

# When Educators Come Together to Speak About Well-Being: An Invitation to Talk

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## Abstract

Contingent on multiple variants, educators' well-being is becoming a concern regarding quality of life in and out of schools. Our qualitative case study aimed to understand how educators negotiate well-being through ever-increasing complexities in schooling environments and incommensurable lifeworld realities. Findings include material

relevant to (1) the cultural politics of well-being; (2) relationality of/with well-being; (3) the need for self-care; and (4) ways of being and doing well-being in context. Conclusions discuss how to support educators in creating and fostering well-being for themselves individually, and within collective and institutional levels.

*Keywords:* educator well-being, school environment, community engagement and leadership, well-being resources, educator support

## **Résumé**

Dépendamment de plusieurs facteurs, le bien-être des éducateurs devient une préoccupation à l'école et à l'extérieur de celle-ci. Notre étude de cas examine comment ils négocient leur bien-être à l'intérieur d'espaces scolaires complexes des réalités du monde d'aujourd'hui. Les résultats incluent (1) politique culturelle du bien-être; (2) rapport du / avec le bien-être; (3) besoin de prendre soin de soi; et (4) manières d'être et de savoir-faire dans un contexte spécifique. Les conclusions présentent comment aider les éducateurs à créer et à favoriser leur propre bien-être, ainsi qu'au niveau collectif et institutionnel.

*Mots-clés :* bien-être des éducateurs, environnement scolaire, engagement communautaire et leadership, ressources de bien-être, soutien de l'éducateur

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## Introduction

In the complexities of contemporary education, educators—along with school counsellors and social workers—grapple with issues of trauma, grief, loss, and, in turn, well-being, in both their professional and personal lives. Wasserman (2015) calls teaching “multi-layered, multi-dimensional, multi-faceted,” a perspective she calls “kaleidoscopic” (p. 87). In the contemporary landscape, educators may have to design learning to meet the needs of refugee students and the inherent complexities that emerge from experiences of displacement (Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016; Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017; Weeks, Sullivan, & Simonson, 2017), or students who may come from myriad traumatic backgrounds, requiring specific knowledge and strategies to have a positive influence (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2018). Necessarily, under these local and global conditions, much recent attention has focused on the importance of cultivating the well-being of students. However, as Briner and Dewberry (2007) concluded, educator well-being also needs attention, to improve school performance among other reasons. Konu, Viitanen, and Lintonen (2010) propose that “without teachers’ wellbeing it is hard to build up students’ wellbeing” (p. 44). Research supports the conclusion that student well-being is necessary for students to reach their potential (Oberle, 2018), making educator well-being significant not just for educators but, importantly, for their students, and thus for society at large. Within educators’ professional practice, then, we are interested in what role schools play concerning their well-being. The goal of this funded project was twofold: first, to conduct a systematic literature review that established the conceptual foundation of well-being and the role schools play concerning the well-being of educators; and second, to determine what the implications are for implementing training programs about well-being in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

The research team designed a one-day symposium to create a space and place for educators to integrate current approaches and practices that promote well-being. We invited educators, administrators, and student service leaders for the following purposes: (1) to get a sense of contemporary issues concerning the well-being of educators; (2) to tease out the gaps in how educators understand well-being; (3) to compare what the literature states about well-being in relation to how educators experience well-being; and (4) to explore what support systems are located in schools and how educators are responding to them. Throughout the symposium, our aim as facilitators and researchers was to

contribute to the increased well-being of educators through engaged scholarship that was mindful of personal wellness, social justice, and material-ecological relations. The guiding question for our one-day symposium was, *How do educators understand well-being?*

Our purpose in writing this article, based on the one-day symposium, was three-fold. First, we aimed to provide an overview of the literature that conceptualizes well-being, to explore the importance of well-being in educators, to describe what happens when well-being is not addressed, and to examine how to foster well-being in terms of the individual and the collective. Second, we wanted to share the findings from various data collected prior to, during, and just after the one-day symposium. Third, we discussed a number of implications for educators' well-being in terms of how to shift the narrative and support educators in creating and fostering well-being for themselves as individuals, as well as at the collective and institutional levels. Our study of educator well-being contributes to the literature in ways that allow us to understand how well-being, teaching, and learning are interwoven, constitutive, and enacted in the context of education—that everyday moments of well-being, teaching, and learning are neither disjointed nor compartmentalized but rather are enmeshed in a series of thoughts and actions that interact in intricate ways to provide meaning embedded in education. Extricating and discussing these embedded meanings can lead to transformative prompts for change that make well-being intelligible as significant to the good of education broadly, as well as to the holism of teachers and learners.

Discussing well-being through a language of possibility is important. Given the incommensurability of well-being, in-depth comprehension necessitates a conceptual framework that reflects the relational experiences of the teacher and learner as governed within educational settings. Well-being and learning are in a sense a dialectic, an embodied relationship entangled within the fabric of education through pedagogy, curricula, leadership approaches, and different philosophical practices. Learning and the well-being of educators are contingent on praxis that involves how we come to know, and they are incumbent on education systems to attend to that purpose. We begin with an overview of the one-day symposium in the next section.

## **Context: One-Day Educator Well-Being Symposium**

In Alberta, and in North America generally, there are a number of major incidents that impact the lives of students and educators. These incidents may be death in families, violence, or fires and floods that devastate communities. Alberta recently experienced a “once-in-100-year flood” that communities are still recovering from five years later. Various types of trauma impact educators, as well as the learners who educators are asked to support. Within this context, we again ask, How, in our schools and school jurisdictions, is educator well-being being addressed? The focus of our one-day symposium on a snowy Alberta day was to bring over 30 teachers, school counsellors, school social workers, and principals together to explore how educators negotiate intersectional spaces that require attending to the well-being of self and others, and what supports are in place to help them live well. Symposium participants used this opportunity to uncover current approaches and practices and identify elements of influence in terms of how they as educators broadly conceptualize and facilitate these moments and are able to meet the continuing needs and concerns of diverse student life.

The day was divided into four parts. The morning began with sharing information from the literature, followed by small and large group discussions on well-being in the participants’ contemporary educational contexts. Notions of well-being and how it is defined were explored, as well as why it is emerging now as a critical topic of discussion. In the second part of the day, participants learned of various models of well-being that included the individual and the collective, and an important discussion question arose, *How do educators perceive well-being for themselves, personally as well as in the workplace?* As part of this portion of the day, participants responded in groups to a quote on a large sheet of paper. Each group had the same quote (see Responding to the Quote [RQ] in Table 1), thus allowing time to dwell and play with the ideas. After adding and editing, they moved to another table to view and add to work what another group had done with their quote. This activity was repeated, so all groups had an opportunity to respond to all the groups’ work, eventually rewriting the quote based on the various edits and additions on their original paper. In the third part, our librarian shared an online resource he created on well-being. This online resource, titled “Well-Being LibGuide,” provides a wealth of curated resources for educators, counsellors, and social workers to use in their daily practice. In the final component of the day, participants experienced an activity for

maintaining well-being that involved mindfulness meditation, visual creation, and reflection. Through the debrief discussion, participants talked about what works to maintain well-being, as well as supports and resources that need to be in place to foster it. The day concluded with a discussion of next steps to move this emergent community of practice forward.

## **Well-Being in the Literature**

### **Conceptualizing Well-Being**

The mental health of students in K–12 schools has been the subject of many studies, helping shape complex understandings of factors that influence student well-being (Danby & Hamilton, 2016; Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2011; Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Oberle, 2018; Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017; St. Leger, 2004). Similarly, exploring the multiple lived realities of what is meant by educator well-being fuels questions specific to that population, Why is it important? What is known about educator well-being, and how can it be sustained to positively impact the lives of educators and, by extension, their students? Research into educator well-being offers a lens to explore how educators negotiate the complexities of their experiences and factors that create and sustain opportunities to flourish (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Konu et al., 2010; Margolis, Hodge, & Alexandrou, 2014; Rogach, Ryabova, & Frolova, 2017; Spilt, Kommen, & Thijs, 2011).

Researchers often provide descriptions of well-being that are highly situated, influenced by the scope of their study and whether it is considering mental health alone or if these descriptions envelop physical health, the environment, social factors, cultural factors, and the geopolitical landscape (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Liu, Song, & Miao, 2018). Rogach, Ryabova, and Frolova (2017), for example, suggest that well-being encompasses an “intrapyschic phenomenon” with an examination of attitude toward self and toward others and the particular conditions within educational settings. Liu, Song, and Miao (2018) call it a “complex phenomenon that involves myriad contextualized contributing factors” (p. 129). According to Parker and Martin (2009), the traditional understanding of well-being at school would be viewed as satisfying experiences within

the educational environment and enjoyment in work with students and colleagues, yet they propose a more comprehensive view that includes additional factors that influence well-being. Shah and Marks (2004) posit that well-being is broader than a level of happiness and satisfaction and also means “developing as a person, being fulfilled and making a contribution to the community” (p. 2). Ryff and Singer (2008) state that well-being can be “construed as growth and human fulfillment” (p. 14) and contextualized to other factors in people’s lives. The general definition of wellness does not do justice to the complexity of well-being, with overall health seen through a medical lens and well-being seen as a psychological domain (La Placa, McNaught, & Knight, 2013).

### **Flourishing and Resilience**

Flourishing and resilience are important to the rich tapestry of well-being. Educator resilience, like well-being, may be imprecisely defined, yet it happens when educators are able to remain effective and positive or to “bounce back” during and after situations of stress, conflict, or adversity (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Clarà, 2017; Gu & Day, 2007). Flourishing contextualizes well-being within positive psychology, where people are able to have optimal functioning when optimism and personal control contribute to being healthy (Gable & Haidt, 2005). There is a reciprocal impact between positive factors, such as efficacy and resilience. Being resilient helps contribute to a sense of efficacy, and efficacy increases resilience (Gu & Day, 2007). To be resilient speaks to the agency that allows us to influence the balance between resources and challenges and affords interactional spaces for effective teaching, which positively impacts well-being.

Educators are often in elevated stress environments with high accountability (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012), stemming not only from the institution but also from belief in the critical importance of their social roles. Being accountable for planning and creating opportunities to enhance student achievement, often with quite diverse students and limited resources, necessitates a robust sense of self-efficacy (Ross, Romer, & Horn-er, 2012). When educators are repeatedly exposed to stressors at work without effective ways to self-regulate, burnout can occur (Ross et al., 2012). Fostering resilience positively impacts self-efficacy and decreases burnout that can occur from working through myriad responsibilities.

## **Well-Being and Culture**

Research across Western and Chinese cultures that explored individual and collective well-being has suggested that individual and collective perspectives on well-being differ across cultures, with individualized concepts of well-being aligning more with the Western view and collective well-being more represented within Chinese epistemologies. Nevertheless, the researchers also acknowledged that both individual and collective well-being are important across nations. Individual well-being has more to do with educator autonomy and self-motivation, whereas collective well-being is about collaborative professional relationships within schools (Liu et al., 2018). Both perspectives are important to how we assemble knowledge about well-being. Educator well-being is influenced by a number of factors at school, including working conditions, relationships at school, resources, the physical condition of the school, individual health, professional competence, and opportunities for further professional development (Saaranen, Tossavainen, Turunen, Kiviniemi, & Vertio, 2007).

While it is generally accepted that well-being is an important concept, its definition is contested in the literature (and, as we will see later, the research participants also found it difficult to pin down). It has a multifaceted interpretation influenced by various factors including culture, perception, experience, motivation, efficacy, realization of potential, purpose in life, and autonomy (Konu et al., 2010; La Placa et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2018; Parker & Martin, 2009; Rogach et al., 2017; Royer & Moreau, 2016; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Shah & Marks, 2004). Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) offer a definition of well-being “as the balance point between an individual’s (psychological, social, and physical) resource pool and the challenges faced” (p. 229). They add that well-being may become compromised when there is an imbalance, when there are more challenges than resources. We believe this framework is broad enough to include the varying complexities and positionalities in the discussions on and experiences of well-being at the symposium.

## **Why Is It Important to Have Educator Well-Being Flourish?**

“Teacher efficacy and professional passion to support student learning is at the heart of teaching practices” (Liu et al., 2018, p. 135). Educators have an impact on students, the nature of which is influenced by how they safeguard their own well-being; they are role

models and, as such, they have the important job of informing students about positive relationships. Ultimately, there is an entanglement between educator well-being and student success (Arens & Morin, 2016; Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Kidger et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2018; Oberle, 2018; Spilt et al., 2011), although more research is needed to determine how educator well-being is consequential to individual, educational, and social outcomes (Bajorek, Gulliford, & Taskila, 2014). Well-being is linked to educators' perception of efficacy (Graham et al., 2011) and can empower them to be prepared for the multitude of stressors inherent in a school day, such as meeting curriculum timelines for student learning, situational crises, anecdotal recording and evaluations, working with limited resources, responding to emergent student behavioural and emotional needs, referrals, planning and carrying out extra-curricular activities, and replying to parent concerns and queries.

In contrast, when educator well-being has lower priority, an array of unfavourable conditions can be present. Diminished well-being in educators has an impact on several areas of life (Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013), including what they can give in a learning environment. Burnout, which can be defined as exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lowered sense of accomplishment, occurs in educators when well-being is severely neglected (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). Burnout is associated with a lack of resources, such as feeling unable to talk to a colleague when feeling stressed or down (Kidger et al., 2016). Likewise, overall stress in the workplace, as well as dissatisfaction with work, impacts burnout in educators (Jackson, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2006; Kidger et al., 2016). Specifically, the belief that effort outweighs rewards in teaching is related to this construct (Konu et al., 2010). Arens and Morin (2016) conducted a study that illustrated that when educators report being emotionally exhausted and therefore having compromised well-being there is a negative effect on achievement levels in classes (p. 807). One of the reasons they suggest is that when educators are emotionally exhausted, they are ill-prepared to create high quality teaching and may be "more careless and arbitrary in their evaluations" (p. 808).

A concern is that poor well-being can impact educator engagement and beliefs about competence in the classroom (Parker & Martin, 2009; Pillay, Godard, & Wilss, 2005). In one study, reduced levels of well-being influenced an individual's perception of effectiveness with students experiencing emotional or behavioural problems (Kidger et al., 2016, p. 77). This is noteworthy because every classroom has a diversity of learners,

some of whom will have complex learning needs, including those with emotional or behavioural problems (Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Recognition of the diversity of students, and the goal of meeting individual potential, means that caring for educator well-being is important not just for individual educators but for the profession (Rogach et al., 2017; Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Im, Beher, & Crook-Lyon, 2014). Well-being, whether strong or weak, provides the platform for and contributes to the dynamics of daily interactions at school.

In the professional lives of educators, well-being can influence social interactions with benefits to the educator, their colleagues, and their students (Beltman et al., 2011; Kidger et al., 2016; Parker & Martin, 2009). What works to maintain well-being? Perhaps one of the most important factors is when educators enjoy the positive relationships they have with their students (Ross et al., 2012; Spilt et al., 2011). Having an effective relationship with their supervisors and finding their work interesting helps maintain well-being as well (Konu et al., 2010). When educators approach their work with a sense of humour, and when they feel effective and competent, they are more resilient, which helps their well-being to flourish (Bobek, 2002). The connections educators make with their students create moments that are uplifting, humorous, and joyful, all of which helps to sustain well-being.

## **Research Design**

The study utilized qualitative approaches. The bounding of the study was consistent with an intrinsic qualitative case study design (Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case study design was chosen because it allowed us to learn about a particular case or phenomenon of educator well-being. Governed by a socio-constructivist tradition (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2017), the study integrated the theoretical assumption that multiple realities are constructed through our relational experiences and interactions with others. The study was bounded by time—12 months from September 2017 to August 2018—and by a single case—the one-day research symposium involving 33 participants, representing a mixed group of educators: professors, university instructors, administrators, guidance counsellors, principals, regional directors, professional development providers, and K–12 teachers. Participants took part in a one-day symposium for which the research team had

pre-designed an initial literature review on well-being and gave small presentations on key concepts in the field. The day was designed to have presentations followed by large and small group breakout sessions for discussion and the creation of material artifacts by participants. The participants were asked to contribute to both large and small group discussions around questions the research team posed, as well as emerging themes they believed were necessary to discuss. Participants were encouraged to be reflexive and be immersed within a pedagogy of listening, given the possible vulnerability people experience when sharing private and confidential stories. We shared early in the symposium the importance of respecting different cultures and ways of knowing. Quotes from the literature were shared as provocations on large paper posters to invite dialogue about the ways in which well-being comes to be experienced and understood within educational settings.

### **Data Collection**

During the symposium's discussions, members of the research team took detailed, anonymous, and aggregate notes of what was brought up. As a way to facilitate the discussions, participants were invited to create concept maps or summaries of their small-group discussions to present to the larger group. These materials were also collected and analyzed as data by the research team. We chose not to do audio or video recording of the day in order to capture the narratives in a less distracting everyday setting. Instead, we took notes and collected pages (e.g., chart paper and sticky notes) and presentation materials as the data. The question that guided the study was, *How do schools contribute to the well-being of educators?* To engage with this question, multiple data sets were collected, including (1) pre- and post-symposium questionnaires responded to individually by participants (pre-seminar questionnaire and exit slips); (2) notes from the symposium captured from small and large discussion groups and the various activities throughout the day; and (3) artifacts created by participants during the symposium, using a variety of question prompts (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Description of prompts in different data sources

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Discussion Prompt(s)</b>
Pre-Seminar Questionnaire (PSQ)	How do you engage with issues of resilience and well-being in your day-to-day work? What are three things you are hoping to gain from the symposium?
Small Group Table Discussions I (TD-I)	What is well-being? How do we make sense of well-being? What does well-being mean to me? Why does well-being matter?
Large Group Table Discussions—Responding to the Quote (RQ)	Original Quote: “More attention needs to be paid to teachers with regards to enhancing their wellbeing. In the unifying process of schools, equal treatment, obtaining support for the teachers and the likelihood of updating education are especially important aspects.” (Konu, Viitanen, & Lintonen, 2010, p. 44)
Small Group Table Discussions II (TD-II)	How do we, as educators, perceive well-being in the workplace? (Consider the individual and collective)
Post-Symposium Questionnaires—Exit Slips (ES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 things you are taking away from the day</li> <li>• 2 things you wish we had done more of</li> <li>• 1 burning question you are leaving with</li> </ul>

## Data Analysis

Data analysis included select members of the research team conducting thematic analysis individually, enacting inter-rater reliability, and specifically considering crystallization across the data sets. Three approaches to coding were used during the analysis: descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and process coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Descriptive codes were used to summarize initial overarching themes from each data source. In vivo coding allowed us to draw from the participants’ artifacts, drawings, and specific words or language to frame their narratives and distinct voices. Process coding approaches enabled interconnectedness and crystallization with the data sources as well as accounting for inter-rater reliability among the research team. The study received ethical approval from the university’s Conjoint Faculty Research Ethics Board to take notes, capture the ideas shared through large and small group sessions, and gather artifacts created as part of the day.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

From the analysis of the data, four major themes emerged: (1) the cultural politics of well-being; (2) relationality of/with well-being; (3) the need for self-care; and (4) ways of being and doing well-being in context. Each theme is discussed below.

### **The Cultural Politics of Well-Being**

Much like the literature, the consensus around well-being in the symposium was that it was difficult to define once and for all (e.g., it's easier to note when you're *not* well—from table discussions in part 1 [TD-I] of the day). Yet, as was commented on through informal conversations before the day officially began, it was of the utmost importance for us to turn our attention to the well-being of educators; as many indicated, this is why they chose to join us for the symposium. One participant specifically noted, “There are a lot more challenges that teachers face in schools than the general population knows about” (TD-I).

Teachers were asked to recognize themselves and their students simultaneously as individuals and as members of broader cultures or communities; this required them to know the different ways in which to read and interpret well-being amongst their students and for themselves. One participant who was an international student noted, for example, that in their home country well-being was not something that one speaks of (TD-I). How do we tend to this obfuscating concept that refuses definition and, in some cultures, communities, and social groups, is located in the realm of the unspeakable and imposed disrecognition? Furthermore, as another participant noted, “What’s important to you in a particular context may not relate to another person” (TD-I); that is, we must keep well-being in a fluid state rather than try to pin it down into some universal understanding that gets imposed on all, thus contributing to the pressures placed on educators to take individual responsibility for their well-being and ensure it manifests as recognizably “well” within that schema. Another participant shared, “Well-being is not a fixed stable box that we ought to attribute to everyone; it involves different cultures, languages, etc.” (TD-I). Interestingly, this articulation emerged from dialoguing with and deep listening to the others in the small group discussion, and spoke to the importance of relationality

and creating a shared space to come together around sensibilities inherent to one's understanding of well-being.

### **Relationality of/with Well-Being**

The relationality of well-being, then, was not only animated through the trajectory of thought in the conversations, but was also indicated in particular sentiments the participants shared throughout the day. One strand of thought around the relationality of well-being was centred on direct (albeit dynamic) relations within the classroom: "If the teachers are not happy, the kids are not happy" (pre-seminar questionnaire [PSQ]). Past researchers have also suggested that personal well-being is closely linked to that of others (O'Brien, 2013). Furthermore, participants amplified the need for community and support (exit slips [ES]); crucially, this community and support must be found in the physical space of the school, but participants also sought spaces for community outside of their schools and classrooms. Indeed, several participants noted in their exit slips that having the space at the symposium to come together created a sense of validation and community. Importantly, many indicated that school leaders have a key role to play, a finding consistent with another study that explored stressful situations that educators deal with in the classroom, which found that educators often feel as though they must take on multiple roles and require more support from the school (Buchanan & Harris, 2014). Several participants shared that "workplace wellness is a shared responsibility" (ES), that "school leadership is critical (support, participation, and commitment)" (ES), and that there is a need for "creating spaces for well-being" (ES). They also discussed how well-being is understood differently. Rather than an absolute narrative, well-being is grounded within their experiences, in particular, relationships of teaching and learning with their students. In pointing in these directions, it was also noted that one important consideration for leaders in particular, and for all community members, is to shift perceptions of well-being by coming into a shared language (and safe space) to discuss issues around well-being. One participant asked, "How do we build common foundational understanding amongst all people in schools?" (ES). This finding is consistent with the observations of other Canadian educators who have also expressed a desire for a "safe space" to discuss the mental health of educators (Ott, Hibbert, Rodger, & Leschied, 2017, p. 12).

## The Need for Self-Care

While many participants indicated the importance of the relationality of well-being—the ways in which our well-being is entwined with the cultures and relations in our workplaces—another emerging theme centred on the need to care for the self. It is important to note that this self-care is in relation to conditions of possibility within the complex relations in our professional and personal lives, and we are cautious in noting the importance of self-care, as it can tend toward a possible neoliberal co-optation that individualizes well-being. Thus, we choose to position our discussion around self-care *after* animating the importance of culture, complexity, and the relationality of well-being. In one of the table discussions, a participant noted: “We must challenge our own current mentalities, and find our own truth if we are seeking others to do the same,” which speaks to the simultaneity of self-care and relational care for well-being. That said, when considering the role of schools in shaping well-being, another participant opined, “Schools are not built for a collective well-being” (table discussions in part two of the day [TD-II]), so what are we to do when *we*, as individuals, recognize the importance of well-being? One possibility is to allow ourselves time and space for self-care, because as the following participant articulated (in the large group discussion), a sense of agency is crucial in well-being and, as such, if the school is not built for and is not explicitly offering space for well-being, we must take it upon ourselves: “Agency and the culture of administration...it can have a negative impact if I feel like I can’t change something—if it’s not within my control. Why can’t you see things like we do? It has an important impact on stress. The structure of the school can create feelings of hopelessness.” Furthermore, well-being “only means something if they find value in the information and in themselves as deserving to be a part of it” (large group discussions—responding to the quote [RQ]).

## Ways of Being and Doing Well-Being in Context

By the end of the day, participants expressed a sense of being seen, heard, and validated in their need for pursuing well-being. Participants noted that “just hearing others [and] other stories” and hearing “the conversations [helped to] clarify and validate” their experiences. The space that the symposium created resonated with the participants, and it ought to be noted that the space became what it was *because* of their participation. Throughout the different parts of the day, participants reflected on and shared different

approaches they take in situations where they are feeling unwell or less well. The sharing of these stories became a critical method for supporting their own and others' well-being. It opened a space for others to validate one another as well as offer ideas of things to do when we're not feeling well. Some participants choose to check out and do something for themselves unrelated to whatever space was making them feel unwell—for example, “switching gears, exercise, family, networking” (PSQ)—while others choose to commit to something “meaningful,” to dive into that which is adding stress and thus making it a learning moment. Responses included desiring what is meaningful and how to go about living a meaningful life; the necessity of communicating with a critical friend, family, and support groups who can confidently provide advice; the importance of having dialogue; and the essentials of having resources, networking, and strategies for supporting well-being with future educators.

### **Implications for Practice in Support of Educator Well-Being: Continuing the Conversation**

As the literature reviewed indicates—and this is what drew us to this research to begin with—there is a need to address the well-being of educators in schools. This need is multi-layered, and situated within the constant intensification of teachers' work, with the increasing demands of the knowledge economy and competitive pressures on students to excel (and for teachers and pre-service teachers to ensure the conditions for excelling as though isolated from complex lifeworld vagaries). One surprising implication for the study was the way in which the participants articulated how important the symposium was for their own well-being. Overall, the informally expressed sentiment was that the day provided space and critical moments for educators to share and reflect on their experiences and needs for well-being.

It ought to be noted that the participants chose to spend a day, even a snowy Alberta day, engaged in conversations and learnings around well-being. These are educators who were already noticing the need and desire for well-being in their personal and professional lives. Toward the end of the day, several participants asked critical questions about the importance of getting those who are not necessarily actively considering well-being as a crucial aspect of their personal and professional lives as educators

involved in the conversation. As in the literature, the important role of leadership in initiating and cultivating conversations around well-being was presented; however, there is an inherent irony to imposing professional learning opportunities that focus on well-being on staff. Might a school principal requiring staff to take a well-being day come across as adding yet another “thing” to do, another check-box, another space to check out instead of in?

Participants reflected on experiences they have had with professional learning that involves being spoken to by some external authority. The importance of the voices and experiences of the participants grounded the day, and we would suggest that they are crucial to the success of opening spaces for schools, such as pre-service teacher training and professional development days for teachers to support educator well-being. Those who attended the symposium were valued as contributors to the collective learnings emerging from the day. Having a semi-structured space, with a variety of activities that invited vulnerability and dialogue, created the experience of well-being and highlighted the need to come together and share stories of and for support. The validation and affirmation of experiences, stories, and vulnerabilities through non-judgement proved to enact the conditions of possibility for the well-being of educators.

The theme that emerged around the cultural politics of well-being suggests that schools would do well to cultivate a safer culture where ideas and practices about educator well-being can be created. Talking about well-being can actually enhance a feeling of well-being, and so discussion and sharing individual experiences is a good place to start the process of change. As individuals in discussion begin to build common understanding and common ground, changes in work culture, policy, and practice at the institutional level are more likely to be effectively addressed. As Gu and Day (2007) suggested, efficacy also enhances a sense of resilience in educators, and resilience is closely tied to the construct of well-being.

Participants talked about the link between educator and student well-being, a theme that we named the *relationality of well-being*, or how our well-being is linked to others (O’Brien, 2013), and how crucially important community support was as well. The participants noted that leadership was particularly key. To shift the responsibility for well-being from individual educators to the broader community, leaders need to focus on the inside *and* outside of classrooms and schools. Remembering that caring about educator well-being is as important for the profession as it is for individual educators (Rogach

et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2014), professional associations, unions, and governments should be making this a priority as well. Inextricably linked to this recommendation is the theme of *self-care* identified in the study—not because the onus is on educators for their individual well-being but because in the implementation of strategies for well-being educators often have unique (and contested) understandings, expressions, and needs in cultivating and maintaining well-being. Therefore, leaders should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach in order to include the “varying complexities and situatedness” mentioned earlier in this article.

That being said, the educators spoke passionately about the pedagogical necessity for all parties to be present in a discussion regarding well-being, and that such a presence becomes a constitutive part of well-being. Discussion and reflection with empathic peers and family were identified as critical to the educators’ making meaning about incidents and experiences. These conversations help to normalize educators’ reactions to stressful experiences and create opportunities for supportive dialogue, networking, and sharing resources. This is a key validation of the importance of reducing stigma around help-seeking and the need for educational leadership to make pathways to make formal and informal mental health support of primary importance.

## Conclusions

How might we recreate these sensibilities of well-being in school spaces and pre-service teacher training, spaces that are differently confined by board and provincial-level curricular and professional learning goals, as well as limited budgets and time? This is where we believe more research needs to be done. We are dedicated to finding ways to better support well-being in schools and energized by those who shared the day with us by participating in the symposium, knowing that, as indicated in many of the exit slips, participants returned to their workplaces with a renewed energy and a sense of community that many committed to bringing with them into their schools. They leave us with hope that some ripples might form in their schools and communities with regard to the intentionality of educator well-being, sustaining these educators and allowing them to wave outwards to reach more educators.

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