

Mentoring for Well-being: Flourishing Across Career Stages

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Mentoring for well-being is in its infancy as a research topic, and there is scant literature regarding mentoring aspiring educational leadership faculty toward well-being. This ethnographic case study explored the ways the mentoring relationship between a late-career educational leadership professor and an early-career protégé influenced our well-being and enabled us to flourish personally and professionally. Our study was guided by the following research question: In what ways, if any, does our mentoring relationship influence our well-being? Over a two-year period, we journaled, recorded our interactions, and wrote narratives about our mentoring relationship. Although the data were collected over two years, the mentoring relationship had spanned eight years. In those years, the mentor transitioned from professor to late-career professor, and the protégé transitioned from M.Ed. graduate student to early-career professor. Seligman's PERMA model is often used to measure well-being. In this study, the mentor and protégé analyzed their data through the lens the PERMA model, which consists of the following five domains: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The findings indicated that we, the mentor and protégé, perceived that our well-being had been positively influenced by the mentoring relationship in all five of these domains. We viewed our relationship as a learning partnership and reported that this partnership had increased our confidence, productivity, and innovation and decreased our loneliness, both personally and professionally. This study resulted in the creation of a model for high-quality and sustainable mentoring relationships using the PERMA domains.

Keywords: mentoring, well-being, career stages, educational leadership

Introduction

Mentoring for well-being is a relatively new concept in positive psychology (Lunsford, 2021; Wheeler et al., 2024). Positive psychology aims to study what makes us thrive rather than trying to correct what makes us languish (Seligman, 2011). In general, these concepts (mentoring and well-being) have not been closely connected in the literature for most professions. Regardless of whether a protégé is in graduate school to become an administrator or if they are seeking to transition to higher education, the educational leadership professor must understand how important mentoring and well-being are. In fact, a recent polling of educational leadership faculty across the nation suggested that there is some confusion about the difference between mentoring, coaching, and advising and little awareness of well-being concepts (Adair, 2024). This is an auto-ethnographical study describing a mentoring relationship between a late-career full professor of educational leadership and an early-career protégé (Kram, 1988). Our partnership began in 2022, when we recognized that our mentoring relationship made us more productive and increased our sense of well-being, both personally and professionally. As we continued our research on the art and science of mentoring and well-being, we decided that this

mentoring relationship was worth documenting, so we began collecting data regarding our relationship. The purpose of our study was to explore our own mentoring relationship as part of our continued exploration of educational leadership mentoring, well-being, and important aspects of positive psychology, and we wanted to explore the possibility of creating a model or framework to guide others in creating similar relationships. Our study was guided by the following research question: In what ways, if any, does our mentoring relationship influence our well-being?

The Learning Partners

Angela (Protégé)

I was reared in a small Southern town in Alabama. I was born in 1972 and am categorized as Generation X. Many people in my family, including my grandmother, mother, sister, and several aunts, were educators. My mother was an accomplished teacher and central office administrator. I taught secondary English for thirteen years. It was my mother's dream for me to get my master's degree and seek an administrative role. After my mother passed away in 2016, I honored her memory by applying to graduate school in an SEC/R1 university's educational leadership M.Ed. program.

I met my mentor, Ellen, in Fall 2017 when she was my professor for an action research class. The first day I met her, she asked us to introduce ourselves and tell a little about ourselves. She asked if I would meet with her during a break we would have later in the morning. During the break, she told me that I should pursue my doctoral degree. She said that as a divorced mother of two, it was up to me to take care of myself and that she knew that I could write because of my background in English. Another member of my cohort and I decided to continue with the education specialist program. In November of 2018, I called Ellen to see how she was doing. I told her during that conversation that I thought it impossible to earn a doctorate as I was teaching six different classes (and preps) in a small, rural school, which required me to work seven days per week. I was stressed and had symptoms of burnout. She suggested that I become a graduate assistant for the program. This would be a part-time position that would allow time to take classes, write my dissertation, and graduate with my doctoral degree. I became the educational leadership program coordinator graduate assistant in May 2019. Ellen was the program coordinator, so I spent a great deal of time with her. Shortly after we began working together, COVID began. Our involvement increased as she began to recognize my talents and abilities. By May 2020, we realized that a mentoring relationship had formed. I had never had a mentor, so this was a new experience for me. In 2021, we began researching, writing, and presenting at conferences together. My primary research focus was educator well-being, specifically through the lens of Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. My relationship with Ellen led me to expand my research interest to include mentoring relationships. I graduated with my doctoral degree in May 2024.

Ellen (Mentor)

I was raised in a Southern town in Georgia. Part of the Baby Boomer generation, I born in 1955. My parents always expected me to receive a bachelor's degree, and they encouraged the advanced degrees that I sought. They wholeheartedly supported my educational endeavors. I worked in public education for thirty years as a K-12 teacher and central office administrator and continued a second career in higher education at an SEC/R1 university. I have been at this institution for eighteen years, rising from assistant professor to associate professor to full professor. I had no mentors until late in my K-12 career. As I transitioned to higher education, I was fortunate that having mentors was an expectation and was encouraged. I had wonderful mentors from the very beginning of my university career. Over the first eight to ten years in higher education, I was able to create a strong network. This is often referred to as a mentoring constellation. These

wonderful people included me in their writing projects and introduced me to other scholars in educational leadership. One of the brightest stars in my constellation was Fran Kochan, dean and educational leadership professor. During my time with Fran, I have realized how important mentoring is for faculty and especially for women faculty. I embraced mentoring as both art and science. Mentoring became a passion for me because others had reached out to me and supported me in my personal life and my career.

Literature Review

Mentoring Is Laden with Social Connectedness

Mentoring is a learning partnership that provides opportunities for personal and professional growth (Reames & Paufler, 2025; Saranya et al., 2022), including networking opportunities, reflection, and opportunities for advancement (Kay et al., 2009). This relationship is often mutually beneficial for both the mentor and the protégé (Arguello, 2023).

Mentorship is the need of every teacher as well as students at every level of formal education. Effective mentoring supports students' growth and holistic development. However, students are unaware of the need and importance of mentorship for their personal, academic, and professional development. Therefore, this study has sensitized the students that mentoring is an art which enables the mentees to recognize their self-identity, hidden abilities and talents. In addition, it made them realize that mentorship helps teachers to gain a good experience in relevant fields. It may directly help in their own professional development, students and organizations. (Saranya et al., 2022)

The social connectedness, sometimes referred to as social support, of an effective mentoring relationship creates a support system and decreases feelings of isolation. Some research suggests that social connectedness can decrease stress and disease.

Social connectedness increases access to the psychological and material resources that buffer against stress, thereby reducing its impact on physiological processes that are associated with disease. Of these resources, social support is recognized as pivotal and comes in various forms – emotional, instrumental, and informational. Social support has been shown to offer some protection against the damaging physiological effects of stress and is associated with more functional, or adaptive, coping styles (Cohen and Wills 1985). Emotional support, in particular, appears to reduce the impact of stressful life events and has been repeatedly linked with greater longevity. (Haslam et al., 2015)

Rich relationships influence our lives in various and powerful ways—it is this social connectedness that becomes the bond in these relationships much

like the bond between a mother and child or the close relationship between mentor and protégé (Allen & Eby, 2021; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Mentoring for Well-being

For those who teach aspiring leaders and future higher education faculty, well-being is an important concern. The benefits of a 'mentoring for well-being' approach are documented in the literature (Adair, 2024; Connery & Frick, 2021; Hollweck, 2019; Wheeler et al., 2024), but this has not been documented regarding educational leadership professors and the students they teach. Mentoring and well-being are a natural pairing in positive psychology as the goal of both mentoring and well-being is the flourishing of individuals. The material in this paragraph needs to be integrated with the previous section as part of the explanation about why the research was done.

Measuring Well-being—Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model

Dr. Martin Seligman (2018) posits well-being as a set of five measurable domains. Positive psychology theorists assert that individuals who are proactive in those domains can flourish personally and professionally (Karcz & Blake, 2021). In his book, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, Seligman (2011) suggests that "Well-being is a construct, and happiness is a thing. A 'real thing' is a directly measurable entity. Such an entity can be 'operationalized'—which means that a highly specific set of measures defines it" (p. 14). Seligman's (2018) domains for measuring well-being are as follows: 1) positive emotion, 2) engagement, 3) relationships, 4) meaning, and 5) accomplishment, otherwise known as PERMA. Well-being can be conceptualized as a continuum in which one end is languishing or suffering some aspect of ill health, and the other end is flourishing or thriving (Seligman, 2011).

Methodology

We selected a case study method using an autoethnographic approach (Stake, 2005; Adams et al., 2016) because we wanted to explore how our experiences in the mentoring relationship influenced our well-being. Autoethnography can be described as a blend of autobiography with ethnography (Adams et al., 2017). In our case, this was found to draw on personal experiences, reflections, and narratives to explain our cultural phenomenon known as mentoring in higher education. As our relationship grew, we used our personal insights and our growing body of research in positive psychology, mentoring, and well-being to create a thick/rich description of our experiences as early career and late career professors. The study

began in January 2023 and ended two years later in December 2024. Our study was guided by the following research question: In what ways, if any, does our mentoring relationship influence our well-being?

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over a two-year period and included personal and professional discourse via ZOOM, telephone, and in person. We also journaled reflectively regarding how we have both flourished during the mentoring relationship. Our discourse on the data and the findings was influenced by the literature on faculty/graduate student mentoring, mentoring in educational leadership preparation programs, and well-being, with a specific focus on PERMA. We shared thoughts and experiences from our reflective journals, looking for commonalities and differences in our two perspectives. Over the two-year period, we engaged in an ongoing process of dialogue, questioning, and response, through which we developed themes and generated answers to our research question. We continued this iterative exchange until we reached saturation and were confident that we had rigorously addressed our question. During our discussions, we agreed upon and identified appropriate examples to substantiate each of our findings. After completing our analysis, we compared our results with existing literature noting similarities and differences across career stages.

Validity and Generalizability

A foundational reference for qualitative validity is Lincoln and Guba's book, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985). The authors introduce key criteria such as credibility, transferability, and dependability, to assess the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. We purposely had a prolonged two-year engagement for our work and additionally used member checking to further ensure the study's credibility. We provided a thick/rich description of the context and participants' roles in the mentoring relationship. Transferability and dependability (rigor) were achieved through the joint and independent analysis of emails, journals, and notes regarding our personal and professional dialogues. Patton (2002) notes that "the issue of generalizability of qualitative findings to larger populations is irrelevant. What is more important is the degree to which the findings illuminate the research problem and contribute meaningfully to understanding specific phenomena in particular settings" (p. 120). In this case, it was a graduate student protégé becoming an early-career professor who was mentored towards well-being by a late-career professor. It was also a late-career professor benefitting from the proteges growth as well as their own growth.

Narratives

The Protégé's Narrative Through the Lens of the PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011)

Positive Emotion

Positive emotion can include a person's general disposition, mindset, and if they are generally "happy." When in graduate school, there are many occasions when you are attempting to do something for the first time. This can create feelings of feeling overwhelmed and imposter syndrome. This was especially true for me as I worked through the dissertation process and shifted my career from K-12 to higher education. With every "great work" or "brilliant idea," my mentor increased my confidence and feelings of imposter syndrome slowly melted away. I learned very quickly that even though she stretched most of my skill sets, she always wanted me to succeed and always had my best interest at heart. This, among other things, built a strong sense of trust in our mentoring relationship. She guided me through the processes of publishing my writing and writing proposals for educational, mentoring, and well-being focused conferences. Having my work accepted for presentation or publication created a sense of belonging for me in a global research world. This decreased my stress and negative emotion because that voice in the back of my mind stopped saying things like, "I can't do this" or "I don't belong at the table." We jokingly talked back to that negative speech, which made it easier to laugh and push those thoughts aside.

Engagement

Engagement can often present itself as feeling as if you have worked (or played) for thirty minutes and then realizing that you have worked (or played) for hours or even feeling that time has stopped. We engaged in projects that interested us both, which yielded many publications and presentations over relatively short periods of time. My mentor helped me focus my research agenda to support my interests and encouraged me to reflect on my personal and professional goals. She found scholarships and awards and would tell me to apply saying, "you can get this." She also stretched my technological skills further than I could have imagined simply by saying, "figure out if there is a way to do this."

Relationships

Relationships are key to thriving. Over time, my mentor became my best support system for moving into higher education. Like other ethnographic studies regarding the mentoring relationship, Ellen and I shared similar family backgrounds and similar value systems (Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Snoeren et al., 2016). She taught me everything she knew about program coordination and the higher education

realm. We would often talk five to seven times per day. Usually, we would discuss work, but sometimes one of us would call to just tell the other a funny story. Having this kind of relationship increased our positive emotion, engagement, meaning, and accomplishment, spanning all PERMA domains (Seligman, 2011). She encouraged me to network to build relationships with other scholars who are experts in educational leadership, mentoring, and well-being. The nature of our relationship created innovative ideas. Often when we were talking about our personal lives, it would spawn a creative idea for the educational leadership program, a presentation, a publication, or my dissertation. Ellen never judged me for having a bad idea and always praised me for innovative thinking. This created a safe space for innovation to occur.

Meaning

Meaning gives purpose to your work. Seeing my writing garnishing international attention from experts on mentoring and well-being spurred my desire to stay focused so that I could make a difference in the lives of others, including the students in my courses. I also feel that I have the responsibility to pay it forward and mentor others. Coaching others through the dissertation process has also given me an incredible sense of purpose.

Relationships have always been at the heart of my values. They give my life meaning, and it has been incredibly helpful to have a powerful relationship with a wise person in the profession. It makes work fun, engaging, and a safe space for lifelong learning and pushing myself out of my comfort zone to reach my full potential. If I feel stuck on a project or have a problem working through an idea, I know she is there. She taught me the importance of relating my research to my teaching and service. She helped me find the sweet spot between these areas, which are highly valued by professors.

Accomplishment

Accomplishment builds confidence and resilience. It also increases engagement and meaning. Since meeting my mentor in 2017, I have earned a master's degree, an education specialist degree, and a doctoral degree. I have two administrative certifications and a program evaluation certification. I have received five awards/scholarships, including the prestigious honor of being named a Clark Scholar, an award sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and divisions of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) to support emerging scholars. Since 2020, I also have nine publications and have shared my research regionally with five presentations since 2023 and nationally or internationally with fifteen presentations since 2019. My mentor was instrumental to my accomplishments and my ability to thrive both personally and professionally.

The Mentor's Narrative Through the Lens of the PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011)

Positive Emotion

Working alongside Angela has helped me transform both my personal and professional life. I trust her explicitly because of the time we have spent together on career-related activities. She has become a cherished member of my inner circle and has demonstrated that she values what I bring to the table. As I have aged and entered a late career phase of my life, I have become dependent on her to manage the intricate details I no longer have the bandwidth nor desire to handle.

She also has a steadfast commitment to our work. When she graduated, I could tell she (like most recent doctoral graduates) wanted to take a break from working on research and publications. I gave her some space for that, but I nudged her to begin again. She responded to the nudging and picked up right away and began the collaborative work. This only reinforced my personal and professional trust in her.

In recent years, I have struggled to feel needed in my career, and Angela has helped me recognize my enduring worth and reminded me that I truly have a legacy reflected in the students, school practitioners, and new professors I have guided. I am still vibrant. Our continued research and publications during her first year as a professor have given me immense personal satisfaction and have affirmed that my career contributions remain significant. As I begin to close my career as an educational leadership preparation professor, I am now feeling free to focus on mentoring and consulting with a small group of like-minded individuals. This new phase of life aligns well with the positive emotion domain from PERMA.

Engagement

Through my mentoring relationship with Angela, I have found a deeper sense of engagement. Our work together and our personal time getting to know one another has brought balance and fulfillment to my life at a time when I needed it most. The productive and intentional nature of our collaboration has freed me from time-consuming tasks, enabling me to devote precious moments to myself and to my son when I needed that the most.

Working with Angela helped me find balance again. It wasn't just Angela, but her perspective was critical in how I allowed myself to be vulnerable and mindful with my students and family. For example, I became more patient, became a better listener, became less judgmental, and was able to see the struggles that others had.

Student vulnerability is an important concept for professors to understand. Angela's willingness to practice this with me allowed me to do more of this

with others. I became a better mentor because of our engagement. This shift, along with other shifts in my life, has allowed me to engage in healthy activities and prioritize well-being, something that was previously difficult for me to achieve. I not only engage more with others, but I engage with myself more. I am more in tune to the needs of others' needs and my own.

Working with Angela has reinforced my commitment to mentoring and broadened my recognition of what truly matters, offering a purposeful way to devote my energy to personal and professional endeavors. Mentoring Angela also helped me redefine my personal and professional commitments. As our work together has evolved, I've realized that my energy and attention are best spent serving my students, my graduates, and myself. I have shifted away from obligations tied to the university and toward mental and physical rejuvenation. With a renewed sense of purpose, I have realized the importance of fostering meaningful relationships with those who align most with my goals and my personal values. For me, engagement makes life worth living. It still excites me to get into the flow of research and writing.

Relationships

My relationship with Angela embodies the essence of PERMA relationships, particularly in how it enriches my personal life. With more time to spend with family, I have been able to strengthen bonds with both loved ones and close friends, even embarking on journeys to explore the world together. This extra time nourishes my own well-being and allows me to set a standard for how I approach all my relationships. Angela, as a trusted confidant, is an integral part of this dynamic. I am deeply committed to ensuring she is well-supported in her personal life, reflecting the value I place on genuine connection and mutual care. On a professional level, Angela's influence has helped reshape my priorities. I now focus more intently on supporting my students and graduates and nurturing my own growth. This shift has been inspired by witnessing Angela's progress and the confidence she exudes, reminding me that mentoring is a two-way street where both personal and professional development are celebrated. I am dedicated to taking care of her career, reinforcing the idea that letting go of rigid control can lead to flourishing and authentic relationships. Embracing this mindset has helped me discover the joy that comes from trusting in the mentoring process. I know that using good mentoring practices benefits me and those I mentor through a shared journey of growth.

Meaning

In reflecting on my personal and professional

relationship with Angela, I realize how deeply the concept of meaning is embedded in my mentoring work. As a mother to my own child and a second mother to those I mentor, like Angela, I am reminded of the joy that comes from nurturing others. I am true to myself in this role, embracing my calling to be an encouraging and giving person.

Although being a professor and teacher is a significant part of my identity, I have come to understand that I am more than my work. Angela's presence in my life has affirmed that I have been good enough in fulfilling my purpose, and I am satisfied with what I have accomplished. Mentoring has granted me profound meaning, and Angela has helped me realize this in ways I had not fully appreciated before. As I am preparing to leave my current role, I ask myself, "Can I continue to mentor Angela or others? Do I still have something to offer in a career beyond the university?" Angela's unwavering belief in me has shown me that I do. Our relationship isn't just a professional one; it encompasses a deeply meaningful connection that goes far beyond the university classroom.

My sense of purpose has been enriched by students like Angela, whose growth and success serve as a testament to the impact I have had throughout my career. Sponsoring Angela, in both her personal and professional life, has been particularly meaningful for me. It brings fulfillment that exceeds any formal accolades. I am truly satisfied with the legacy I've built. It's a legacy of changing students' lives for the better. Sometimes I am the spark that lights up a student like Angela and sometimes a student like Angela is the spark that I need. Even as I navigate the transition of leaving my current position, I find peace knowing that my contributions are measured by the growth of individuals like Angela. She is one of the brightest stars of my career and certainly holds an important spot in my mentoring constellation. As I near retirement and begin a new chapter of my life, I take solace in knowing I have achieved many professional goals and have made a deep and lasting impact through mentoring relationships.

Accomplishment

In both my personal and professional life, Angela has been a consistent source of encouragement and motivation, fueling my sense of accomplishment and growth. She has supported me in continuing my health journey, reminding me that success in one area of life contributes to my overall well-being in other areas of my life.

One of my proudest professional achievements was serving as the soul program coordinator during COVID-19 when the university was closed for in-person classes and faculty duties. This was quite an accomplishment and one that was not appreciated by my colleagues. While that was disheartening, Angela was serving as the graduate assistant to

the program coordinator. I could not have done the work if not for her willingness to support and learn the role of program coordinator. Together, we advanced the program in countless ways—recruiting talented students, managing admissions, coordinating schedules, and more. Her dedication and commitment to our work accelerated the program's success, bolstering my own sense of accomplishment. All of this was accomplished during COVID-19 and the following two years.

As I reflect on my career, I recognize the many milestones and successes that have shaped my journey as a mentor. Angela is wonderful evidence of that, as her growth is a direct reflection of the investment I made in mentoring. She constantly reminds me of all the things I have accomplished in the past and all that remains within me to achieve moving forward. I know Angela values my support in advancing her career and, in turn, she reinforces my belief that even after all I have accomplished, there are still new frontiers to pursue—whether for myself or for those I mentor, like Angela. In this way, our work together has brought both personal satisfaction and a renewed sense of possibility. What a wonderful testament to accomplishment in the PERMA model.

Findings

Using PERMA as a lens, we analyzed how our mentoring relationship influenced our positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment during our differing career stages. The effects of the relationship can be categorized as psychosocial (personal) and career (professional) development (Kram, 1988). See Table 1.

In our review of the literature, we found common best practices of mentoring. These were processes and structures for the mentoring relationship. Together, we discussed if we had or had not used these processes and structures by putting an "X" beside the processes and structures we used. We then determined which processes and structures were related to PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment). Note that we did not use positive emotion as an indicator because positive emotion can occur during engagement, in relationships, in meaningful experiences, and through accomplishment. Also note that in Table 3, we did not set boundaries for our mentoring relationship because our mentoring relationship evolved organically, so we did not address boundaries in the outset. By the time we recognized ourselves as mentor and protégé, we had naturally set boundaries. These tables were the genesis of our model for high-quality, sustainable mentoring relationships. See Table 2 (processes) and Table 3 (structures).

Our findings in this study indicate that our

Table 1: *Personal and Professional Development from the Mentoring Relationship Aligned with PERMA*

PERMA Domain	Early-Career Professor (Protégé)	Late-Career Professor (Mentor)
Positive Emotion		
Psychosocial Development (Personal)	Ellen makes me laugh. We have become friends who enjoy each other's company who happen to collaborate on projects together. I trust her as a confidant. She encourages me to have a work/life balance.	I trust Angela personally. She is part of the inner circle. Angela appreciates what I have to offer. I depend on her for details; I no longer wish to keep up with those.
Career Development (Professional)	Ellen has helped me nearly eliminate instances of imposter syndrome. She gives me confidence, which decreases my stress. I trust her expertise. She gives me a sense of professional belonging. I never dread hard work because I know I have her support.	I trust Angela professionally. She is committed to her work and to our collaborative efforts. I have struggled to feel needed at this stage of my career. Angela helps me to see that I am still of use. I am leaving behind a legacy of students/school practitioners and new professors. I have continued to research and publish with Angela after she graduated because the work we do gives me personal satisfaction. I no longer care about another career. I have had a first and second career. I can now focus on mentoring and consulting work with a small group of like-minded people.
Engagement		
Psychosocial Development (Personal)	Ellen encourages me to stay engaged in my own family and my relationships with others and to be self-reflective in my personal life.	The productive nature of our mentoring relationship has given me more time with family, friends, and former students like Angela and more time to pursue healthy activities. My commitment is now focused on my students, graduates, and myself; I realized this because of Angela.
Career Development (Professional)	Ellen helps me to be committed to the university, its program design, and its students. She has taught me to be reflective in my work and to write productively for publication. She has taught me how to network and speak confidently about my research at conferences.	I have less commitment to the university and more to myself and my students
Relationships		
Psychosocial Development (Personal)	Ellen is a friend and sometimes a mother figure to me.	Having more time with family has given me the opportunity to strengthen my relationships with friends and family and to travel the world with them. I want to make sure Angela is taken care of in her personal life. Angela is a confidant.

Career Development (Professional)	Ellen has served as my professor, mentor, advisor, dissertation chair, and colleague. I trust her professional guidance explicitly. She provided ample opportunities to build global relationships with others interested in my research focus.	I want to make sure she is taken care of in her career Angela and other students/ graduates make me realize I can let go and I can enjoy the letting go; not be disturbed by it
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Meaning

Psychosocial Development (Personal)	I find meaning in the time that Ellen is willing to invest in me personally. I know that I can be transparent and authentic with her. I trust that my best interest is at the forefront of her actions. It is deeply meaningful to me that she values me as a friend and confidant.	I am a mom to my own child and those that I mentor, like Angela. I am true to myself I am more than a professor/ teacher although that is a large part of my identity. I was meant to be an encouraging, giving person. Angela has helped me understand I have been good enough; I am satisfied with what have done with my life.
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Career Development (Professional)	I find meaning in the time that Ellen is willing to invest in me professionally. I find my work meaningful because she has shown me that I can make a difference and that this work can be exciting. She is my professional sponsor, advocate, and protector. It is deeply meaningful to me that she saw my potential. She pushes me when I feel blocked and helps me work through professional issues. I highly value learning and striving to meet my potential, and she helps me accomplish both.	Can I continue to mentor Angela or others as I leave? Do I have something to offer career wise after I leave? Angela helps me understand that I can. My contributions are measured by students like Angela. Sponsoring Angela is meaningful to me. I am satisfied with my career. I am satisfied with what I have accomplished with my students. Angela is the shining star.
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Accomplishment

Psychosocial Development (Personal)	Ellen works to help me accomplish my life goals. She also lets me know when I am wasting my time.	Angela offers encouragement and support to continue my health journey.
Career Development (Professional)	Since meeting Ellen, I have earned degrees, certifications, and awards/scholarships. I have also produced nine publications, and presented at least twenty presentations at the regional, state, national, or international level.	I was able to be the soul program coordinator for a year because Angela was the graduate assistant. She helped advance the program in many ways: recruiting, admissions, scheduling, and more. Angela knows I am there to help advance her career. I have accomplished a lot in my career. Angela is a wonderful piece of evidence of that. Angela reminds me of all the things I have and can still accomplish.

mentoring relationship increased our confidence, productivity, and innovation, while decreasing feelings of burnout. Because of our differing career stages, the protégé had differing struggles than the mentor, such as feelings of imposter syndrome, overwhelm due to the dissertation process, and having little knowledge of the higher education culture, program coordination processes, and preparing research for publication. The mentor was positioned to address the protégé's issues and help her to overcome obstacles and be successful. Having her mentor's strong support during her transition to the professorship gave her a positive sense of well-being. The mentor was feeling unappreciated by her colleagues and was doubting her usefulness. Her ability to guide the protégé to multiple successes and collaborate in projects to bolster her own success gave her a sense of rejuvenation, a feeling that she had built a legacy, and a willingness to keep working on the areas she is passionate about with the people who share her interests in mentoring. Her self-worth and resilience was reaffirmed by the mentoring relationship. Both mentor and protégé agreed that all domains of PERMA were apparent in the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring can be defined as a learning

partnership characterized by mutual respect, trust, and shared goals between a mentor and a protégé. In an effective mentoring relationship, both parties engage in a process of exploration and growth, where the mentor provides guidance, insights, support, and feedback based on their experiences, and the protégé actively participates in discussions, reflects on their own challenges and ambitions, brings their unique perspectives and aspirations, and possesses a mindset prepared for mentoring (Searby, 2020). This partnership involves imparting knowledge, active listening, open communication, and a commitment to fostering the protégé's personal and professional growth.

Today's best practices of mentoring use a relational approach. The high-quality and sustainable mentoring relationships model posits mentoring as a strategy to support the protégé's and mentor's well-being and to support transitions of career stages. This model is one of the first to openly recognize mentoring for well-being as an instrument of positive psychology. Social connectedness is the glue that holds the learning partnership together. Both the mentor and the protégé can decrease stress and burnout, which increases the likelihood of a high-quality, sustainable mentoring relationship

Table 2: *High-Quality Mentoring Processes Used in This Mentoring Relationship and Aligned with PERMA*
(Daloiz, 2012; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Searby, 2014; Zachary, 2011)

Mentor Processes	PERMA	Ellen	Angela	PERMA	Protégé Processes
Model best practices, professionalism, and leadership.	M	X	X	E	Take initiative.
Listen, ask questions, and summarize key points.	E	X	X	E	Listen, ask questions, and follow up.
Encourage protégé to learn from their experiences.	M	X	X	A	Self-reflect on progress, challenges, and lessons learned.
Ask questions that require critical thinking.	M	X	X	A	Apply knowledge learned from mentor in real-life situations.
Give feedback that notes strengths and areas of growth.	P	X	X	M	Seek feedback and use it to grow.
Guide the protégé to learn to self-advocate.	R	X	X	P	Take ownership for progress and decisions
Adjust mentoring strategies based on protégé's needs.	E	X	X	E	Make connections with people recommended by mentor.
Celebrate achievements.	P	X	X	E	Embrace challenges and be adaptable.
Provide tasks that push protégé out of their comfort zone.	A	X	X	R	Express appreciation for mentor's time and guidance.
Keep the focus on long-term growth.	E	X	X	R	Pay it forward by sharing knowledge and supporting others.

Table 3: *High-Quality Mentoring Structures Used in This Mentoring Relationship and Aligned with PERMA*
(Daloz, 2012; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Searby, 2014; Zachary, 2011)

Mentor Structures	PERMA	Ellen	Angela	PERMA	Protégé Structures
Use SMART goals to give direction.	E	X	X	E	Outline goals, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.
Regularly check in with protégé.	R	X	X	M	Journal to monitor personal growth.
Create a short-term and long-term plan for protégé's growth.	A	X	X	A	Prepare a purpose or focus for each mentoring session.
Create structures for giving and receiving feedback.	E	X	X	M	Record feedback and make changes when necessary.
Organize resources and networking for protégé.	M	X	X	A	Collect resources for continuous learning.
Define expectations and boundaries for mentor and protégé.	R		X	R	Network at key events and with key individuals.
Keep a log of progress and/or action plans.	E	X	X	A	Review progress as milestones are met.
Introduce protégé to key individuals in professional circles.	R	X	X	E	Self-assess to determine personal strengths and weaknesses.
Offer opportunities for professional development or trainings.	R	X	X	E	Develop an organized time-management system.
Create a confidential, safe place for authentic discussions.	R	X		R	Set boundaries about what is shared with mentor.

and a healthy work-life balance. The model presents the concept that mentoring for personal and professional development, using evidence-based processes and structures, leads to high-quality, sustainable mentoring relationships.

Conclusion

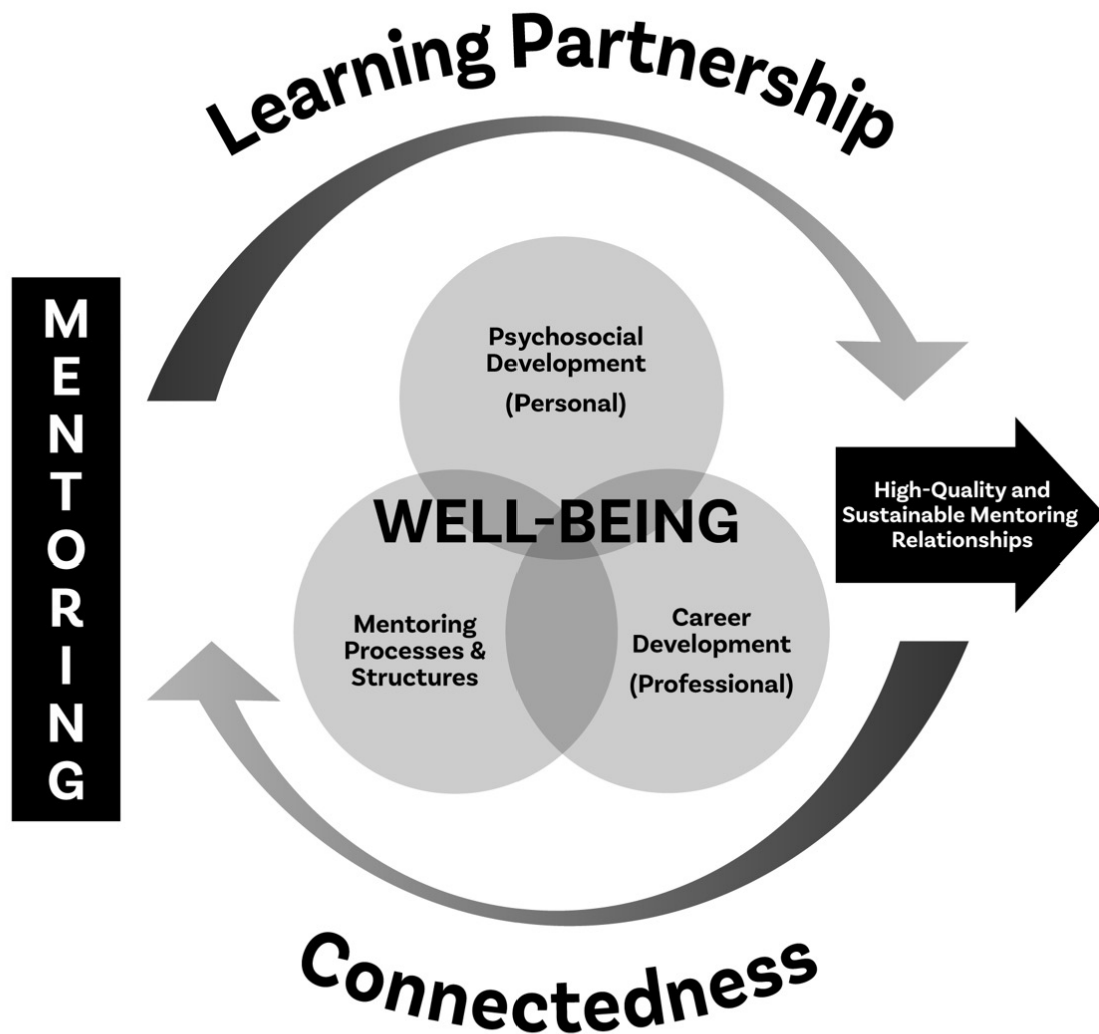
By engaging in a mentoring relationship, both parties benefit; the protégé gains valuable insights and encouragement to navigate challenges from the mentor's seasoned advice and expertise, while the mentor often finds renewed purpose and learns through the protégé's fresh viewpoints and innovative ideas, creating an environment where knowledge is co-created and fostering deeper understanding and skill enhancement for both individuals. Ultimately, mentoring as a learning partnership not only accelerates the protégé's professional and personal development but also enriches the mentor's experience, cultivating a sense of shared purpose and continuous learning that extends beyond their individual roles. It is our hope that this research will help mentors and protégés as they transition through career stages and that

it will encourage higher education faculty to take active roles in supporting the next generation in their endeavors to transition into higher education.

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Figure 1: *High-Quality and Sustainable Mentoring Relationships Model*



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About the Authors

Angela C. Adair earned her Ph.D. in Administration of Elementary and Secondary Education in May of 2024 at Auburn University where she is now an adjunct professor. Prior to coming to Auburn University, she spent thirteen years as a secondary English teacher. She was named a 2023-2024 Clark Scholar by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) for her research on educator well-being. Her other research interests include mentoring, K-12/university partnerships, principal preparation program improvement, and program coordination and design.

She has authored or co-authored and published four articles and five book chapters regarding educational leadership and regularly presents her research at national and international conferences. Among other presentations, she and her colleagues presented *Moving Forward and Building Traction by Mentoring for Well-Being* at the 2024 International Mentoring Association and *Positive Psychology Conceptual Frameworks: Global Perspectives Exploring Principal Well-Being* at the 2024 Annual Convention of the University Council for Educational Administration.

Ellen H. Reames is a Professor of Educational Leadership at Auburn University. Prior to coming to Auburn University, Ellen spent thirty years as a K-12 teacher and administrator. She researches educational leadership program design where she enjoys exploring innovative ideas that can improve the lives of K-12 school administrators and teachers.

Mentoring for Well-being: Flourishing Across Career Stages

Her current focus includes the influence of positive psychology and mentoring for principal well-being and developing educational leadership preparation program partnerships.

Dr. Reames has authored five books including *The Art and Science of Mentoring*, (2021). She recently presented at the Research Forum on Educator Well-being: Sharing Diverse Perspectives and Multiple Approaches in Kelowna, BC, Canada. The presentation was titled: Positive Psychology: Mentoring with Well-being in Mind.

Ellen is a member of the Alabama New Principals Mentoring Program Design Team. She, along with Linda J. Searby, IMA past president, Brenda Mendiola, and Yvette Bynum designed and implemented the program. Alabama is now one of six states which formally mentors new principals for two years.