

## **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 (Ramawami *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 regrettably, 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,

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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.

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### **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*

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