walker is Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. His recognized areas of work include educational governance and policy-making, leadership philosophies and practices, community and interpersonal relations, organizational development and capacity building, and applied and professional ethics. He brings over 35 years of experience as a Manager, Teacher, Minister, Leader, Scholar and Educational Administrator in public and social sectors. His formal education has been in the disciplines of physical education, sports administration, theology, education, educational administration and philosophy.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Not a solo ride: co-constructed peer mentoring for early-career educational leadership faculty

Benterah C. Morton
Department of Leadership and Teacher Education,
University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama, USA, and
Elizabeth Gil
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership,
St. John’s University, Queens, New York, USA

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe the origins of a co-constructed peer-mentoring model designed by and for early-career faculty representing historically underrepresented groups in the field of educational leadership. The model, which includes components of the multicultural feminist model of mentoring, pays specific attention to early-career faculty development and well-being and outlines the need for and benefits of peer-mentoring programs.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study details the experiences of the development and implementation of a peer-mentoring program based on a review of literature that points out the need to provide mentoring opportunities for early-career educational leadership faculty, from historically underrepresented populations, and further posits peer-mentoring as an avenue to enhance faculty development and well-being.

Findings – Faculty representing historically underrepresented groups often experience challenges related to their identities, alongside the general pressures of working toward tenure. Peer-mentoring groups provide support with which to navigate these challenges. Peer-mentor groups are a supplement to other professional groups and interactions within departments and institutions.

Practical implications – The model has implications of being able to prepare institutional leaders to work toward institutionalizing mentoring programs that take into consideration invisible labor while promoting professional growth and personal wellness, thereby increasing the satisfaction and retention of faculty.

Keywords Higher education, Mentorship of early-career faculty members, Gender/race/ethnicity, Multicultural mentoring, Peer-mentoring, Pre-tenure faculty

Introduction
Mentoring is a form of professional development that can support faculty in terms of learning to navigate professional contexts and developing collegial relationships with others (Kent and Green, 2018) within their departments or universities. The informational and social support provided by mentoring can lead to increased retention and job satisfaction (Ponjuan et al., 2011). Mentoring programs must be designed intentionally, taking into consideration the contexts and needs of early-career faculty. The purpose of this paper is to describe the origins of a peer-mentoring model designed by and for early-career faculty from historically underrepresented groups working in the field of educational leadership. The model, which includes components of the multicultural feminist model of mentoring, pays specific attention to early-career faculty development and well-being and outlines the need for and benefits of peer-mentoring programs. Furthermore, the paper identifies research-based strategies to strengthen diverse support systems requested by multicultural participants in a peer-mentoring group that emphasizes both scholarly productivity and personal well-being.
Origins of a peer-mentoring initiative: the context

The co-constructed peer-mentoring effort described in this paper was conceived by a group of early-career tenure-track faculty who were invited to serve as panel members and roundtable session facilitators at a large national educational research conference. The session, sponsored by a professional organization in educational leadership, was designed to support graduate students’ writing efforts within their doctoral programs and subsequently within academia.

At the conclusion of the session, several of the invited panelists seeking fellowship and camaraderie went to lunch together. During that lunch, they discussed the multitudes of challenges they were facing as they navigated the arena of higher education as early-career tenure-track faculty members in educational leadership. Discussion included points about institutional norms, professional expectations and cultural practices in academia that needed to be learned and understood. They also discussed the overriding concern regarding the need to maintain their own personal wellness as they work toward tenure. They concluded that as early-career faculty, they face challenges in relation to balancing responsibilities for research, teaching, and service, further realizing that one category in particular – research – carries more weight than the others for tenure-track faculty. Juggling research projects and publications, teaching loads and advising, and institutional and organizational service obligations has a tremendous impact on their well-being and takes a toll on their professional and personal relationships (Thomason, 2012). They collectively inquired: how do they function healthily and manage their productivity in academia and maintain balance with responsibilities outside of academia?

As they continued discussing, they realized that they had mutual concerns, and as they were exchanging ideas, resources and tips with one another, this type of interaction would be valuable on a wider scale. As a result, they developed a proposal for a collaborative critical conversations session targeting early-career faculty to take place at a smaller national educational leadership conference later in the year. The session’s aims were to encourage dialog among junior faculty within a supportive context to discuss their challenges, exchange possible strategies for overcoming challenges, and develop action plans toward healthy productivity in academia – plans that included both scholarly goals as well as aims focused on maintaining wellness. The organizers identified limited research, exclusively discussing the processes by which early-career tenure-track faculty work collaboratively to support the academic and personal well-being of their peers through peer mentorship. Consequently, they knew that there was value in peer groups supporting each other as they experienced such support through graduate-level cohort models and sought to build upon that type of idea for early-career faculty. As they were all in similar stages of the professoriate, in their first and second year, they believed they could relate to each other’s experiences and provide support in ways that more senior faculty may not be apt to offer.

Early-career faculty support: review of the literature

The ability to have multiple opportunities to experience success in the first few years of the professorship is critical to the development of patterns of productivity for junior faculty (Borders et al., 2011). While it is understood that the first few years as an assistant professor are typically stressful, the stress is compounded when faculty seek the tools and strategies to secure multiple publication opportunities without consistent access to support systems (Rice et al., 2000). Mentoring, in its various forms, is one of the keys for finding a support system with which to navigate these challenges. The review of the literature points out the need to provide mentoring opportunities for early-career educational leadership faculty, from historically underrepresented populations, and further posits peer mentoring as an avenue to enhance faculty development and well-being.
Rationale for support of early-career faculty

Current literature purports modes of mentorship that reduce the obstacles of one-to-one hierarchical mentor–protégée relationships (Benishek et al., 2004; Chao, 1997; Fassinger, 1997; Karam et al., 2012; Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015; Rees and Shaw, 2014; Yun et al., 2016) that may be based on a simplified, linear view of mentoring. Therefore, an understanding of the complexities of mentoring informs the resulting co-constructed peer-mentoring model. This peer-mentoring model reflects all of the aspects identified by Benishek et al. (2004) through the multicultural feminist mentoring (MFM) model, including the importance of choosing to and having a commitment to participate. The model also acknowledges the importance of recognizing faculty’s multiple roles and responsibilities, both professional and personal (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015). Finally, the program is delivered virtually, reducing geographic and time barriers (Morton and Nguyen, 2018) of initiatives that rely solely on face-to-face contact.

The development of this peer-mentoring model is directly influenced by Chao (1997), who promoted transitioning away from the understanding of mentoring as dichotomous relationships with experience differentials. This model also exemplifies the view posited by Kram and Isabella (1985) that mentoring should be grounded in relationship building. The idea of relationship building, and mentoring as a relational process (Fassinger, 1997; Benishek et al., 2004), provides a backdrop for the need to develop opportunities for early-career faculty to begin working together to establish diverse pollinations of peer-to-peer mentor relationships (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Rowland, 2012). These opportunities maximize newer faculty members’ ability to successfully navigate the challenges of being on the tenure track, support the development of faculty leadership, and subsequently further institutionalize effective mentoring initiatives. Putting structures in place to support this navigation improves the well-being and thereby retention of early-career faculty (Allen et al., 2004; Chao, 1997; Kent and Green, 2018; Noe, 1988; Ramaswami et al., 2014; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000; Thomason, 2012).

While exploring ideas of peer-mentoring among faculty at early stages in the tenure process, the authors recognized additional factors experienced by certain subgroups of faculty. This prompted the authors to consider invisible labor (Chang et al., 2013; DeVault, 2014; June, 2015; Mitchell, 1983; Montero-Sieburth, 1996), cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994) and identity taxation (Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012) that impacts faculty who are women of color (Cho et al., 2013; Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012; Martinez and Welton, 2017; Turner, 2002), international faculty (Collins, 2008), first-generation college graduates and historically underrepresented (Padilla, 1994; Yun et al., 2016). The authors identified literature that noted the importance of having mentors who share similarities in how to navigate race and other cultural differences (Benishek et al., 2004; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002; Ramaswami et al., 2014) and hypothesized that mentors who are currently navigating the weights of cultural and identity taxation could provide meaningful perspectives of how to address these concerns with their mentees. By the same logic, a peer-mentoring environment could provide opportunities to discuss taxation from diverse perspectives and, when necessary, provide access to tenured faculty within the group’s sphere of influence, that have experienced success in navigating cultural milieu, ultimately expanding the network of early-career junior faculty.

In a similar way, foreign-born faculty working in US institutions, in addition to working toward tenure, experience added pressures related to immigration status, cultural differences, and isolation and loneliness (Collins, 2008). Invisible labor also impacts those who are gender and sexual minorities and those who come from working class backgrounds as they often spend greater amounts of time on activities that are not equally recognized when calculating expectations for tenure (Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). Empirical studies document how women
of color are expected to lead efforts and offer this invisible labor in the form of service, such as leading initiatives focused on diversity or serving as (in)formal mentors for students of color (Mitchell, 1983; Montero-Sieburth, 1996). Aside from the issues of invisible labor, faculty from historically underrepresented groups also experience the marginalization of their research. Their knowledge and research in the academy are at times perceived as illegitimate (Martinez and Welton, 2017) because they do not conform to objective truths linked often to settler–colonial perspectives of what counts as legitimate knowledge (Bernal and Villalpando, 2002; Murakami and Núñez, 2014).

**Well-being and early-career faculty.** The demands of someone within a tenure time frame can be confusing, intimidating, isolating and intense. Murdak et al. (2018) note that work–family conflict is a significant obstacle to faculty well-being. For example, working in academic environments that require faculty to constantly produce muddies the otherwise defined boundaries between work and play (Gornall and Salisbury, 2012), leading to the possibility of faculty members leading unbalanced lives or “not feel[ing] a sense of community or collegiality in their workplace” (Greene et al., 2008, p. 430). Workplace stress is often compounded for faculty with children or elderly family members as work–life boundaries are blurred by the need for uninterrupted time to produce in preparation for tenure (Murdak et al., 2018). Early-career faculty seeking work–life balance and care for their well-being while seeking tenure can benefit from a continued support system (Allen et al., 2004; Chao, 1997; Kent and Green, 2018; Noe, 1988; Ramaswami et al., 2014; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000). For these reasons, formal mentoring programs have been leveraged as a vehicle to support future faculty/scholars by pairing them with mentors who offer various forms of support (Martinez and Welton, 2017). In addition to these efforts, early-career faculty can benefit from reciprocal group-oriented mentoring: engaging with one another as they navigate the tenure process (Jacelon et al., 2003; Johnson, 2007; Reder and Gallagher, 2007; Smith et al., 2001).

**What is mentoring?**
Mentoring is a complex approach that has different aims, goals and meanings, depending on the contexts to which it is applied. Traditional mentoring, in higher education, pairs a tenured or more experienced individual with an early-career or less experienced individual for the basic purpose of sharing the hidden curriculums of norms and socialization of a specific environment. While the traditional central focus of mentoring has remained relatively constant, the complexities of its applications have expanded as the diversity of its users has evolved. Changes include mentor pairings between participants with different genders, ethnicities, religions and so on. Fortunately, the relationship between mentor and protégée is being researched more and more over the last two decades (Allen et al., 2004; Chao, 1997; Kent and Green, 2018; Noe, 1988; Ramaswami et al., 2014; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000). The discussion of types of mentor programs has spanned a wide spectrum of options. Some scholars note the benefits of institutionally organized mentorships (Godden et al., 2014; Simmonds and Dicks, 2018), while others note benefits of organically developed relationships (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Sosik et al., 2005). Single and Single (2005) posit that the benefits of face-to-face mentor relationships mirror those of e-mentoring relationships. Morton and Nguyen (2018) note that face-to-face mentoring limits the reach of the mentor to those who are within a specific mile radius. Further, Morton and Nguyen (2018) add that e-mentoring helps to remove the geographical limitations and some of the time-bound constraints placed on face-to-face mentoring. Amid the different types of mentorships, the data are inconclusive as to which type is best (Ramaswami et al., 2014).

**Components of successful mentoring.** Mentoring research suggests that there is an array of factors that impacts the effectiveness of various mentor programs. First, the choice to
participate in a mentor relationship plays a strong role in determining the mentor/mentee commitment (Benishek et al., 2004; Burke et al., 1994; Fassinger, 1997; Godden et al., 2014). Therefore, whether the relationship is arranged or organically developed, face-to-face or electronic, the participants’ commitment to engage in a mutually respectful relationship is paramount (Bierema and Merriam, 2002). Second, setting clear goals for managing the mentor relationship, including when it is appropriate to communicate, what is expected from each communication and other norms, are a consistent link to increasing the benefits of successful mentor–protégée relationships (Benishek et al., 2004; Godden et al., 2014; Fassinger, 1997; Morton and Nguyen, 2018; Sherman et al., 2010). Additionally, mentorships provide both tangible and psychosocial benefits to all participants, mentors and protégées (Burke et al., 1994; Sherman et al., 2010; Simmonds and Dicks, 2018).

Along with these similarities in the research, there are specific characteristics identified that support successful mentor–protégée relationships. Godden et al. (2014) note that reflection is a key to making mentor–protégée relationships work more effectively for all members of the team. The authors add that the reflective process often begins as a task that can evolve into a more informative exercise that supports the facilitation of broader discussions. Connolly (2017) posits that effective mentor–protégée relationships support identity development, such as working through stereotype threat and imposter syndrome, resulting in more collegiate success for the protégée. Findings that effective mentor–protégée relationships support identity development were echoed through the work of Magaldi-Dopman et al. (2015). Magaldi-Dopman et al. (2015) note that mentor relationships assist both mentor and protégée in developing self-efficacy, acknowledging multiple life roles (professional, academic and personal), increasing the sharing of resources and providing spaces to candidly discuss professional concerns and challenges.

Obstacles to successful mentoring. While the benefits of various types of mentoring have been described above, research has also highlighted limitations with traditional mentorship in academia. For example, mentoring programs that are based on a “hierarchical dyadic model” (Rees and Shaw, 2014, p. 5), that situate the mentor in a position of superiority over the protégée (Bowman et al., 2000; Chao, 1997; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002; Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015; Rees and Shaw, 2014; Yun et al., 2016), may be limiting. In cases where mentors may negatively perceive their mentees, they may “withhold needed support from their protégées until they think that they are worth the investment of their time and energy” (Hansman, 2003, p. 15). Similar negative interactions were identified in relationships where the mentor and protégée held different cultural values (Ramaswami et al., 2014). The hierarchical model situates the mentor, often a person of higher rank, as the giver of guidance and the protégée as one who receives assistance as offered (Hansman, 2003). This model is also visible in mentoring relationships where there are power differentials associated with race, gender, age and so on (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002; Ramaswami et al., 2014; Thomas, 1993), such as cross-cultural mentoring taking place with minoritized protégées and white mentors. These specific models may be viewed as “paternalistic and political” (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002, p. 21). Additionally, if the mentor does not recognize the mentee’s specific context, such as personal and cultural traits that are at play in the mentee’s experience within the organization, the support provided may not be appropriate for the mentee (Hansman, 2003; Ramaswami et al., 2014).

Peer-mentoring. Non-traditional approaches to mentorship, such as peer-mentoring, can reduce the restricting effects of hierarchical power relationships as they promote personal and professional relationships between peers (Karam et al., 2012). Peer-mentoring, unlike traditional mentoring, is steeped in relationships that foster an environment of reciprocal support and reinforcement that counters the competitive and sometimes siloed nature of academia (Benishek et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1997; Karam et al., 2012). For example, one group
of Latina faculty at a Hispanic Serving Institution noted how being part of a peer-mentoring collaboration helped members to remain within academia in a way that aligned with their cultural understandings. While academia appeared to focus on individual success, the faculty experienced “their own individual advancement as intertwined with the advancement of the entire group” (Murakami and Nuñez, 2014, p. 290). The faculty described their approach as one of collaboration, “developing and strengthening collective self-reliance” (Murakami and Nuñez, 2014, p. 293). They also found that consciousness of their class and ethnic identities were viewed as “a source of strength and as an asset to generate transformative resistance and persist” (Murakami and Nuñez, 2014, p. 293) within academia. While these faculty members felt excluded from the institution at large, they found a supportive peer community within their collaborative peer-mentoring group (Murakami and Nuñez, 2014). Part of these faculty members’ commitment to the group stemmed from their shared goal of Latinx educational attainment (Murakami and Nuñez, 2014). Furthermore, members within this group benefited from exposure to other members’ expertise, which allowed them to cross disciplinary boundaries, write and publish from a broader perspective, further increasing their publishing productivity. In this way, the personal aspects of understanding and knowing each other within the group also led to professional gains. These examples highlight how peer-mentoring has aided faculty development toward tenure by informing their ability to navigate academia, supporting the maintenance of personal and professional well-being, and validating their existence in the academy.

Peer-mentoring has additional defined benefits that support its application with early-career tenure-track educational leadership faculty representing historically underrepresented populations. Yun et al. (2016) highlight various studies that emphasize the benefits of developing relationships with multiple mentors and forming mentoring networks that can aid in supporting faculty more holistically, rather than from one lens of expertise. Other scholars explored peer-mentoring models with early-career tenure-track faculty (Johnson, 2007; Reder and Gallagher, 2007) including Jacelon et al. (2003) and Smith et al. (2001), who outlined peer-mentoring models for early-career faculty specifically focusing support on publications. In short, peer-mentoring is a tool that can be used to support faculty development up to and through tenure.

Martinez and Welton (2017) cite previous research, indicating that “culturally relevant, same sex or race mentoring, as well as sister or friend, that is, peer mentoring” (p. 125) provides support, especially, for faculty representing historically underrepresented groups. This idea is echoed by Yun et al. (2016), noting that mentoring groups can be especially important for faculty from traditionally underrepresented groups in academia. Among the outcomes noted in one peer-mentoring group composed of five female-identifying education pre-tenured faculty was the “platform for individual faculty to grow while meeting the needs of several programs and departments” (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015, p. 40) in which the various faculty members worked. Within the peer group, members’ experiences were validated as those in the group were recognized as whole people, with personal and professional roles (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015). Through the group, the participants developed trusting relationships where they could discuss personal issues that were affecting their well-being and their work. These groups also supported identity development, thwarting thoughts of stereotype threat and imposter syndrome.

The session: methods of inquiry
The collaborative critical conversations session invited participants to discuss and share their own experiences as early-career faculty. Prompts referred to challenges that early-career faculty must navigate, and how they navigate the challenges of academia as
tenure-track scholars, while maintaining personal wellness. Participants also offered their
own suggestions for how outcomes for tenure-track faculty might be improved. Finally, they
had an opportunity to incorporate their thoughts about these topics within their personal
action plans written at the end of the session.

Session process
The 75-minute session was broken into four segments: Whole Group A, Small Group, Whole
Group B and Action Planning. During the first segment, Whole Group A, facilitators
provided the origin of the session, clarified its purpose, objectives and vision, and invited
introductions from the participants. Small Group consisted of four groups, each led by a
different facilitator. Participants rotated through each of the groups discussing ways to find
balance in research, teaching, service and a work/personal life balance. Seven- to ten-minute
group discussions centered on roles and responsibilities, challenges to maintaining a
healthy work/personal life balance, and ways to handle stressors specific to each of the four
stated aspects of academia. Whole Group B provided opportunities for participants to share
the highlights of their Small Group discussions. Finally, in Action Planning, participants
were given time to begin writing an action plan for their academic success while
maintaining personal wellness.

Participants
In total, 15 participants attended the session, 4 of which planned and facilitated the session.
Aside from the title including the phrase “early-career faculty,” the session was open to
educational leadership scholars from all stages of the tenure process. In total, 87 percent of
the participants were early-career faculty (first one to three years at their current institution)
serving in tenure-track positions. In total, 13 percent of the participants were either graduate
students or post doctorates. While organizers recognized that there are additional factors
involved for historically underrepresented faculty in academia, they intentionally opened
the session to all conference attendees. In the collaborative critical conversations session,
less than 14 percent of the participants identified as white, and only one of these was male.
The demographics of the participants were in stark contrast to the demographics of faculty
of color within the field of educational leadership. In a 2008 survey, over 85 percent of
faculty in the field identified as white, while less than 15 percent of faculty, combined,
identified as black or African–American, Hispanic or Latino/a, bi- or multi-racial, Asian,
American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (Hackman and
McCarthy, 2011 as cited in Martinez and Welton, 2017). Scholars from universities across
the USA attended the session. Notably, those who chose to attend overwhelmingly identified
as representatives of historically underrepresented groups within academia (e.g. women,
African–American, Latinx, international).

The development of the peer-mentoring program sprung forth from a comment made by
a participant in the collaborative critical conversations workshop. Near the conclusion of the
session, a participant remarked that the group should meet again during the conference the
following year to report back on the group’s progress toward their academic and wellness
action plans. Thus, the intuitive genesis, imagined over lunch months earlier, of the
collaborative peer-mentoring session for early-career tenure-track faculty in educational
leadership was validated by the responses of the session’s participants.

Modes of inquiry
Expanding the collaborative critical conversations session into a co-constructed
peer-mentoring model for early-career faculty in the field of educational leadership
required a melding of several qualitative methodologies. The first path of treatment was to

Early-career
educational
leadership
faculty
extensively review the literature and identify previously designed mentoring models that focused on supporting faculty development and well-being for early-career faculty representing historically underrepresented populations. Identifying how to situate the authors as a part of the research, as co-creators of the peer-mentoring model, led to action research and then to appreciative inquiry, which allows the researcher to directly participate in the organization of study (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1987). Further, appreciative inquiry is a method that is uniquely designed for systems innovation, like the development of the peer-mentoring model for representatives of historically underrepresented populations. Finally, the study was treated as a case study thus allowing the authors to examine, specifically, the early-development phase of the mentoring collaborative.

Developing a co-constructed peer-mentoring model: findings
Building on the literature cited above, our conversation now turns to fleshing out the essential elements included in the development of the present co-constructed peer-mentoring program. The participants indicated a genuine desire to be part of peer-mentoring that transcended time constraints and geography, actualizing the idea that the journey to tenure is not a solo ride. Subsequently, the collective support experienced via the collaborative peer group has the potential to aid in retaining these educational leadership faculty. Ultimately, it is envisioned that as participants successfully earn tenure, they may accept formal leadership roles within their departments. As they become decision makers within their departments and institutions, they will have the ability to further institutionalize effective vehicles of support. This re-visioning of what academia in educational leadership can be engages in efforts to socially innovate (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1987) by affecting needed change within the larger system. This systemic change approach is related to appreciative inquiry (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1987) and was revealed during the process of further considering and describing the current model. While the benefits of diverse types of mentor relationships are bountiful, peer mentorships must be intentional about each aspect of the collaboration to attain those benefits. In order to provide the needed peer support for early-career faculty from historically underrepresented populations, intentionally acknowledging issues of power, wellness and continued reflection became key aspects of the design.

Intentionality
Developing a meaningful avenue for early-career faculty to work together in a manner that promotes collegiality, scholarship and healthy habits does not occur haphazardly. While the impetus for this model was organically birthed out of a collaborative critical conversations session, its subsequent design was very intentional. The design is grounded in the literature identifying characteristics of diverse types of mentor relationships including, but not limited to, face-to-face mentoring, e-mentoring and peer-mentoring. Two of the original session organizers compiled some of the most beneficial practices and incorporated them into the design of this model. Although it was not the initial intent to focus on multicultural aspects of mentoring, the diversity of the participants demanded a refocus to that area of need and subsequently to the MFM model (Benishek et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1997; Fassinger and Hensler-McGinnis, 2005), a model that contains aspects that intentionally attend to the needs of participants from historically underrepresented populations.

The MFM model introduced by Benishek et al. (2004) was a re-envisioning of Fassinger’s (1997) feminist model of mentoring. Benishek et al. (2004) altered Fassinger’s (1997) model by threading a commitment to diversity as an intentional treatment for multiculturalism across the other five components of the model. MFM’s five characteristics include rethinking power, placing emphasis on relational mentorships, valuing collaboration, an appreciative integration of dichotomies, and an incorporation of political analysis, all undergirded by
intentional attention to multiculturalism (Benishuk et al., 2004). Aligning with the components of the MFM, the development of this peer-mentoring model intentionally targets the diverse needs of the participants of the original critical conversations session. Further, the application of MFM to a peer-mentoring model with the integration of a component of wellness introduces a novel approach to meeting the needs of early-career junior faculty.

*Rethinking power through an emphasis on the relational.* Development of the peer-mentoring model is a way of beginning to eschew hierarchies. This does not imply that hierarchies are non-existent or that “there are power differentials that cannot (and perhaps should not) be fully dismantled, [instead suggesting that] […] the best one can do is strategically manage them to the best ends of all concerned” (Fassinger and Hensler-McGinnis, 2005, p. 158). The power dynamics to be navigated cross lines of patriarchy, gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, education and ability. Concurrently, this peer-mentoring model is rooted in the development of relationships between the undefined mentor and protégée. Undefined is used here because the roles of the mentor and protégée are not permanently ascribed to a particular person in the relationships. In fact, the roles are interchangeably applied depending on the needs of the participants. Subsequently, the relational nature of the model provides opportunities for the participants to share personal strengths and challenges comfortably with knowledge that respect and reverence, for and from the others, is situated in the individual’s differences and not in opposition to those differentials.

*Valuing collaboration.* Co-construction (Yun et al., 2016) of the processes and forms that mentoring will take exemplifies collaboration. While there are a few peers who spearhead specific parts of the development, the group members will have multiple opportunities to influence any aspect of the model. In its flexibility and response to participants’ thinking, this collaborative (co-constructed) peer-mentoring effort adopts an approach that “encourage[s] and nurture[s] improvised action by system members” (Bushe and Kassam, 2005, p. 168).

An example of the co-construction of the program can be seen through attempts to gain an understanding of what those opting into the peer-mentoring collaborative hoped to gain from the collective. Toward this effort, group members shared demographic information and identified professional goals they aimed to meet between the collaborative critical conversations session and the next educational leadership annual meeting. This initial information also provided an opportunity for the group members to identify opportunities for collaborative scholarship. Finally, consideration was made for the intentionality of communication styles (Morton and Nguyen, 2018) and identifying boundaries (Bierema and Merriam, 2002). This component is more complex in application as the peers are working at universities scattered across the country. While communication styles and boundaries are very important aspects of a mentor relationship (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002; Putsche et al., 2008), deciding communication styles for the entire group would limit the diversity of communication styles. Favored communication styles and boundaries will be set by each individual and posted in a central location. Before first contacts, each peer will need to check another peer’s posted preference and abide by the requested boundaries and communication styles. In this manner, a participant with family responsibilities may prefer not to be contacted during family time. Therefore, this person would list specific times not to be interrupted by members of the group.

Specificity of intentionality includes the necessity to survey participants in the peer-mentoring cohort regarding their needs and anticipated outcomes. Intentionality, then, becomes the catalyst through which the peer-mentor collaborative provides the service of supporting the well-being of its participants. Additionally, attention should be paid to the frequency of interactions between individual members and the group as a whole. In line with Early-career educational leadership faculty
the findings of Connolly (2017), Godden et al. (2014) and Magaldi-Dopman et al. (2015), each member of the team will be encouraged to keep a journal to reflect about their experiences as participants, specifically discriminating between their roles as a mentor and as a protégée in any given interaction, and to monitor wellness practices.

Integration of dichotomies. Discriminating between the roles of the mentor and protégée is essential in a peer-mentoring model. Unlike traditional mentoring models with more static roles of mentor and protégée, there is no clear dichotomy of which of these roles a participant may embody in each conversation. As noted earlier, the roles of mentor and protégée are more undefined until just before the interaction is initiated. As early-career faculty, all of the participants are novices in the academy and must work together to navigate the terrain. Unlike traditional mentoring between one mentor and one protégée, the intersections of diversity are compounded many times more because the number of people participating in the group is greater. In this context, the participants represent varying ethnicities, gender identities, cultures, linguistic communities, ages, experiences, nationalities and abilities, among other areas of diversity. Benishek et al. (2004) note that the integration of dichotomies promotes an awareness and appreciation of the diversity of the self, as “the varied ways individuals think, feel, and perceive our world are all valuable” (p. 439). Additionally, van Emmerik (2004) notes that protégées with more than one mentor have greater career benefits than those with just one.

Wellness. As previously mentioned, a key component of this co-constructed peer-mentoring vehicle is attention to members’ personal wellness. Chang et al. (2013) note that an essential component of an effective collaborative peer-mentoring design is genuine concern for the maintenance of a healthy work–life balance for all members. Further, “as current and future racially underrepresented female faculty ourselves, we are particularly concerned about our own well-being, success and health, and that of our colleagues” (Chang et al., 2013, p. 99). Intentionally incorporating wellness checks into the design works to develop habits of responsibility and reciprocity for others in the group.

Considering maintenance of developing a healthy work–life balance troubled conceptions of balance. One of the participants in the collaborative critical conversations session made comments that supported a shift in the understanding of seeking to find balance. The participant posited that balance is an illusion, further noting that other participants should seek to live within the ebbs and flows of priorities and expectations. In this way, participants could comprehend that the pendulum of life is only momentarily situated in perfect balance as it continues swinging. Working from this perspective, peers will answer questions about their wellness during each mentoring contact. Question prompts include “How are you maintaining positive mental health?” “What are you doing to relieve stress?” “When was the last time you rewarded yourself?” “When was the last time you took a meaningful break? Vacation? Work-stop?” Because of the necessity of keeping track of wellness, peers are encouraged to journal about their wellness activities and to make frequent wellness checks on others. The check-ins could be as simple as a text or direct message asking, “How are you?”

Requiring participants to ask and answer simple questions about wellness in each mentoring contact has multiple purposes. As the professoriate becomes more diverse, more interest has been focused on institutional policies that relate to personal responsibilities (Austin et al., 2007). As these policies can be confusing, peers are encouraged to compare notes about institutional policies that relate to their professional and personal lives. Doing so helps peers get into a rhythm of communicating about life outside of academia and is an avenue for strengthening off-campus networks, which are important for faculty agency (Niehaus and O’Meara, 2015). Discussions may include topics such as expectations for office hours, securing family and health-related leave, and correlations between course loads and
tenure expectations. At a very basic level, these conversations provide space for peers to share about their experiences as early-career faculty representing historically underrepresented populations, which in turn provides benefits to the mental health and wellness of the speaker and the listener (Lee et al., 2015; Schaefer et al., 2017). Finally, responses to these shared experiences may provide insight into innovative ways of navigating the diverse challenges of the professoriate.

Reflecting on the peer-mentoring process and change. As previous research has documented, the process of reflection within mentoring efforts can lead to a greater understanding of mentors’ and protégées’ selves, both personally and professionally (Godden et al., 2014). Within this collaborative peer-mentoring experience, reflection will be incorporated in various ways and can help us to evaluate the effectiveness of the model in supporting early-career faculty. In order to begin from an appreciative stance (Bushe and Kassam, 2005), and in order to gain a sense of members’ experiences with mentorship, participants will be asked to write and share their “best experiences” (Bushe and Kassam, 2005, p. 167) of mentoring. Throughout participation, group members will commit to reflecting on the ways in which they are engaging with one another, including considering the type (e.g. one-on-one, group, in-person, virtual and written), frequency and length of time spent during interactions. A review of peers’ journal entries and conversations about interactions and experiences will help the group gain a deeper understanding of the support they are experiencing and whether or not their thoughts on mentoring and the tenure process are evolving in any way. Journal entries will include reflections from each interaction including the peer’s role in the discussion (mentor or protégée), positives from the interaction, negatives from the interaction and possible outcomes of the contact. It is anticipated that the development of conversations centered on reflections will promote the development of bonds between members. These bonds provide a network of support that increases the likelihood of faculty retention within the academy, thereby increasing the possibility of members applying for and accepting leadership roles. Reflections may also provide a deeper understanding into what role participating in the group might play in this trajectory. Additionally, the reflections, interactions, contacts and conversations may lead to generative metaphors that hold meaning to the group (Bushe and Kassam, 2005). The initial generative metaphor that emerged in the development of the collaborative critical conversations session is the tenure process as a ride with other early-career faculty.

The role of group members’ home institutions. While participation in the peer-mentoring group can develop strong bonds among members, there is a risk that group members may isolate themselves within the group (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015). Early-career faculty should be careful not to detach themselves from other professional groups and interactions within their departments and institutions. Therefore, it is essential that early-career faculty include more than one form of mentoring within their personal–professional plan. Faculty members who develop relationships within their peer-mentoring groups must also be aware of their departmental and institutional cultures (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015) and engage additional institution-based mentors outside of the peer group. While this collaborative peer-mentoring model is one that early-career faculty have sought out themselves and are co-constructing, departments and institutions are not relieved of their responsibility to support faculty (Chang et al., 2013) and should continue developing systematic mentoring programs (Tillman, 2001), including opportunities to foster interactions and relationships among pre-tenure faculty via research initiatives that cross disciplines (Ponjuan et al., 2011). Institutions should also develop an understanding of the role of departmental administrators as players in the experiences of tenure-track faculty of color (Ponjuan et al., 2011) and other underrepresented identities. Further, making clear the tenure process, for junior faculty, can result in positive views about their collegial
associations and their desire to remain at the university (Ponjuan et al., 2011). These simple changes in how institutions support faculty from historically underrepresented populations through mentor programs correspond with the final aspect of MFM: incorporation of political analysis in order to change the status quo.

Implications
Looking forward to the professional trajectories of the peer-mentor group beyond the tenure stage, it is anticipated that through appreciative inquiry, the underlying values, beliefs and emphasis of support of collaborative action will slowly be integrated within these faculty’s institutions. As participants continue in the field and enter positions of formal leadership, they can continue to work toward institutionalizing effective mentoring programs that support all early-career faculty. More importantly, as decision makers and shapers of policy, the participants can consider that invisible labor leads to cultural and identity taxation when promoting professional growth and personal wellness. As noted in the literature, developing mentoring programs that consider aspects of wellness work to increase retention and satisfaction of faculty in the professoriate.

Conclusions
This still-developing, co-constructed model encompasses all five elements of the multicultural feminist model of mentoring. Elements of the model are designed to intentionally attend to the needs of participants from historically underrepresented populations and address the well-being of the protégée and the mentor. As a collaborative peer-mentorship model, this effort works to lessen the impact of documented situational complications that can arise from power dynamics between senior and junior faculty (Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2015; Yun et al., 2016), especially when those faculty members have differing cultural values (Ramaswami et al., 2014). Additionally, the model provides opportunities to exchange information and support with multiple mentors, rather than maintaining a one-on-one relationship. These aspects of peer mentorship have been found to result in a sense of empowerment and acknowledgment for early-career faculty from historically underrepresented groups “as proactive, intentional agents of their own career development” (Yun et al., 2016, p. 4). Concurrently, actively engaging with more than one mentor provides access to greater career benefits than engaging with only one mentor (van Emmerik, 2004). While the collaborative critical conversations session and subsequent peer-mentoring group are not exclusive to representatives from underrepresented populations within academia, the majority of attendees who opted to attend the collaborative critical conversations session were women, black, Latinx and international faculty, all groups that experience challenges related to these identities, in addition to the general pressures of working toward tenure (Collins, 2008; Mitchell, 1983; Montero-Sieburth, 1996; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). Seeking to identify what factors influenced the diversity of the participants in the original session and subsequently the peer-mentoring group is not addressed in this paper, yet it should be examined further.

Those participating in this initiative choose to support and be supported by fellow early-career faculty as they continue to work through the tenure process. They also choose to focus on professional productivity while ensuring that they are discussing wellness and maintaining a healthy perspective throughout the process. Since the participants are situated around the country, the model relies mainly on virtual means of communication, overcoming barriers caused by geography and time (Morton and Nguyen, 2018). As the literature clearly shows, reflection is a crucial aspect of mentoring programs and faculty development. Thus, this aspect will be emphasized in the model as well. Engagement in reflection will begin with taking an appreciative stance and may result in the development of generative metaphors that are shared between group members. Additionally, as a
support vehicle such as this develops, it can be used to foster a cultural change within the field of educational leadership that supports collaboration over competition (Karam et al., 2012; Murakami and Nuñez, 2014). As in the peer group documented by Murakami and Nuñez (2014), the success of the individual is viewed as interconnected with that of the collective. While it is acknowledged that tenure is achieved individually, this model is intended to leverage collective support toward this professional milestone while maintaining personal wellness.

Tending to the well-being of the participants in this co-constructed peer-mentoring model is an intentional practice. Participants are expected to conduct wellness checks with their peers on a regular basis. The wellness checks serve the purposes of building opportunities for the participants to develop genuine concern for the maintenance of a healthy work–life balance for themselves and their peers, develop continuous support systems, increase faculty agency and provide opportunities for storytelling toward the goal of well-being. While the authors have identified numerous benefits of this peer-mentoring model, they anticipate a host of unanticipated benefits to emerge as the model is further developed. Nevertheless, peer-mentoring is a tool that can be used to support faculty development and wellness up to and through tenure.

While it is ideal for institutions to provide mentors, early-career faculty members are encouraged not to wait for this to occur. Instead, they are charged to intentionally seek out a variety of mentoring opportunities to meet their individual needs. Choosing to become part of a peer-mentoring model is only one of the many mentoring choices available. Further, institutions seeking to proactively meet the needs of early-career tenure-track faculty, especially those representing historically underrepresented populations, may benefit from adopting a meaningfully designed model of peer-mentoring. A peer-mentoring group such as the one described here should be only one aspect of a comprehensive mentoring approach for early-career faculty; it is not a substitute for institutional and departmental mentor-based supports (Chang et al., 2013; Ponjuan et al., 2011; Tillman, 2001).

Understanding the unbalanced representation of faculty of color within the field of educational leadership, and in light of who chose to attend the collaborative critical conversations session, this vehicle of support is one that is welcome and needed within the field. As existing research has highlighted vehicles of support, such as this peer-mentoring model, aid in early-career faculty members’ ability to thrive into tenure, successfully publishing scholarship, managing teaching and service responsibilities and maintaining physical and mental wellness. The research further suggests that by participating in peer-mentor programs and engaging with multiple mentors, protégées have the potential to expand their career benefits more than those with one mentor (van Emmerik, 2004). In short, mentoring is an important part of “building a diverse and strong academy” (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002, p. 15). If this is a goal of the academy, then providing collaborative peer-mentoring opportunities is one avenue to reach that goal.

References


Corresponding author
Benterah C. Morton can be contacted at: morton@southalabama.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Thriving vs surviving: benefits of formal mentoring program on faculty well-being

Shanna Marie Stuckey
Department of Education,
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Brian Todd Collins
Center for Urban and Multicultural Education,
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Shawn Patrick
School of Medicine, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Kathleen S. Grove
IUPUI Office for Women,
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, and

Etta Ward
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research,
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe current challenges faced by women and underrepresented minority faculty members, the benefits of mentoring programs, conceptual frameworks that highlight a wellness model and mentoring relationships and the findings from a mixed methods evaluation of a formal mentoring program (EMPOWER) that highlights the indirect benefits of such a program and the impact on faculty well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – This study was based on grounded theory, in which analysis was ongoing as data were collected and a variety of methods were used to building understanding. Measures included a survey and semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The thematic analysis of qualitative data was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method. Descriptive statistics were calculated for quantitative data.

Findings – Findings focus on the indirect benefits of EMPOWER including creation of a safe space, continued relationships between mentees and mentors, networking benefits, acculturation to the campus and a better understanding of organizational politics and how these can positively impact faculty well-being.

Originality/value – The benefits of this formal mentoring program, and the impact on faculty well-being, are important to acknowledge, understand and share with the broader research community and other institutions of higher education.

Keywords Relationships, Well-being, Faculty development, EMPOWER, Faculty vitality, Formal mentoring program, Minoritized faculty, URM faculty, Women faculty

Paper type Research paper

Introduction/Purpose
Supportive faculty mentoring programs can help promote well-being among women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty members. Mentoring programs, such as the Enhanced Mentoring Program with Opportunities for Ways to Excel in Research (EMPOWER), provide a space for socialization and development of productive researchers and scholars, growth of professional identity and enhancement of well-being. EMPOWER supports faculty who are historically underrepresented and/or excluded populations in their
discipline or area of scholarship to become successful in sponsored research and scholarly activity and to achieve significant professional growth and advancement. EMPOWER is a program that is housed at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, the urban research university in Indiana. For the purpose of this paper, well-being is defined as decreased emotional exhaustion, lower depersonalization and higher personal accomplishment (Eckleberry-Hunt et al., 2009).

The challenges and tensions marginalized faculty often face can lead to challenging work environments and can decrease the likelihood of recruitment and retention. EMPOWER assists participants as they navigate and negotiate these complexities by offering a strategic formal mentoring program that centers on these issues and supports participants in both professional and personal capacities. This type of holistic development program helps faculty members to feel connected to the institution and increases well-being and resiliency. This paper describes current challenges facing women and URM faculty members, the benefits of mentoring programs, conceptual frameworks that highlight a well-being model and mentoring relationships and the findings from a mixed methods study of EMPOWER that highlight the indirect benefits of such a program and the impact on faculty well-being.

Conceptual framework
This study incorporates two conceptual frameworks: wellness conceptual framework (Dunn et al., 2007) and relational systems theory (Kahn, 1998, 2001). Together, these frameworks contribute to a more holistic understanding of how formal faculty mentoring programs can reduce burnout and increase resiliency and well-being. While both theories acknowledge the role of the individual, they also place emphasis on the role of the organization to promote systems and programs that support the well-being of faculty and other members of the community.

Well-being conceptual framework
Rooted in academic medicine, Dunn et al. (2007) developed a model of physician well-being. Adopted for this study, Dunn’s framework provides an understanding of organizational interventions, such as mentoring, and the impact on individual faculty members’ well-being. This model comprises three core principles: control, order and meaning (see Figure 1).

Together, these principles impact the expected well-being of faculty members. The control principle represents the influence and autonomy a faculty member has over their work environment and how they spend their time. Order is the degree of efficiency (e.g. reduced administrative burden) a faculty member has. Meaning is defined as the satisfaction a faculty member gains from their work. Together, control, order and meaning help improve faculty members’ satisfaction, reduce burnout and improve organizational health. Dunn and colleagues (2008) also recognized how mentorship helps faculty members cope with the stresses of academia and ultimately experience resilience (see Figure 2).

Mentorship, as well as other positive factors including psychosocial support, social/healthy activities and intellectual stimulation, can help to mitigate barriers to success (e.g. stress, time and energy demands).

Relational systems theory
Relational systems theory (Kahn, 1998, 2001) explains the role of relationships within organizational life. In this study, this theory provides a framework for understanding the mentoring experiences of women and URM faculty. The theory is based upon two key propositions: the presence of anchoring relationships and holding behaviors. Anchoring relationships are defined as strong emotional bonds that “anchor” employees to their
organizations and help in maintaining organizational commitment in the face of anxiety-producing events. Holding behaviors are defined as intentional behaviors that provide containment (safe space), empathic acknowledgment and enabling perspectives. Mentors can build holding behaviors by providing their mentees with safe spaces to share their experiences and concerns, providing empathic knowledge to validate feelings of inadequacy and/or conflict, and offering nonjudgmental perspectives to rebuild the mentee’s ego.

Literature review
In the literature, a variety of barriers related to faculty well-being are addressed. This review of the literature focused on five key areas: barriers to well-being, challenges facing women in academia, challenges facing URM faculty in academia, benefits of mentoring for women and URM faculty and benefits of mentoring for mentors. Literature was examined from a variety of fields including education, industrial/organizational psychology and academic medicine to better understand the needs of women and URM faculty, as well as the individual and systemic barriers they face.
Barriers to well-being

Burnout is well defined in the literature as a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment (Pines and Aronson, 1988). Burnout affects all professions but tends to be more pervasive in human service occupations, such as education. While much of the literature on faculty well-being and burnout comes from academic medicine and industrial/organizational psychology, this phenomenon is experienced by individuals across employment sectors and is not isolated or unique to higher education. Likewise, this work will translate to other fields.

Symptoms of burnout include dissatisfaction, negativism, boredom, unpreparedness, testiness, frequent illness, forgetfulness, depression and tiredness (Eastman, 1996). When discussing strategies for preventing burnout in a college/university setting, four broad categories require consideration: managing time, managing space, managing people and managing physical well-being. In order to reduce burnout, individuals must identify aspects of their professional lives that contribute to excessive stress and which provide satisfaction and promote feelings of accomplishment (Eastman, 1996). Organizations should administer self-assessments to help faculty members recognize sources of stress and to identify individuals who may be burned out. Once identified, faculty should seek ways to prevent or diminish them by achieving and maintaining a balance among their spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical well-being (Eastman, 1996). Organizations also play an important role in this process to reduce organization stressors.

A focus on well-being can lessen or prevent burnout (Eastman, 1996). Temporary burnout, including emotional and physical exhaustion, is perhaps inevitable over the course of an academic career. However, efforts can be made by institutions of higher education to ensure that all employees, especially women and URM faculty, are provided the resources and support they need. There have been published efforts to boost well-being through self-reflective practice; workshops, lectures and support groups; and other multidimensional programs (McCray et al., 2008). Mentors are one example of a positive input for junior faculty. Not only can these individuals help mentor and support junior colleagues with their research, but they can also discuss topics of well-being, such as feelings of insecurity, celebrating accomplishments, handling errors, and burnout (Eckleberry-Hunt et al., 2009). Mentors also model the human side of the professoriate.

Challenges facing women in academia

The retention and promotion of women faculty in academia has long been an area of national concern (Gardner, 2013). To begin, “academia has traditionally been a highly male-dominated and gender-segregated” occupation (Maranto and Griffin, 2011, p. 140). Compared to their male peers, women faculty are more likely to report feelings of isolation and invisibility in their departments, especially within the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Armstrong and Jovanovic, 2015; Bilimoria et al., 2008; Liang and Bilimoria, 2007). Another contributor to feelings of isolation include women faculty not being involved or invited to join committees where high-level decision-making occurs (August and Waltman, 2004). Women faculty have reported higher stress levels due to having to work harder than their male peers to receive credibility for their work and contributions (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016), heavier teaching loads (Gardner, 2013; Misra et al., 2011), and receiving less pay than their male counterparts (August and Waltman, 2004; Lodish, 2015). Women faculty also report a lack of individuals willing to provide career advice or mentoring as barriers toward their professional growth and success (Hewlett et al., 2010).

In academia, the model for the “ideal worker” is one who is dedicated, undistracted and constantly working (Williams, 2001). Research has examined barriers women faculty...
experience related to work/life balance and how starting a family can be a cumulative disadvantage, particularly as it relates to the typical timeframe for advancing in a tenure track career path (Blood et al., 2012; Lodish, 2015). Academic institutions tend to be less friendly to women faculty due to the increasing demands of faculty to produce scholarship and maintain a high teaching load, resulting in a lack of balance between work and family (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2005; Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2006).

Challenges facing URM faculty in academia
To understand how mentoring can be an effective tool in addressing and overcoming the issues listed above, it is essential to recognize the unique cultural identities and experiences of URM faculty in higher education institutions. To begin, URM and women faculty are confronted with the stress of performing their social and cultural identities carefully and selectively to avoid being criticized, marginalized, dismissed or rejected by colleagues and students (Marbley et al., 2011; Trinh Vô, 2012). A barrier commonly reported by URM faculty is feelings of marginalization and isolation. By definition, URM faculty suffer from isolation due to the lack of other faculty and mentors available from their own race and backgrounds, resulting in feelings of being the “only one” or “an outsider” (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Patton, 2009). Feelings of isolation may stem from the lack of effective mentors (particularly mentoring from other URM faculty), the burden of representing their whole race (Pololi et al., 2010), and feeling uninformed and unsupported. Feelings of isolation have also been reported among women of color in male-dominated fields where one may be not just the only woman, but also the only woman of color (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Marbley et al., 2011).

URM faculty have reported suffering from the pressures of “cultural taxation,” where they are given heavier workloads, in comparison to their majority counterparts, in an effort for their institution to demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and diversity (Johnson and Lucero, 2003; Rocquemore and Laszioffy, 2008). Additional URM faculty roles may include advising minority students, serving on numerous committees and participating in outreach programs (Conway-Jones, 2006) while having to manage their teaching and research roles (Johnson and Lucero, 2003). Another barrier experienced by URM faculty includes feeling that, compared to their majority peers, their scholarly work is not treated with the same level of importance (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012), their legitimacy as academics is often questioned, and their contributions to the academy are not recognized. This leads some URM faculty to believe they are being used by their institution as “token” or “affirmative action hires” (Zambrana et al., 2015, p. 53).

It is essential to note how URM and women faculty members’ intersecting identities influence their experiences and perceptions of barriers in academia and the potential impact on retention (Armstrong and Jovanovic, 2015; Zambrana, 2018). Intersectionality focuses on the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and so on, intersect at both the micro and macro levels of personal and social experiences (Bowleg, 2008). Literature shows that URM and women faculty often experience academia as an unwelcoming environment, and that this level of discomfort may vary based on the intersections of race, sex, class and gender (Zambrana et al., 2017). These intersections shape URM and women faculty’s multiple identities, the social perceptions of these individuals by others (i.e. stereotypes), and the dominant power relations that influence their experiences (Espino, 2012). By examining these intersecting identities, we can move toward better articulating and assisting the “invisible” position of people who experience multiple disadvantaged statuses (Lewis et al., 2015, p. 5).

While the urgency of addressing multiple marginalities intensifies, institutional reforms for addressing climate change tend to focus on an individual’s racial/ethnic or
gender identity without considering the multidirectional influence of multiple identities on shaping individuals’ experiences. As Armstrong and Jovanovic (2015) suggest:

The lack of progress among URM and women faculty in academia results from the kinds of issues and challenges that emerge when conceptual and data-collection structures fail to take into account the forms of disadvantage experienced by persons who are characterized by multiple subordinated identities. (p. 145)

Benefits of mentoring for women and URM faculty
Mentoring research has explored the benefits of women having a “constellation” of developmental relationships (mentoring, coaching and sponsoring) regarding their leadership development journeys. Such relationships within these networks of mentoring relationships provide “developmental assistance” that involves both career and psychosocial support (Higgins and Kram, 2001, p. 267). While there are multiple definitions of the role and practice of mentors, the literature reveals a common set of mentoring characteristics: mentoring involves mutual social exchange and consistent interaction, and results in developmental benefits related to the protégé’s career (Haggard et al., 2011). Among mentors of women, this includes helping mentees integrate their personalities and professional experiences to better situate them within their disciplines (Patton, 2009), finding effective methods toward dealing with issues specific to gender, informing them of the organizational politics of the academic environment and affirming one’s worth (Thomas et al., 2015).

Effective mentoring is critical throughout the academic and career advancement of junior URM faculty to enhance their educational access, persistence and career advancement (Nakamura et al., 2009; Zambrana et al., 2015). Mentoring programs for URM faculty have reported mentors provide numerous benefits such as providing emotional support and accountability, understanding and identifying systems of oppression and inequality, and overcoming the fear of being affirmative action hires who are recognized for their addition to diversity and not the merit of their work (Zambrana et al., 2015).

Benefits of mentoring for mentors
It is important to examine not only the potential benefits for mentees but also the benefits for mentors participating in mentoring programs. In the best of circumstances, the process of mentoring is a mutually beneficial experience to both the mentor and mentee (Pololi and Knight, 2005) and provides an emphatic experience of closeness, openness, care and vulnerability (Ragins, 2016). Studies have found mentors engaging in mentoring programs reported increased senior and emeriti faculty productivity, stability and the opportunity to support and develop relationships with the next generation of leaders (Pololi and Knight, 2005). Further, by focusing on mentoring junior faculty and supporting them, senior faculty can help establish realistic beliefs about their position, help to lower stress levels and possibly contribute to an increase in overall well-being (Wester et al., 2009).

EMPOWER program
Genesis of EMPOWER
When discussions began in 2011 between the Office for Women (OFW) and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (OVCR) about addressing the needs of women faculty, internal data from the university indicated that in 2010, only 22 percent of full professors were women and constituted 30 percent of the tenured faculty at the urban campus.

In seeking ideas to address these issues, the OFW and the OVCR convened a focus group of senior women faculty in the spring of 2011. The participants discussed how the
university could increase the participation of women faculty in research activities and support women in advancing their careers. The top request from the women was mentoring. Another concern for the campus was the retention of URM faculty. Although the percentage of URM faculty on campus matched the national average, recent turnover of recruited URM faculty was noted.

Subsequently, the OVCR and OFW developed an enhanced mentoring program for women and URM faculty. This program, known as EMPOWER, paired assistant professors with tenured associate professors (or above), and associate professors with full professors, for a calendar year to assist them in developing an agenda for research or creative activity with the aim of applying for external funding. The mentee component of EMPOWER targets URM populations and women, and the mentor component includes all populations.

Program objectives
The desired outcomes for the mentees were: to become more productive researchers and scholars, to be promoted and tenured and to pursue and receive external funding for their research and scholarship. It was expected that benefits for mentors would include the financial incentive of professional development funding and fulfilling their service role as colleagues and faculty citizens. Additional benefits included the synergy of working with generationally diverse colleagues and sometimes discipline diverse colleagues and learning new technologies or theories.

Implementation of program
Full-time tenure-eligible assistant professors and untenured associate professors who are historically underrepresented and/or excluded populations in their discipline or area of scholarship and historically denied admission to higher education or that discipline, from all campus schools and units, are eligible to apply as mentees. All full-time tenured associate professors or full professors from all schools and units are eligible to apply as mentors.

Mentees receive an award of up to $5,000 to support research and creative activities, as well as support professional development. Mentors receive one allocation of $1,000 at the beginning of the program for professional development. The duration for EMPOWER participation is one year for the formal mentor/mentee relationship. One activity that must be completed, because of the mentoring experience, is a proposal submission to an external funding agency.

Methodology
The guiding approach for the processes and products of this mixed methods study was based on grounded theory, in which analysis was ongoing as data were collected and a variety of methods were used to build understanding (Creswell, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The evaluation used multiple measures including a survey, semi-structured interviews and semi-structured focus groups to examine the implementation and outcomes of EMPOWER. This mixed methods evaluation design allows for stronger validity in interpretations of data through the use of triangulation of multiple methods and sources, and detailed elaboration upon quantitative findings through qualitative analysis. Additionally, the discovery of contradictory findings that provide nuance and suggest future questions for further evaluation is a strength of this experimental design (Greene et al., 1989).

Participants
The evaluation focused on 118 individuals from five cohorts (2011–2016) who participated in EMPOWER. Of the 118 total participants, 83 (70.3 percent) were female and 34 (28.8 percent) were male. In total, 81 percent of mentees were female and 19 percent were male, while
56 percent of mentors were female, and 44 percent were male. The ethnicity of the mentees was 38 percent White, 31 percent Asian, 21 percent Black/African American, 6 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 4 percent two or more races. The ethnicity of the mentors was 82 percent White, 8 percent Asian, 8 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 2 percent Black/African American. Nearly two-thirds (61.7 percent) of participants self-selected their mentor/mentee as part of the application process. The remaining matches were heavily dependent on the program leaderships’ connection to a diverse group of potential mentors across the university who had the skill set and temperament needed for an effective mentoring experience. The objectives of the match were not necessarily based on ethnic or gender similarities, but rather the research and development needs of the mentees. Participants represented 16 different schools across the campus including, but not limited to, education, engineering and technology, public health, informatics and computing, liberal arts, medicine and science.

In total, 44 (37.3 percent) individuals (mentors and mentees) completed a survey that was distributed in July 2017. In total, 15 (34.9 percent) males and 28 (65.1 percent) females completed the survey, and 25 mentees and 19 mentors (three who had mentored twice) completed the survey.

**Measures**

**Survey.** Surveys were completed by mentees and mentors in the summer of 2017. The survey consisted of seven demographic items, 14 Likert scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Disagree/Nor Agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree, and na) pertaining to participants’ experiences and outcomes related to participation in EMPOWER, 11 items related to the EMPOWER mentor/mentee matching and current/previous mentoring experiences, and four open-ended items. Sample items included “Participation in EMPOWER helped me be successful in pursuing sponsored research or external funding” and “Participation in EMPOWER helped me achieve professional growth and advancement.” Open-ended items included “Please describe what you believe was the most rewarding aspect of your participation in this program” and “Please describe any challenges you encountered while participating in this program.”

**Focus groups.** Two (n = 5) focus groups, which lasted approximately 45 min each, were conducted in September and October of 2017 with mentors. They were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Sample focus group questions included “Describe your experience with EMPOWER” and “Describe your relationship with your mentee.”

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted in the spring of 2017 with eight EMPOWER mentees. They lasted approximately from 30 to 45 min and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Sample interview questions included “Describe your successes or accomplishments since participation in EMPOWER” and “How satisfied were you with your mentor?”

**Analysis**

Throughout analysis, evaluators consistently engaged in self-reflective practices and challenged one another during the coding process regarding assumptions, biases and prior knowledge that were important to recognize and set aside but not abandon (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Qualitative data included interviews, focus groups and open-ended survey responses. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Researchers applied codes representing the sentiment of each paragraph or data cluster and/or developed codes identifying patterns that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2008). NVivo 11 qualitative research software was utilized for the coding of themes and reporting prevalence of codes.
and themes. As a group, the team met to discuss the relationships among codes and to combine similar codes into broader patterns or themes. Next, they divided into groups to return to the original data sources to identify representative examples. Finally, the entire team met to share findings, which resulted in the creation of specific themes for coding all sources of qualitative data. This type of cooperative relationship creates better overall understanding of the data and leads to more valid conclusions (Creswell, 2007).

Quantitative data included participants’ responses to the survey. Descriptive statistics including means, frequencies and standard deviations of respondents’ answers were calculated.

Findings
In addition to the direct benefits of a structured/formalized mentoring program, such as career advancement and increase in scholarly activity and sponsored research/external funding, participants identified various indirect benefits of participation in EMPOWER. For the purposes of this paper, the indirect benefits and the connection to faculty well-being are explored. Indirect benefits included the creation of a safe space, continued relationships between mentees and mentors, networking benefits, acculturation to the campus, and a better understanding of organizational politics. These indirect benefits could support the faculty member’s sense of control, order, and meaning and thus contribute to a sense of well-being. While the majority of the findings listed below could include more than one of the principles identified in the wellness model presented by Dunn et al. (2007), we have conceptualized these specific indirect benefits in the following ways:

1. Having a safe space enables faculty members to experience satisfaction and a sense of meaning in their profession by providing an environment where they feel comfortable (Meaning).
2. Continuing relationships between the mentor and mentee allow both individuals to use one another as a sounding board and increase efficiency. In addition, as with the creation of a safe space on campus, these continued relationships provide faculty with a sense of meaning and satisfaction (Meaning and Order).
3. Networking within and across departments and other institutions of higher education also assists with order and making meaning of one’s work (Meaning and Order).
4. Similar to continued relationships and networking, acculturation to campus provides faculty with the opportunity to create order and better understand how to decrease administrative burden, as well as finding meaning in their work (Meaning and Order).
5. Understanding the organizational politics of individual schools/departments and the university assists faculty in better understanding their environment and determining how they spend their time (Control).

Safe space
Participants often described EMPOWER and the mentor/mentee relationship as a “safe space.” Mentors and mentees alike appreciated the opportunity EMPOWER afforded them to discuss areas they were struggling with related to promotion, colleagues or personal and professional well-being. One mentor explained:

He used to joke that this was his safe space to come and talk about career issues. He could talk about other people, or he could talk with other people about his discipline and his articles and where he should publish and that sort of thing. But with me he could sit and I don’t want to say strategize but think more intentionally about his role in that school and how best to set himself up for success on campus more generally.
Mentees described the mentoring relationship in the following ways: “I think having a trusted senior colleague. Just that safe space that we mentioned and just someone to bounce ideas off of” and “The trust that develops, allowing both people to open up about their experiences, hopes, fears, expectations.”

Having this safe space also allowed mentees to open up regarding areas in which they felt they were struggling. One mentee stated that it was beneficial to know that the struggles she experienced were struggles others experienced as well:

And just to hear from your mentor that this is not something that I’m going through. Everybody went through the same thing or everybody goes through the same thing. Don’t feel that you are not good enough or you are not on your track or anything like that. This is the path everybody has to go through. That was good to hear.

These descriptions of safe space exemplify the holding behavior described in relational systems theory (Kahn, 1998, 2001).

Continued relationship
The majority of mentor/mentee pairs (83 percent) that completed the survey continued their relationships past the formal one-year participation in EMPOWER (see full survey results in Table AI). Participants reported long-term mentorship beyond EMPOWER. In addition, others described a professional relationship that also turned into a friendship: “I mean I’m lucky that this one mentee has given me a lot of […] resources but we enjoy each other’s company quite a bit.” Another mentor described her relationship with mentees in this way: “Even the very first person that I worked with, like I said now I think it is more you know we’ve become friends and it is more emotional support but I find that we do almost the same thing.” One mentor discussed how he typically shared a challenge he was facing toward the end of the year with his mentee, and told him, “You may see me as a mentor but on this campus we are very much equals and I value what you think. I think that is one reason why they want to keep meeting.” These emotional bonds “anchor” faculty to their school/department/university and assist with retention of women and URM faculty.

Several mentors felt the mentor/mentee relationship was mutually beneficial. One mentor reported, “I grew in a number of ways so it was very beneficial to me,” while another said, “I’ve got to say I feel like I got every bit as much as I might have given.” However, others felt that this program was more of a service and strictly benefited the mentees. One mentor stated:

I see mentoring as me serving them not a partnership. I feel [mentoring] is a service. It doesn’t take too much time so it doesn’t negatively impact anything that I do […] I may have been taking the wrong approach this whole time but I’m not looking to get anything out of this.

Overall, whether both individuals in the mentorship pair felt the relationship was beneficial, multiple mentors agreed that EMPOWER provided a space for them to help build the campus more broadly. One mentor shared, “There is a strong sense I think that this is helping to build our campus more generally not just helping some people out.” This conclusion, as well as others mentioned above, speaks to the benefits of the program as an explicit investment in human capital.

Networking
Networking was one of the most highly discussed indirect benefits of participation in EMPOWER. Mentors and mentees alike benefited from the relationships they developed not only with one another, but also with colleagues in other departments across campus. Typically, mentors, who had more connections across campus, were able to connect mentees
with individuals who shared similar interests; however, there were multiple instances when mentees were able to introduce their mentors to individuals within the campus, at other university campuses, or the local community. As one mentee stated:

Now I have two mentors and they didn’t know each other before and now they are friends. They do work together now. They are both on all of my grants and publications that they’ve helped me with.

It has actually helped bridge a lot of relationships.

Being able to create, maintain and expand their professional relationships and network was an important benefit. One mentee stated:

And then to be connected, I mean these are high level people so right off the bat to be connected to people that have generated the reputation that they have in their fields and have produced the amount of research that they have is very like, that felt good. It felt like I was being treated like I was important. That is important.

Generally, mentees felt that the individuals their mentors introduced them to were helpful, and several ultimately ended up publishing, writing external grants, and collaborating on research projects. Others were not always able to make these concrete connections but felt that they benefited in other less direct ways from these contacts. One mentee described this the following way: “But you know the more people who you know and who know you, the closer you get to finding people you might actually collaborate with eventually. Even if the first people you meet are not exactly the right match.”

The ability to network within EMPOWER was also something that benefited participants. While there were only a couple of formal group interactions, several mentees felt they were able to connect with other mentees in the program and build a supportive community, as exhibited by the following quotation:

The other junior faculty and hear them going through the same struggles that I am. Not because I want them to suffer but because I know I’m not suffering alone. That was nice. It kind of gave us a forum where we could speak freely and openly and be understood.

In total, 64 percent ($N = 16$) of mentees and 38 percent ($N = 8$) of mentors rated the survey item “The program helped me make connections to colleagues in other departments” as Agree or Strongly Agree ($M = 3.96$ and $M = 3.24$, respectively). In addition, 75 percent ($N = 18$) of mentees and 61 percent ($N = 14$) of mentors rated the survey item “The opportunities to meet with the larger group in person were valuable” as Agree or Strongly Agree ($M = 4.07$ and $M = 3.80$, respectively).

**Acculturation to campus**

Acculturation to campus was another indirect benefit identified by participants to reduce feelings of isolation. This included connecting with and recognizing others on campus and feeling connected to the campus community. One participant explained this the following way: “I didn’t even really know, anything I learned about who was doing what on campus at the time was through my mentor. Because she was my first conduit to narrowing down a big world into a smaller one.” Another mentee shared that the most rewarding aspect of EMPOWER was “feeling more connected to faculty community.”

One mentee recommended that continuing to increase the visibility of EMPOWER would be beneficial, as she viewed the program as an opportunity to acclimate faculty to campus: “Such programming can really help people who feel like they are outsiders and bring them more into the fold. I think making it more accessible I think.”

In total, 88 percent ($N = 22$) of mentees rated the survey item “As a new faculty member, this program helped me feel welcomed and/or acclimated to the campus” as Agree or Strongly Agree ($M = 4.50$).
Organizational politics

In addition to the indirect benefits listed above, mentors and mentees described the importance of understanding the organizational politics within specific departments and the campus as a whole. One mentee described how this benefited her:

It came with understanding what I didn’t know that my mentor helped me to understand and to see. There is always politics. There is always undercurrent where the bones are buried kind of phrase that you don’t know and mentors have a way of helping you to see those while recognizing a path less traveled where others have been successful given all of those nuances. I loved EMPOWER for that because I was able to see those and therefore carve out a clear path for my promotion and tenure.

Understanding these organizational politics was also useful as it related to different ways of communicating across cultures, as the following quotation demonstrates:

I’m used to a more direct way of interacting with people so it was harder to understand what people or faculty wanted from me. She was able to kind of say well this is how people say this. This is how this happens. That is very helpful situation for somebody like me who is culturally so different.

Another mentee stated, “Those sort of morsels of information for me was a good 90% win from just being a part of EMPOWER. Which would not have taken place outside of that structure.”

Understanding the organizational politics surrounding promotion and tenure helped one mentor assist her mentee:

The first person that I mentored it was also a joint appointment and those are always very tricky to navigate. Things got very political with her promotion as well. And so I felt like I could be that safe space for her. She really needed it at that time and luckily everything worked [...] It did get very political and I think having the support of someone completely removed from her school, completely removed from that line of work and certainly I wasn’t the only one. There were a lot of people that were able to provide that for her but it ended up working out really well.

These “insider secrets” and “tricks of the trade” were invaluable to mentees. In fact, several described this information as the most beneficial aspect of their participation in EMPOWER.

Discussion

In recent years, the conversation around well-being and burnout has moved from an individual problem to an organizational challenge. Eastman (1996) suggested that a focus on well-being could lessen or even prevent burnout. The benefits associated with participation in EMPOWER were evident, and involvement in this type of faculty mentoring program provided many of the resources necessary to improve women and URM faculty well-being at institutions of higher education (Wester et al., 2009). While the original intention of EMPOWER was to foster research productivity among women and URM faculty, some of the most significant findings indicated the importance of faculty well-being. These indirect benefits acknowledged by participants (safe space, continued relationships, networking, acculturation to campus and understanding organizational politics) directly relate to how formal mentoring programs such as EMPOWER provide many of the resources associated with increasing and promoting faculty well-being. Our study supports the findings of other researchers (e.g. Gardner, 2013; Maranto and Griffin, 2011) with regard to the challenges that women and URM faculty face in academia and what is known about the benefits of mentoring for these populations. EMPOWER is one example of ways that institutions of higher education can provide a space for socialization, development, and well-being of women and URM faculty.
Conclusion

Significant research literature indicates that formal mentoring programs are particularly beneficial for women and URM faculty (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Such programs could mean the difference between success and failure for early career faculty, who find themselves navigating the complex and sometimes political terrains of the academy, as they seek to build a robust research portfolio and advance to full professorship. This type of intentional mentoring program that gives mentees, who are from underrepresented populations, the opportunity to learn from and network with mentors and leaders across the university is rare because of the program focus on the mentees’ research agenda and productivity. Additionally, the indirect benefits of this program, and the impact on faculty well-being, are important to acknowledge, understand and share with the broader research community and other institutions of higher education.

Although overt discrimination and discrimination based on sex is illegal in many countries and institutions of higher education, systemic and institutional barriers still exist for women and underrepresented minorities. Other covert barriers such as unconscious bias, exclusion, hostile environments and microaggressions persist and must be addressed by institutions. The cumulative impact of unconscious bias on opportunity and advancement, the exclusion from informal networks of information and power, the isolation and pressure of “tokenism,” and the organizational structure ordered around male norms are a few of these barriers that organizations can address through direct action and programming. Faculty mentoring programs for historically excluded or underrepresented populations that focus on professional growth and success can also meet individual relational needs promoting well-being by providing “safe spaces” and “holding” environments. Institutional support for programs such as EMPOWER help to recruit and retain a diverse faculty and signal to the community that diversity is a key value of the institution.

In contrast to the focus of previous literature, the current study looked at the experience in terms of how to support women and URM faculty to increase promotion and tenure rates and research funding. The key implications of this study can be summarized as follows: support of institutional leaders is crucial; adding funding and scholarship components to mentoring programs help increase mentees publishing, external grants and collaborative projects; and there is a mutual benefit for mentors and mentees. This program was able to exist, both in regard to human resources and financial resources, due to support from all levels of the university administration. In developing this program, it was important to have data about the institution; promotion and tenure rates and external funding by gender and race. Moving forward, collecting and sharing data on these two metrics has helped to keep institutional funding since the program’s inception. To that end, providing funding and setting expectations for scholarly work has been a mutual benefit to the institution and participants of the program. Finally, both mentors and mentees shared benefits they received from being in this mentoring program.

Implications for future research

This research focused solely on the experience of women and URM faculty in a structured mentoring program. The current study, which focused on a small sample of women and URM faculty who participated in the EMPOWER program, found that these individuals experienced a variety of direct and indirect benefits. Further research recommended to explore the connection between two individuals is seen as critical in the success of the mentoring relationships. In the EMPOWER program, the facilitators were intentional in pairing mentors and mentees. Future research on the pairing process would lend additional insight into the establishment and maintenance of these relationships.
References


### Table AI. Mentee and mentor survey responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentee only items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree/nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>na</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the EMPOWER Program helped me be successful in pursuing sponsored research or external funding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>10 (40.0%)</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>4.17 (0.937)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the EMPOWER Program improved my productivity of scholarly activity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>13 (52.0%)</td>
<td>8 (32.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>4.13 (0.850)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the EMPOWER Program helped me achieve professional growth and advancement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>12 (48.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>4.33 (0.817)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a new faculty member, this program helped me feel welcomed and/or acclimated to the campus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>7 (28.0%)</td>
<td>15 (60.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.780)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor only items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree/nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>na</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My mentee received my support, input, and feedback positively</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>19 (90.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.90 (0.301)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to provide my mentee with constructive feedback</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>17 (81.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.81 (0.402)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have grown and developed as a mentor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>7 (33.3%)</td>
<td>11 (52.4%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>4.45 (0.688)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This program contributed to my career advancement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>7 (33.3%)</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>3.24 (0.970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program improved my sponsored research capacity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10 (47.6%)</td>
<td>6 (28.6%)</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>2.70 (0.801)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program improved my scholarly activity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (28.6%)</td>
<td>6 (28.6%)</td>
<td>7 (33.3%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>3.15 (0.933)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor and mentee items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree/nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>na</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectations that I had before beginning the EMPOWER Program were realized during and after participation in the program</td>
<td>Mentee 0</td>
<td>4 (16.0%)</td>
<td>3 (12.0%)</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>7 (28.0%)</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to meet with my mentor/mentee on a consistent basis</td>
<td>Mentor 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (33.3%)</td>
<td>13 (61.9%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>4.65 (0.489)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentee 1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>10 (40.0%)</td>
<td>12 (48.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.24 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I contributed to my mentor/mentee’s growth</td>
<td>Mentor 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (23.8%)</td>
<td>16 (76.2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.76 (0.436)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentee 1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>7 (28.0%)</td>
<td>5 (20.0%)</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>3 (12.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.24 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>7 (33.3%)</td>
<td>12 (57.1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.48 (0.680)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree/nor Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>na</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The program improved my understanding of resources available to me on campus</td>
<td>Mentee 0</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>3 (12.0%)</td>
<td>11 (44.0%)</td>
<td>10 (40.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.20 (0.817)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor 1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10 (47.6%)</td>
<td>9 (42.9%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.43 (0.811)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This program helped me make connections to colleagues in other departments</td>
<td>Mentee 0</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>6 (24.0%)</td>
<td>7 (28.0%)</td>
<td>9 (36.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>3.96 (0.999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor 1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>3 (14.3%)</td>
<td>9 (42.9%)</td>
<td>6 (28.6%)</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.24 (0.955)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend the EMPOWER Program to colleagues based on my experiences</td>
<td>Mentee 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>4 (16.0%)</td>
<td>18 (72.0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>4.67 (0.637)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (23.8%)</td>
<td>15 (71.4%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
<td>4.75 (0.444)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table AI.
About the authors
Shanna Marie Stuckey is Assistant Director for Research and Evaluation at the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME), Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis. Shanna received the Master Degree in Educational Psychology from Indiana University. Her research interests include research and evaluation methodology, action research and project-based learning. Shanna works collaboratively with urban schools and community organizations to translate research and evaluation findings into practice in meaningful ways. Shanna Marie Stuckey is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: stuckeys@iupui.edu

Brian Todd Collins received the Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology from Morehouse College and a Master of Arts Degree in Sociology from Indiana University – Purdue Indianapolis (IUPUI). He is currently Doctoral Student in IUPUI’s Urban Education Studies doctoral program. He is also Graduate Assistant in the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME), which has served as a great opportunity for further engaging in studies relating to his research interests.

Shawn Patrick, MA, is Director of Faculty Development, Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM). In this role, he supports faculty in teaching, research and leadership development and other aspects of faculty vitality. His scholarship focuses on faculty development, diversity and inclusion and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Shawn is currently a doctoral candidate in the Urban Education Studies program at Indiana University. He received the MA Degree from Ball State University and the BS Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Prior to joining IUSM, Shawn worked at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the University Hawai‘i Mānoa.

Kathleen S. Grove is Director of the IUPUI Office for Women, with a mission to help build and support an equitable and inclusive campus environment where all can succeed. Kathy has been consulting, advising and counseling in a professional capacity throughout a career that has encompassed the fields of law, business, mental health counseling, and higher education. She has a Doctor of Jurisprudence Degree from McKinney School of Law, Indiana University, Indianapolis and a Master Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis.

Etta Ward has led research development operations in the IUPUI Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research for nearly 17 years. As the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research Development, her primary role is to advance the IUPUI research enterprise through faculty and professional development efforts. She works collaboratively with units to develop, execute and monitor current and future strategic initiatives. She leads efforts to promote independent and collaborative research success across disciplines and units. Ward spearheaded targeted programing to nurture and advance the research and creative activities of women and minority faculty researchers.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Exploring professors’ experiences supporting graduate student well-being in Ontario faculties of education

Vera Woloshyn, Michael J. Savage, Snezana Ratkovic and Catherine Hands
Department of Educational Studies, Brock University, St Catharines, Canada, and Dragana Martinovic
Department of Education, University of Windsor, Windsor, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore Ontario education professors’ perceptions of well-being, document ways in which they support graduate students’ well-being and discuss perceived challenges in doing so.

Design/methodology/approach – A basic interpretative design was used, with participants consisting of seven (four females, three males) tenured professors from five faculties of education in Ontario, Canada. Participants completed one to two semi-structured interviews. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed for member checking and read holistically to identify emergent themes across participants.

Findings – Participants provided multifaceted representations of well-being and reported that supporting graduate students’ psycho-socio-emotional well-being was a critical aspect of their role. They discussed the intentional use of specific strategies including creating inclusive learning environments, nurturing caring relationships, providing academic accommodations and promoting relevant on-campus supports and services. Finally, participants identified factors that challenged their abilities to support graduate students’ wellness including institutional norms and expectations, shifting student demographics and uncertainties with respect to professional capacities.

Practical implications – Graduate student mentorship should be included in the faculty reward system. The provision of private, specialized services offered by trained personnel is also recommended. Future research is needed to explore faculty experiences supporting and mentoring diverse groups of graduate students.

Originality/value – While limited in participant numbers and educational jurisdiction, this research extends current mentoring models by adding a mental health and well-being component, thus bridging gaps between well-being and graduate mentorship in higher education.

Keywords Mentoring and coaching in HE, Well-being, Graduate teaching

Paper type Research paper

Promoting and sustaining mental health and well-being are issues of increasing global attention and concern (e.g. Cratsley and Mackey, 2018). According to the WHO (2016), mental health and well-being are “fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life” (para. 2). Unfortunately, one in four individuals will experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime, making mental health disorders a leading cause of ill health and disability (WHO, 2013).

The prevalence of mental health issues identified in society may be an even greater problem in institutions of higher education. Internationally, higher education institutions are reporting increased instances and severity of mental health concerns, with university students exhibiting elevated distress and mental health symptoms relative to their non-university peers and the general population (e.g. Ibrahim et al., 2013; Kurtovic, 2018). Poor mental health or a compromised sense of well-being has been found to negatively affect individuals’ capacities to engage in scholarly pursuits and activities (WHO, 2016). Students who experience poor mental health typically exhibit poorer academic performance, higher
rates of non-completion, underemployment and/or unemployment, as well as ongoing mental health concerns relative to their peers (Koch et al., 2014; Schindler and Kientz, 2013).

The purpose of this paper is to explore Ontario education professors’ perceptions of mental health and well-being, document the ways in which they sustained and supported graduate students’ well-being and identify perceived challenges in doing so. Graduate students were defined as learners involved in academic studies beyond their undergraduate degrees, including students enrolled in professional master’s programs that granted teacher certification and students enrolled in master’s and doctoral-level graduate programs in education.

Literature review

Higher education institutions have increasingly been called upon to support the well-being of their students, staff and faculty (Blee et al., 2015; Gagnon et al., 2017). To this end, many higher education institutions have increased mental health literacy initiatives including course-based programming (Woloshyn and Savage, 2018a, b) and access to support services (MacKean, 2011). Such services, however, tend to be tailored for, and used by, undergraduate students (Jaworska et al., 2016), leaving the needs of graduate-level students potentially unmet. Based on CFS-O (2017), even when services are available, graduate students may be reluctant to use them due to fears of personal, social, academic, funding and career reprisals. Consequently, universities may not be promoting graduate students’ well-being as effectively as intended.

It is well recognized that professors hold critical roles in facilitating graduate students’ academic success experiences (Conrad et al., 2015). Graduate students’ positive experiences are, in part, facilitated by supportive formal and informal interactions and relationships with professors (Fedynich et al., 2016). Professors may offer coaching, advice and friendship and provide professional sponsorship and visibility. Many decide to serve as mentors, and not just advisers, to their graduate students. While advising is a top-down, goal-driven, one-dimensional transfer of information between professors and students, mentoring is a bi-directional, multifaceted, deeply personal and highly individualized process where mentors understand their mentees’ prior experiences, strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, values and professional goals (Montgomery, 2017). Effective mentoring requires complex and dynamic relational and behavioural patterns involving open communication and accessibility, reciprocal goals and challenges, passion and inspiration, a caring personal relationship, mutual respect and trust, exchange of knowledge, independence and collaboration and role modelling (Eller et al., 2014; Lucey and White, 2017). Mentoring functions to support students’ socioemotional and personal growth as well as career and/or professional growth (Gill et al., 2012; Fedynich et al., 2016). As such, faculty members who mentor their students play a formative role in promoting the students’ success, both academically and personally.

Students’ academic success and well-being are both directly and indirectly linked through caring relationships. Caring relationships have been positively associated with learning in graduate studies (Schwartz and Holloway, 2012, 2014; Lucey and White, 2017). Graduate students who experience caring relationships with their professor report enhanced learning and academic success, increased sense of agency, empowerment, self-esteem and self-worth and ongoing desire for connectivity (Protivnak and Foss, 2009; Schwartz and Holloway, 2014). The provision of socioemotional support from professors can develop students’ confidence to take risks and promote a sense of satisfaction, happiness and belonging, especially during the early stages of graduate studies (Johnson, 2008). In these ways, caring relationships between professors and graduate students support student well-being.

Many professors, however, prioritize and demonstrate greater confidence in their abilities to provide students with knowledge mobilization and career induction support rather than
socioemotional support (Conrad et al., 2015; Fedynich et al., 2016). Limited studies have directly explored how professors support graduate students' well-being within their roles as academic mentors. Therefore, it is important to investigate professors' experiences in supporting graduate students' socioemotional needs, especially within the field of education where graduates are often charged with overseeing the well-being of others. It would also be beneficial to explore professors' awareness of the university-level supports available to graduate students and their strategies for connecting students to these resources.

Conceptual framework
This study is grounded in Noddings' (1984, 2005) ethic of care, Selke and Wong's (1993) mentoring-empowered model and Yob and Crawford's (2012) conceptual framework for mentoring. Within these frameworks, successful mentors are viewed as caring (Noddings, 1984, 2005), nurturing (Selke and Wong, 1993) and friendly (Yob and Crawford, 2012), pursuing multiple roles and a holistic approach to mentoring.

Yob and Crawford (2012) identified 55 behaviours and characteristics of effective mentors and categorized them into a mentoring model that includes academic and psychosocial domains, with four main attributes pertaining to the academic domain (competence, availability, induction and challenge) and three main attributes comprising the psychosocial domain (personal qualities, communication and emotional support). The academic domain encompasses mentors' roles in supporting knowledge, skill and attitude development, while the psychosocial domain "includes the qualities and skills in building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, and the values, attitudes, and affects involved in mentoring" (p. 41).

For Noddings (1984), care involves being receptive, related and committed to students' needs. Noddings distinguishes between "the one-caring" and "the cared-for" (p. 4). The one-caring professor must follow this ethical ideal through "dialogue, modelling, the provision of practice, and the attribution of best motive" (p. 179).

The mentoring-empowered model of Selke and Wong (1993) provides a developmental framework for graduate student mentoring. The model incorporates existing knowledge of graduate student advisement, principles of educational mentoring and Erikson's stages of human development. As adult learners, graduate students encounter an intimacy crisis that calls for acceptance, openness and trust within a mentoring relationship as well as a desire to contribute to society. Mentors should be aware of this need for growth and support students in achieving their professional and personal goals.

The mentoring-empowered model provides mentors with six essential characteristics of mentoring context and five mentor roles. The mentoring context includes acceptance, good communication, and an open, trusting and growth-centred relationship. The mentor role includes teacher, sponsor and socializer, counsellor, encourager and role model. The model considers the professional and social needs of adult learners; however, implementation of this model in different contexts must be continuously scrutinized and modified.

In this paper, all three models contribute to an overall picture of the mentor–mentee relationship. Yob and Crawford (2012) clearly outline the binary nature of mentoring as both an academic and socioemotional endeavour. They, along with Selke and Wong (1993), identify mentors' main responsibilities in both of these areas as they work with their mentees. Both Noddings (1984, 2005) and Selke and Wong (1993) note the nature of caring relationships and the crucial role their development has in promoting not only academic achievement but also, importantly, in supporting well-being. Toward that end, the mentoring-empowered model highlights the importance of tailoring relationships to graduate student mentees' developmental needs as well as their personal and professional goals. Building on this collective model, mentoring relationships are conceptualized as "mutually rewarding and developmentally sound" (Selke and Wong, 1993, p. 25), with the
potential to promote well-being. To understand the mentoring role within these conceptual frameworks, we explored the following research questions:

RQ1. What are education professors’ perceptions of graduate student mental health and well-being?

RQ2. How do education professors work to sustain and promote graduate student mental health and well-being in context of their roles as instructors, supervisors and mentors?

RQ3. What challenges or tensions do education professors report in their efforts to support graduate student mental health and well-being?

Method

The findings reported here emerged from a larger, comparative explanatory mixed-methods investigation of perceptions of well-being and graduate mentorship in faculties of education. The first phase of the research entailed surveying Ontario education professors and graduate students. To explain the survey findings, the second phase of the research entailed interviewing a selection of the participants (Creswell, 2011). Seven professors from five faculties of education in Ontario volunteered to be interviewed. This study focused on the interviewees’ reported experiences and understandings of well-being and mentorship in the context of their lived experiences within higher education settings in Ontario, Canada.

Research design

Within qualitative research, basic interpretative designs provide one tool for understanding individuals’ socially constructed experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their lived experiences (Creswell, 2011; Merriam, 2002). Basic interpretative design was used to gain a deep understanding of professors’ perceptions of mental health and well-being, with particular interest in the intersections between teaching, supervising and mentoring graduate students and supporting their well-being.

Participants

Seven tenured professors (four females and three males) from five public universities in Ontario participated in this study. Two were from universities with graduate enrolments of fewer than 2,000 students, four from institutions with graduate enrolments of 2,000–6,000 students and one from a university with graduate enrolments over 19,000 students (Universities Canada, 2018). Four of the participants were full professors (Ariana, Diane, BC and Kevin), with one recently granted the status of professor emeritus. The remaining three were associate professors (Jennifer, Bill and Randy). Participants held a minimum of 10 years’ work experience at their current university, with five holding previous positions in other higher education institutions. Six participants held administrative positions throughout their careers (e.g. chairs, directors and deans). All participants identified themselves as experienced with respect to graduate-level instruction and supervision. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to maintain confidentiality.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection occurred over six months, with participants completing one to two semi-structured, open-ended interviews that ranged from 60 to 90 min. Interview questions were based on the concepts outlined in the literature review and conceptual frameworks (Merriam, 2002). Questions explored participants’ understandings of mental health and well-being, and the ways in which participating professors supported graduate students’
academic success and well-being. Participants’ knowledge of on-campus services and resources was explored, as were their beliefs about how higher education institutions could work to support graduate student academic success and well-being. Participants were encouraged to provide lived examples whenever possible to contextualize and deepen their responses (Creswell, 2011). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Participants were invited to edit, revise or clarify their transcriptions to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2011). We received several minor word edits with no requests for major change.

Data analysis was thematic. The researchers individually read and coded each transcript holistically, using a priori codes based on the literature and theoretical frameworks (e.g., mentorship, academic success and well-being) and emerging codes that arose from the data (e.g., work–life imbalance, emotional labour and inclusive practices; Creswell, 2011). Researchers then met to discuss their analyses, interpretations and theme parameters. The researchers arrived at a shared understanding of emergent themes, including participant “definitions of mentorship and well-being”, “maintaining personal well-being”, “strategies for supporting graduate student well-being”, “strategies for supporting graduate student academic success” and “tensions”. In this paper, the three main themes that directly relate to professor–student mentorship and well-being are discussed, including definitions, strategies and tensions.

Findings and discussion
Participants provided multifaceted representations of well-being that integrated biological, sociocultural and psychological factors. They described their use of specific strategies and processes to support graduate students’ well-being, including creating inclusive learning environments, nurturing caring relationships, providing academic accommodations and recommending relevant on-campus supports and services. Participants also identified tensions in terms of limited professional skills to support students’ well-being, institutional norms and expectations and shifting student demographics.

Definitions of mental health and well-being
Participants provided multifaceted descriptions of well-being that included considerations of physical, mental, social and emotional states of being. For Jennifer, well-being was “physical and mental and emotional”, while BC responded, “You are mentally healthy, you are physically healthy and you have a social network and support system that you contribute to as well”. Most participants also discussed the importance of achieving “balance” across these dimensions as foundational to wellness. For example, Randy defined well-being as “a composite of emotional, mental, physical, health, confidence […] with a commitment to some balance of all those dimensions of your life”, while Bill observed that well-being is “finding life balance between the demands we have in the professional world and the needs we have on a personal level”.

All participants were sensitive to sociocultural factors related to racism, sexism, classism and homophobia as well as acculturation and first-generation challenges, employment uncertainty and financial hardship, and family status (single parents, elder care) that can work to undermine individuals’ sense of well-being. BC noted that some graduate students are “first-generation students, students coming from marginalized positions that may have different kinds of challenges that we may not be looking after”. Jennifer noted that many international students are English language learners and they come to the university with “different cultural norms and different, very different, approaches to doing pedagogy and, in terms of well-being […] [those are] the kinds of things that can up the stress levels”.

Some participants also recognized a range of biological vulnerabilities, as well as psychological and cognitive factors that could impede graduate students’ well-being,
including specific mental health disorders (e.g. anxiety, mood disorders, psychosis, ADHD and brain injuries). Randy noted that “every year there seems to be a mixture of folks with […] anxiety kind of issues, people with more complex mental health needs”, while Ariana shared she had several students for whom she was “really concerned they were struggling, whether with anxiety or depression”, which was adversely affecting their well-being. Ariana, Kevin and Diane demonstrated awareness that graduate students with mental health and cognitive disorders were likely first diagnosed as adolescents or young adults. These professors then assumed that as graduate students, these individuals would likely be knowledgeable about their specific needs, vulnerabilities and triggers, and have effective coping strategies. Diane stated:

Many of those students I encounter, they have had mental health issues for a long period of time and they know what has helped them be successful. It doesn’t mean they can do it because their mental health issues could be confounding it, but they have the background of knowing what has helped before or nothing has helped before and they just plod along. So, I always look to the person first as a point of reference [for providing strategies and accommodations].

These participants viewed students as self-experts and indicated that effective mentoring involved inviting students to provide directions and recommendations about how to best support their learning and mental health needs, consistent with the argument that student agency and autonomy are critical for learning (Yob and Crawford, 2012).

Finally, participants also acknowledged the complex role of psychological factors on students’ well-being including suicidality, stress and anxiety (ranging from specific course-based concerns to global ones such as climate change), as well as misconceptions and erroneous beliefs related to performance expectations (e.g. perfectionism), role enactment and academic standards. Diane noted that her institution had “a number of suicides that became very high profile over a very short period of time and [her] institution made it a high priority to focus on mental health”. Jennifer stated that “graduate students often have [a] sort of perfectionism”, which manifests itself in “I’m going to get perfect or I’m going to fail out of this program”. Perfectionist thinking has been found to have a negative effect on graduate students’ well-being and academic achievement (Cesar et al., 2018; Cowie et al., 2018).

Participants held a holistic, multifaceted and dynamic understanding of mental health and well-being that acknowledged reciprocal relationships between the mind, body, spirit and community (Moe et al., 2012). For them, students demonstrated well-being when they used their physical, social and psychological resources in ways that allowed them to cope with daily challenges and stressors, to work and learn productively and contribute meaningfully within their scholarly communities (Dodge et al., 2012). Participants also appeared to reject ideas of absolute well-being or absolute illness, adopting instead the notion of a continuum where individuals experience varied levels of wellness across time and context. They also expressed awareness of sociocultural factors including social capital, poverty and discrimination that influence students’ mental well-being and external and internal factors that may alter it, consistent with the understanding that too many challenges and/or too few resources may result in distress and decreased well-being (Dodge et al., 2012; Manwell et al., 2015).

Strategies for promoting graduate student well-being

For the most part, participants believed that they were well-positioned to develop students’ academic skills, clarify academic expectations, challenge perfectionist tendencies and support personal goals. These professors discussed the importance of self-determination, perseverance, resilience and a sense of agency for engagement in academic activities and ultimately well-being, suggesting that students flourished when they possessed the relevant
knowledge, skills and mindsets to achieve self-defined personal goals and objectives. Individuals who are motivated to achieve self-defined goals and believe in their own agency and capacity for success are able to reflect on their learning strategies and persist in the face of adversity, and demonstrate higher academic achievement, career attainment and higher levels of wellness (Ntoumanis et al., 2014; Aswini and Amrita, 2017). Participants promoted well-being broadly within their classrooms as well as individually in mentoring relationships (Selke and Wong, 1993) by establishing inclusive learning environments for all of their students, and caring relationships in which they attempted to get to know and understand their students personally (Schwartz and Holloway, 2012, 2014) and accommodating their needs.

**Inclusive and safe classrooms.** Participants promoted their classrooms and research spaces as “safe” and “inclusive” places where mental health, well-being and self-care were valued and respected. They did this in part by modelling inclusive language, encouraging open and respectful conversations about diversity, and planning inclusive assignments. These practices are congruent with the mentoring-empowered model that proposes acceptance, good communication, openness, trust and growth-centred relationships (Selke and Wong, 1993). The participants provided opportunities for students to engage in informal discussions during class and connected students with similar interests. Jennifer outlined how she tried “to set an environment that is welcoming to all students […] [so] that graduate students see one another as peers and colleagues who are supportive, rather than seeing one another in competition with each other”. Diane spoke about the importance of seeking advice from on-campus pedagogical and support service experts to create inclusive and accommodating classroom and mentoring experiences when working with students with mental health challenges. She stated, “I knew when my line was being crossed and I called somebody to [ask] what I can do to better support [the student] because I had no idea”. Here, Diane reveals her boundaries and her wisdom as a nurturer and counselor (Selke and Wong, 1993) in knowing when additional supporters should be invited to join the mentor–mentee conversation.

Several participants intentionally integrated mental health and wellness activities (e.g., mindfulness activities) into their classroom teaching. Randy noted, “We start our class routinely with some breathing exercises or a body scan or mindfulness-kinds of activities”. Participants also indicated that they provided personal and professional examples about the potentially detrimental effects of biopsychosocial stressors to well-being as well as the importance of self-care practices, acknowledging that wellness practices often required effort and focused attention. BC shared that she makes sure students “know that I’m trying to understand their context and that I’ve actually experienced their context. I give them personal examples of my own [experiences] […] my own strategies”. In this way, BC demonstrated a focus on individual student needs and the capacity to serve as a role model (Noddings, 1984, 2005; Selke and Wong, 1993).

That participants tended to readily engage in well-being conversations and practices when working with education graduate students is not surprising. It is increasingly acknowledged that the teaching profession is a stressful and emotionally intense occupation (Ellis and Riel, 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2014), where teachers’ psychological well-being has been associated with students’ mental health and wellness (Sisask et al., 2014). For these reasons, inclusion discussions and activities intended to support mental health and well-being can be viewed as critical components of graduate education (Powietrzynska and Noble, 2018).

By creating an inclusive classroom, modelling and discussing self-care practices and strategies, respecting students as individuals and developing relationships with them, participants were connecting teaching and mentoring with students’ well-being. They believed in the importance of maintaining a state of positive well-being, which replicates previous experiences.
research demonstrating self-care promotion among graduate students as an element of emotional support (Green and Hawley, 2009). Collectively, such actions are congruent with effective mentorship (Selke and Wong, 1993; Yob and Crawford, 2012).

Caring relationships. Participants acknowledged the individuality of students’ life experiences and circumstances and believed that developing rapport and positive relations with graduate students was foundational to supporting their well-being. In part, such relationships evolved when professors expressed sincere interest in students’ in-school and out-of-school lives, considered extenuating and exacerbating factors that could influence academic performance, and respected individuals’ unique learning goals and objectives. Jennifer said:

First and foremost we need building of a rapport […] a lot of that can happen through informal conversations, getting to know one another in small ways, finding out [that] they play racquetball, or they have a really close relationship with their sister […] or whatever it may be, but I think that is the first step – trying to establish and basically grow that rapport.

Participants were also conscious of potential tensions between gaining holistic understandings of students’ mental health and well-being and respecting their rights to privacy and confidentiality. In this context, participants discussed the importance of providing students with “gentle invitations” to share their experiences, concerns and mental health needs. BC explained that if she noticed a student was struggling, she:

[...] would try and make contact in some way and say “why don’t you come by and we can have a chat […] so I just try to communicate, put some feelers out there […] but I wouldn’t force it because, you know, I’d give them a choice.

Participants also discussed the importance of engaging in “check-ins” for building rapport and sustaining students’ well-being. In particular, they noted the importance of reaching out to students, especially those who demonstrated behavioural changes in their productivity or presence on campus. Diane explained:

Somebody’s writing may be off one day or an email may sound quirky or something doesn’t quite gel, and so it’s putting all these different pieces together without making an assumption but checking in. So, I am typically really good at sending out those emails that say, that’s the subject line, “checking-in.” And, I am usually pretty good at checking-in when I need to.

Participants highlighted the importance of active listening, emphasizing the importance of being empathetic to the complexities of students’ lived experiences, as well as recognizing and honouring their knowledge and insights about their mental health and wellness needs and adaptive coping strategies. Bill and Jennifer elaborated that active listening is an acquired skill that is challenging, difficult and potentially exhausting. Ariana equated active listening as akin to emotional labour. These participants cautioned that active listening requires listeners to be self-aware and reflective of their own needs.

Similar to Schwartz and Holloway (2012, 2014), the participants in this study incorporated the concept of care into their teaching and mentoring practices. By taking an active interest in their students and their lives both in and out of the classroom, respecting personal boundaries, exhibiting empathy and active listening and by being available to meet with graduate students, participants acknowledged and honoured students as worthy and capable individuals. These acknowledgements portray participants as caring mentors who are receptive, connected and committed to their students’ needs (Noddings, 1984). Traditionally, the concept of care has been marginalized in higher education even though it is a “deeply fundamental value” (Held, 2006, p. 17). Held argued that care is the actions, reactions and decisions individuals engage in to maintain their well-being, as well as the actions, reactions and decisions that individuals receive from others to grow and experience
positive well-being. Care creates interdependencies between individuals, others and society that allow for the evolution of personal capacities necessary for positive well-being (Noddings, 2005). Care, or nurturing, has been identified as a required element in effective mentoring, and by enacting it, participants were supporting graduate students’ academic achievement and well-being (Selke and Wong, 1993; Yob and Crawford, 2012).

**Academic accommodations and on-campus resources.** The participants expressed a willingness to provide students with mental health concerns with academic accommodations. All participants discussed the use of extensions and flexible timelines to reduce students’ stress and anxiety related to the completion of research and programme-related tasks and assignments. Jennifer shared, “I have tried to accommodate by [meeting] my students on a regular one-to-one basis; I have all these writing supports in place, I provide them with extra handouts. I have simplified the number of readings and the kind of readings”. Participants also discussed their willingness to coach students and provide scaffolded instruction for task completion. For instance, they discussed their willingness to discuss academic readings, shape literature reviews, edit written materials and assist in task- and time-management activities. Participants were also willing to alter instructional activities to avoid “calling out” individual students without advance warning. Furthermore, participants indicated a willingness to provide such accommodations in the absence of official requests to do so. The willingness to accommodate students independent of direction from the university appears consistent with participants’ perspectives that graduate students are self-directed and self-aware learners. These practices demonstrate an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005) on the parts of the participants which had the potential to facilitate rapport and trusting relationships with students.

While participants acknowledged that their roles extended beyond promoting students’ academic success, they recognized their mentoring limitations regarding mental health support. Participants indicated willingness to direct students to on-campus resources and support services when they deemed that the pressing issues and concerns were beyond their levels of expertise or role parameters. BC stated she informed her students of various services they can access, including “health Services that they can go to […] I talk to them about writing support […] if they’re an international student I talk [how] we have international services and then we have Indigenous services”. For the most part, participants appeared aware of mainstream resources such as writing and learning centres, international services and accessibility and wellness centres.

In this way, participants viewed themselves as akin to “front line workers” or “triage workers” whose primary responsibility was to be alert to potential challenges and assist students to access appropriate on-campus services. At the same time, participants expressed concern about the capacity of these services to support the unique learning and emotional needs of graduate students, noting that undergraduate students were primary service users.

**Challenges/tensions**
Participants’ awareness of the professional and institutional limitations highlighted several challenges to their mentoring practices. Moreover, their personal experiences with well-being, their perceptions of institutional culture and their awareness of changing student demographics appeared to impact their perceived ability to support graduate students’ well-being.

**Work–life (im)balance.** When reflecting on their individual self-care practices, participants acknowledged tension between popular well-being rhetoric and institutional practices. They observed that engagement in self-care practices were often neither encouraged nor supported within their institutions or by colleagues. Instead, participants spoke about general institutional tendencies to advance a “more is better” approach to work
and promote the “martyr syndrome”. In this way, participants acknowledged a sense of tension associated with engagement in wellness activities and perceptions of being a deserving and valued employee.

One way this tension manifested itself was through participants’ attitudes toward work–life balance. Four participants appeared to reject promoting the concept of work–life balance within graduate studies either when reflecting on their expectations for their students or when reflecting on their previous experiences as graduate students. Ariana and Kevin spoke about having students prepare themselves and their families for their extended absence from the home while completing graduate studies. Bill described his own experiences as a working graduate student and his intentional strategy of scheduling intermittent, extended leaves to support and nurture his interpersonal relationships. Diane spoke about the importance of self-awareness and purposeful decision making when discussing opportunities for engagement in scholarly activities with students. She emphasized that decisions to engage in one activity, by default, limited opportunities for engagement in other activities and encouraged students to consider whether they would experience well-being in the moment. For Diane, informed reflection and deliberate decision making for engagement in any scholarly activity were critical for promoting graduate student wellness.

Kevin and BC extended their experiences related to work–life imbalances while completing graduate studies to their current academic roles, noting that the structure and culture of the work environment does not readily promote balance (largely undefined work hours, publication demands). Ariana and Jennifer spoke about how flexibility with respect to research interests and activities, service and teaching assignments worked against an established work day or task completion. BC stated, “The academic world isn’t thinking about the well-being of students [and faculty members] […] they are thinking about productivity and outcomes”. Participants viewed the profession as one that did not readily encourage work–life balance or wellness but instead required individuals to assume personal responsibility for time and task management. As such, participants appeared to hold a belief that over time, focused attention and positive change in any specific work role or personal life experience may have ripple effects for holistic well-being (Moe et al., 2012).

Higher education institutions have been critiqued for supporting a culture where work needs and the needs of others are prioritized over the needs of individual educators (Aguilar, 2018; Gorski, 2015). Within this culture, educators come to believe that self-care practices are indulgent, selfish and a marker of privilege and are therefore discouraged from engaging in wellness activities (Gorski, 2015). Such sentiments contradict the sentiments of a caring mentoring relationship, one that is “mutually rewarding and developmentally sound” (Selke and Wong, 1993, p. 25).

Changes in student demographics. Participants identified shifts in student demographics as another factor that challenged their ability to support and mentor graduate students. They noted that more students were being admitted to graduate programs and that these students had different characteristics than their predecessors. There were more international students, mature students with families, students holding full- and part-time employment and students lacking traditional “academic” skills. Bill explained:

We have to be a lot more open to the notion that education has moved away from being something that was limited to the very privileged […] to now being virtually universal. Master’s programs are an example. They used to be only research-based programs. Now we have course-based programs. There is discussion about graduate diplomas now […] And those students vastly differ than the student who […] have] nearly perfect GPAs […] They look very different.

Participants’ observations are consistent with programme enrolment data suggesting that graduate programming and student demographics patterns have changed dramatically
over the past years, challenging the traditional structure of programs that consist of the completion of sequenced courses and research thesis/dissertation. Today, many graduate programs offer course-based, cohort-based, part-time, flex-time, distance and blended programs that are closely aligned with the workforce (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010, 2018). With the explosion of graduate programming options, and with the movement away from research-based pathways, increasing numbers of female, working and mature students (often navigating professional and familial responsibilities) as well as indigenous, minority and international students are becoming engaged in graduate studies (Council of Ontario Universities, 2012; Shen, 2017).

Universities, however, have been slow to adapt to this new reality in graduate programs. Universities still expect, and tie funding to, graduate students performing academic tasks such as research and teaching assistantships, roles that require traditional academic writing and research skills – skills that these new graduate students are seemingly not as versed or interested in as previous students. Such misalignments between institutional expectations and student interests and skill sets may result in tensions, stress and decreased wellness for both graduate students and professors (de Kleijn et al., 2012, 2016). Bill argued:

The tendency [in universities] is to focus on the research-oriented student [...] and I think we need to increasingly prepare our faculty to work with the broader cross-section of students [...] [Faculty members] need to be willing to do differential instruction and mentorship.

Concluding comments
In providing an overview of professors’ perspectives, this paper endeavours to highlight the ways in which they understand well-being and their role in mentoring and supporting graduate students academically, psychologically and socioemotionally. In doing so, the study’s limitations must also be acknowledged. The sample size is small, with participants restricted to one educational jurisdiction (i.e. Ontario, Canada). The research questions and interview prompts referred to graduate students in an open-ended manner, allowing participants to refer to their lived experiences. Therefore, participants’ responses referred to many different graduate students (e.g. full-time, part-time, international, master’s and doctoral), reflecting the diversity among graduate students and their mentoring relationships. Acknowledging these students’ unique contexts, it would be prudent for future research to explore professors’ experiences mentoring and supporting the well-being of specific groups of graduate students, such as international students or part-time students. Additionally, all participants were volunteers who were familiar with the research topic prior to being interviewed. It is possible that these participants possess unique characteristics and beliefs about mental health, well-being and mentorship relative to their colleagues, contextualizing why they teach and supervise graduate students in the ways that they do. For these reasons, caution should be taken when generalizing these participants’ experiences. Nevertheless, the degree to which the findings are supported by existing literature helps to tell a compelling story. Moreover, the issues related to student mental health and professors’ preparedness to promote well-being highlighted in this study may serve to encourage further crucial investigation into the factors that influence professors’ mentoring practices as well as how faculty from a variety of different educational jurisdictions promote graduate student well-being.

The landscape of higher education has changed substantially over the past few decades, with increasing demands being placed on professors with respect to academic performance and research productivity (Sabagh et al., 2018). There is an increasing focus on mental health and well-being in higher education, with institutional policies and rhetoric highlighting its importance. At the same time, faculty engagement in research and scholarship is prioritized. Providing graduate students with socioemotional support and mentorship are still not
recognized or rewarded in terms of tenure, promotion and merit processes. Internationally, professors report that increased workload and the conflicting demands placed on them by teaching, research and service obligations have substantially contributed to stress, distress and burnout (Sabagh et al., 2018). Especially relevant here, role ambiguity predicts symptoms of faculty burnout, including disengagement, emotional and physical fatigue and depersonalization, which ultimately negatively impacts graduate student learning and mentorship experiences.

The findings of this study provide several suggestions for supporting graduate student mental health and well-being. Graduate student mentorship could be included in faculty reward systems, thus encouraging engagement in sustaining and promoting graduate student academic achievement and well-being. Participants in this research touched on the diversity of graduate students and their varied needs. Private and separate space should be allocated for graduate student mental health services, with flexible hours and specialized service providers who have comprehensive training in graduate-specific issues (CFS-O, 2017). Graduate students would benefit from access to campus-wide mental health initiatives including e-health technology (CFS-O, 2017). Professors should be informed about these services so they are aware of available on-campus supports to assist them in supporting graduate student mental health and wellness. Lastly, models incorporating specific mental health and well-being components, thus extending the existing models’ focus on relationships, would be beneficial for bridging the current gaps between well-being and education literatures as well as mentoring and well-being models in higher education.

By providing a snapshot of professors’ mentoring experiences, this research highlights the promising practices and pitfalls potentially encountered when mentoring graduate students. While it can be argued that faculty and institutions of learning are primarily responsible for students’ intellectual development, academic well-being is impacted by psychological well-being and, as such, a challenge to tease apart. Given the increasing prevalence of mental health issues, it is more important than ever that institutions of higher education take an active role in supporting students’ well-being. Education extends beyond an intellectual pursuit. As Noddings (2013, p. 155) argued, “We should want more from our efforts at schooling than achievement”. Ultimately, we need to value not only intellectual contributions, but also social contributions from “competent, caring, thoughtful [...] well-balanced adults” (p. 155). Professors’ teaching and mentoring practices are a fundamental strategy for achieving these goals.

References


Further reading

Corresponding author
Michael J. Savage can be contacted at: msavage@brocku.ca

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Backfiles Collections

Preserving over 100 years of management research online

A lifetime investment for your institution, Emerald Backfiles will significantly enhance your library’s offering by providing access to over 125,000 articles from more than 260 journals dating back to 1898.

Visit emeraldinsight.com

Get Backfiles Collections for your library

Recommend Backfiles to your librarian today.
Find out more: emeraldpublishing.com/backfilescollections
The role of mentorship and coaching in supporting the holistic well-being and ongoing development of educators

Guest Editors: Benjamin Kutsyuruba and Lorraine Godden

229 Guest editorial
235 Virtual mentor partnerships between practising and preservice teachers: helping to enhance professional growth and well-being
Patricia Briscoe
255 The well-being of the early career teacher: a review of the literature on the pivotal role of mentoring
Vicki Squires
268 The benefits of mentoring newly qualified teachers in Malta
Michelle Attard Tonra
285 The impact of mentoring on the Canadian early career teachers’ well-being
Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Lorraine Godden and John Bosica
305 Educators’ perceptions of the value of coach mindset development for their well-being
Kendra Lowery
325 “I love this stuff!”: a Canadian case study of mentor–coach well-being
Trista Hollweck
345 Mentorship for flourishing in schools: an explicit shift toward appreciative action
Sabre Cherkowski and Keith Walker
361 Not a solo ride: co-constructed peer mentoring for early-career educational leadership faculty
Benterah C. Morton and Elizabeth Gil
378 Thriving vs surviving: benefits of formal mentoring program on faculty well-being
Shanna Marie Stuckey, Brian Todd Collins, Shawn Patrick, Kathleen S. Grove and Etta Ward
397 Exploring professors’ experiences supporting graduate student well-being in Ontario faculties of education
Vera Woloshyn, Michael J. Savage, Snezana Ratkovic, Catherine Hands and Dragana Martinovic