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Leader, Know Thyself

Greetings From the President



K.J. White

President, Canadian Association of Principals

Greetings,

I hope spring has sprung in the region of Canada that you call home. As we admire the buds in bloom, sun melting the snow, and bountiful sounds of nature, we must take a moment to reflect on the school year that is nearly complete and begin our renewal for the next school year ahead. As educational leaders, we know this time of year is crucial for planning and offers us the opportunity for reflection, connection, and projecting our path and vision for our students, staff, parents, and learning communities for the next school year and into the future. At this time, I would like to say thank you to all our great educational leaders from coast to coast to coast for a tremendous 2015-2016 school year!

The main theme for our CAP Spring Journal focuses on “Mental Health: Solutions that Work”. The articles within are highlighted by the breadth and depth of how mental health is affecting our students and schools, it is evident that solutions, supports, and resources are needed right now; more than ever. Mental Health has reached every corner of our nation inside and outside the classrooms. It is a critical time in education and time for educational leaders’ to reach out to one another, band together, and share best evidence, practice, and strategies that work in supporting mental health across Canada.

Our CAP Spring Journal offers tremendous perspectives in dealing with student wellness, bringing mental health to school, standards of practice to drive school growth, improving school attendance, and team collaboration to improve student wellness. As you read, highlight key elements that directly impact student mental health and wellness in your learning community. Share your ideas with fellow educational leaders and our shared vision of how to support mental wellness in our schools will begin to grow. In our leadership roles, we are the grassroots of education and we need to share our stories and our united voice must be heard to make a difference in the lives of the children that we lead each day.

At this time, our CAP Executive and CAP Board of Directors would like to thank the NBTA and our CAP Conference 2016 co-chairs Ardhith Shirley and Tina Estabrooks, along with all members of the host committee for planning our upcoming 34th Annual CAP Conference. The theme for the conference is “Tides of Change – Oceans of Opportunity”, being held in Saint John, New Brunswick on May 16th – 19th, 2016. We look forward to seeing you on the shores of Atlantic Canada this coming May!

In closing, I want to thank our CAP executive, CAP National directors, and CAP members for entrusting me with the leadership role of being CAP President. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve CAP and all our members across Canada. It has been a rewarding journey and one of the best professional learning opportunities in my educational career; one I will not soon forget. I will cherish all of the great stories and great times spent with fellow provincial and territorial leaders, sitting at the CAP national table discussing educational ideas, and attending our CAP Conferences while meeting new and familiar friends, speakers, and delegates across our great nation. Until we meet again!

Stay strong and carry on,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K.J. White". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey grid background.

K.J. White

CAP President 2015 – 2016



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Editor's Comments



Kyran Dwyer
Editor, CAP Journal

We are in the final few months of the school year with more demands on us as we wind down this year and continue planning for the 2016-17 school year. The art of leadership is around balancing our work life, our family life and other commitments in our lives. The end result is that with so many demands and after a long year, we begin to wear down, which can affect our mental health and well-being. Staff and students feel this same stress and anxiety even though the demands are different. This issue of the CAP Journal with its main theme of Mental Health: Solutions that Work, discusses various programs and activities that schools are using across the country to support members of the school community. Please take time to read the articles and hopefully they will help you not just in the last few months of this school year but also as you continue to lead in future years.

The CAP Journal provides a platform to communicate with our members and to focus on topics that are important to school leaders in Canada. The theme for the Fall CAP Journal is: Issues and Trends in Canadian Education. This theme provides lots of room to be creative as you write about educational situations in your corner of our great country.

I look forward to the 2016 CAP Conference in Saint John, NB as we explore the theme “Tides of Change – Oceans of Opportunity” and renew friendships and make new ones. The conference is a great learning opportunity while at the same time a great chance to relax and refocus as the year winds down.

In closing, thank you to education leaders who contributed to the CAP Spring Journal and I look forward to compiling the articles for the Fall Journal.

Yours in Education,
Kyran Dwyer



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MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

By Catherine Nolan
and Mark Cole

Across our country mental health problems continue to increase among our youth, resulting in a need for those working in education to be equipped with the skills to help support our students. Educators are front-line workers who are in a position to be able to identify and support our students in many ways. In the fall of 2015, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) utilized funding from the Bell Let's Talk Community Fund to train two Behavioral Support Itinerant teachers as instructors in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). During the first phase of this multi-year initiative, the instructors will focus on training a group of administrators

in schools with grades 7-12 students in the Eastern region where the student population is the highest. The training will continue on to other regions in Newfoundland and Labrador and over the longer term, it is intended that Mental Health First Aid training will be made available to all school administrators.

So why is it that the administrators are being trained? There is an increased demand on guidance counsellors who alone cannot address the many needs that come with our students on a daily basis. Mental Health First Aid provides administrators with the skills needed in supporting students experiencing mental health problems.

The program does not teach people how to be therapists, but rather teaches people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, provide initial help, and guide a person towards appropriate professional help. Having a staff member trained with these skills also means that students will have another “go-to” person in their school who has the ability to help them as needed. With this training, school administrators will also be better able to act as “mental health leaders” to both staff and students.

“There is an increased demand on guidance counsellors who alone cannot address the many needs that come with our students on a daily basis. Mental Health First Aid provides administrators with the skills needed in supporting students experiencing mental health problems.”

NLESD is working to improve awareness of mental health problems. Prior to the fall of 2015, administrators in the Labrador region had received MHFA training and further training or updating is ongoing as necessary. As efforts continue, to date, three groups of administrators in the Eastern region have taken part in the two-day Mental Health First Aid training, and the feedback so far has been extremely positive. Participants consistently report an increase in knowledge and understanding of the signs of mental health problems, and how to appropriately respond when students present with these problems. As a result of this training, participants also identified an increased awareness of local resources and where to avail of help outside the school setting.

We’ve heard from experienced administrators, as well as other school district personnel, that this has been among the most relevant professional learning opportunity they have ever had. Some of their comments include:

“An excellent course - information to add to my toolbox.”

“Manual is a great resource/tool.”

“Great 2 days. Pertinent, useful, insightful, and supportive for my role as an administrator.”

“A great course to help with my professional as well as everyday encounters.”

“Extremely important training, particularly for those working with high risk individuals.”

“I feel much more confident in dealing with potential students or friends who may be at risk.”

“A must for daily work!”

Mental Health First Aid for Adults who Interact with Youth aged 12-24 is an evidence-based, international course administered through the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The goals of MHFA training are to increase mental health literacy and early

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Mental Health Solutions that Work

recognition of a developing mental health problem in an effort to prevent a future crisis. Some young people may feel too ashamed to share their problem or to seek help and others may not know what help is available to them. Mental Health First Aiders can play an important role in encouraging a young person to get professional help.

“ Some young people may feel too ashamed to share their problem or to seek help and others may not know what help is available to them. ”

Mental health problems are the chronic illnesses of our youth. Feelings of rejection are often experienced due to the stigma associated with mental illness. Although attitudes are improving, many young people still do not seek help for their mental health problems because of the persistent stigma. In their leadership role, school administrators can play an important part in addressing stigma and increasing empathy and understanding in their schools.

Mental health problems can be as disabling, if not more so, than many chronic physical illnesses, in that they can have a serious impact on physical health, work and relationships. MHFA addresses several specific areas of mental health affecting youth, including substance related disorders, mood disorders, deliberate self-injury, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and psychotic disorders. Over the 14-hour training session, participants learn the signs and symptoms of these problems, and the importance of early intervention. Through role plays and discussion, MHFA participants practice how they would respond to a mental health

problem. The Mental Health First Aid ‘action plan’ outlines specific steps to take in different situations, including what to do during a mental health crisis.

The positive participant feedback within our district indicates that Mental Health First Aid training provides a combination of valuable information and an effective skill set that can be used, not only in the school setting, but in our everyday lives as well. NLESD’s efforts to equip administrators with these important tools continue to move forward with the support of good community partners, like Bell Canada and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, and our amazingly professional educators throughout the province. Through district-wide initiatives such as the Mental Health First Aid Training effort, we are aiming to ensure our school communities have the skills, knowledge, and training needed to assist our students. As we know, the school-age years can be some of the most challenging in the lives of our young students and any assistance we can provide to ensure they come out the other side better, stronger, happier members of our community will benefit our greater society in the long run. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Catherine Nolan (B.Ed., B.Sp.Ed., M.Ed.) has taught at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels in St. John’s, NL. She has also served on the National Council of Welfare, addressing issues of poverty. Currently, Cathy works as a Behaviour Support Itinerant Teacher and teaches MHFA.

Mark Cole, B.Ed., M.Ed. (Counselling Psych.), has worked in education for the past 16 years as a classroom teacher, instructional resource teacher, guidance counsellor, and currently as a Behavior Support Itinerant Teacher. Mark is also a certified Mental Health First Aid Trainer.



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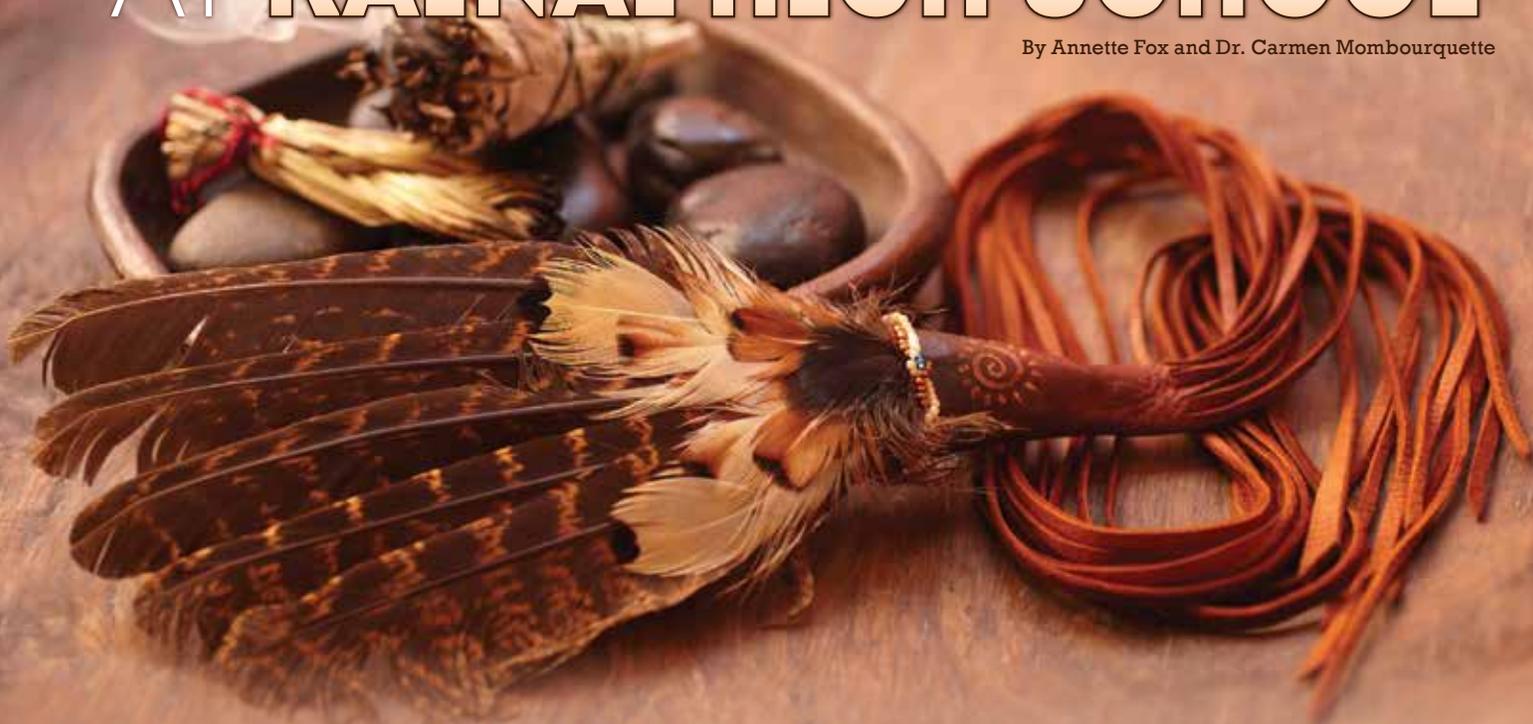
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STUDENT WELLNESS AT KAINAI HIGH SCHOOL

By Annette Fox and Dr. Carmen Mombourquette



Two young students were the sole members of the school to cross the graduation stage in June of 2009. Four years later, close to 40 excited young men and women were able to wear their eagle feathers proudly as they crossed the stage on graduation day and move onto the next phase of their lives. What happened in those four years to produce such a dramatic difference in the number of students attaining the right of passage as signified by high school graduation? At Kainai High School, attention to student wellness led to this dramatic change.

Kainai High School (KHS) is a grade 9-12 on-reserve school situated on the Kainai First Nation (Blood Band within the Blackfoot Confederacy) in Southern Alberta, Canada. Since 2009, wellness has been the major drive behind student success. The four pillars supporting the whole child approach to student wellness include: spiritual, physical, academic, and emotional. Blackfoot cultural and spiritual values are the principles through which Niitsitapiisini help guide and support student spiritual wellness. Research into student physical wellness comes from Ever Active Schools (www.everactive.org). The academic model for the school is centered on attention to the data on student attendance and its link to

achievement along with an innovative approach to timetabling. Staff members are involved in continuous collaboration opportunities where the academic need of all students is kept at the forefront of focused conversations. Care and attention for the emotional health of the students comes through numerous partnerships where experts come into the school to work with students and staff alike.

“Blackfoot cultural and spiritual values are the principles through which Niitsitapiisini help guide and support student spiritual wellness.”

The school's focus on Blackfoot cultural and spiritual values is centered on a vision of 'what it means to be a warrior'. The warrior becomes symbolic of pride and the connection to the Blackfoot ideals of survival and long-life, with an inherent belief in the spiritual world. One of the first activities in the 2009 school year was for all staff to hike the Belly Buttes, a significant spiritual place for the Bloods/Kainai. Each year the staff renew the hike, and now bring the students to

this sacred site with events planned to help make the connection between the spiritual and the physical worlds.

At the school, each ceremony or gathering begins with prayer. Numerous opportunities are made available to the students to help bring meaning to the history, culture, and spiritual beliefs of the people. The fall term features a tobacco ceremony. During the course of the year Elders provide Ceremonial Face Painting, where students are offered the opportunity to sit with an Elder to receive an individual blessing. Earth Day takes on a special significance with a ceremony that includes Elders sharing knowledge, history, and stories of the ancient ones, all the while providing ties to the spiritual and physical environment. Blackfoot Social Dance was incorporated into the Friday activities to provide understanding for students when and if they participate in the various school and community sponsored Blackfoot events. Graduation exercises include a Grade 12 Feather Blessing Ceremony, where members of the Sacred Women Society paint student faces and bless feathers that are presented to the graduating students in recognition of their accomplishments. In the beginning, students would shy away from participating in the ceremonies, now they clamor for

Kainai High School

more. With their increasing sense of pride in who they are as a people has come increased attention to their work as students and commensurate academic success.

“ Numerous opportunities are made available to the students to help bring meaning to the history, culture, and spiritual beliefs of the people. ”

As Usain Bolt won the Men’s 100m and then the 200m races during the London Olympics, students from KHS appreciated the athleticism required to accomplish such a feat while also knowing the deep seated cultural connection this fine Jamaican had to the sport of athletics. Traditionally speaking, members of the Kainai First Nation were runners. There is a close connection between running, culture, and a spiritual sense of what it means to be Blackfoot. The leadership of KHS used this connection between running and what it means to be a member of this nation to support physical wellness initiatives. Kainai High School is located in a very rural area. The school has easy access to some of the best cross-country territory in

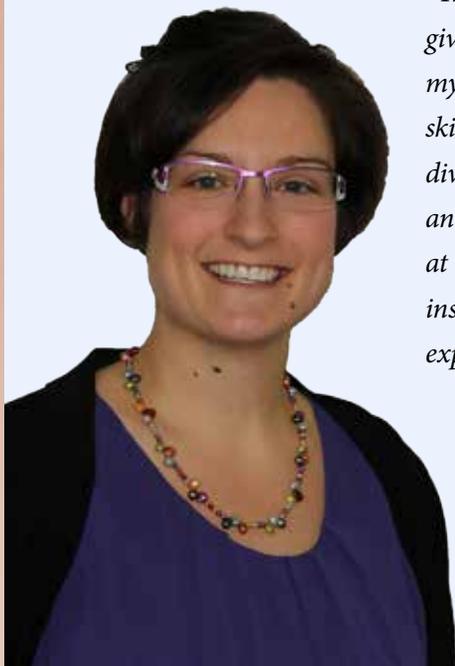
Alberta. At the beginning of each school year, the school hosts the Bullhorn Coulee Run, which includes running or walking the coulees and provides picturesque scenery of the Rocky Mountains. Students of all ages are invited to participate in this school-wide event. Since 2010 the number of participants has continued to grow. Many students now enter the run from neighboring First Nation and public schools.

Supporting the work of school leaders in their quest to improve the physical wellness of the students has been an organization called Ever Active Schools. The journey with Ever Active began by building capacity among teachers to incorporate Daily Physical Activity (DPA) into their classrooms. As part of evolution with the program, each morning begins with a routine of 30 minutes of walking. These walking sessions connect students to their physical environment, increase heart rates, develop positive peer-to-peer interactions, and increase the awareness of teachers into student academic and attendance progress (amazing conversations happen as teachers and students walk together). As students walk they also have available fresh fruit to snack on and bottled water to drink. Ever Active supports the walking program but also provides exercise ideas to keep student bodies

and minds engaged throughout the day. They also work with the school to ensure that the daily hot lunch program includes food that will feed the mind as well as the body.

Kainai High School adopted what has come to be known as the Quarter System for grade 10-12 students in the 2010-2011 school year, while grade nine students have followed a customized semester/quarter schedule. The Quarter System is the name given by the school to its timetabling format. The full academic year is divided into four equal semesters, called quarters. Each quarter is ten weeks long and features an immersion experience where students take one course in the morning and another in the afternoon. By the time the year is over, students complete eight courses, the same as students who attend either a traditional semester (four courses in each of the two semester) or that of a linear school year (eight classes per day for the entire year). The big difference in the Quarter System, as compared to either the semester of linear formats, is that it allows teachers to develop very deep connections with their students. Teachers have the same group of students for three hours per day. Teachers invoke very student friendly

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modes of teaching so as to keep students engaged and focused on learning while also working on relationships so necessary to help students form a deep connection to the school. Each year after the adoption of the Quarter System the students have doubled the number of classes they successfully complete, leading to the large number of students graduating in 2014.

“The big difference in the Quarter System, as compared to either the semester or linear formats, is that it allows teachers to develop very deep connections with their students.”

Academic data from the school clearly indicated that student literacy levels were not where they should be. Based on the data, the school amended the grade nine timetable to allow for eight hours of reading and writing each week; four of the hours are devoted to an intensive reading program called Read 180.¹ In addition, all grades receive an additional hour to their core subjects on Fridays. With increasing student reading levels came a commensurate bump in student efficacy and the belief that they could indeed be successful in school.

In an effort to keep students engaged in learning what is relevant to them and focused on student futures, the first hour of the day on Friday was radically changed. Fridays now feature activities and information on diverse subjects incorporating nutrition, Blackfoot Social Dance, Truth and Reconciliation information and training, Sexual Health information, suicide prevention programs, healthy relationship development, weight training, and yoga. Community agencies support these initiatives. Elders actively participate in many of the sessions offered on Fridays. Financial support for these programs comes from the First Nation’s Student Success Program (FNSSP). In this case, the funding program is appropriately named as so many students are now experiencing success, many for the first time, as a result of these programs and the impact that they are having on the emotional wellness of the students.

Through the FNSSP an additional school counselor was added to the staffing complement in order to further address the demands of student emotional needs. Counselors monitor student attendance, when identified by classroom teachers, and they act as liaison between support agencies-school-parents/guardians. Other emotional supports include Learning Support Team meetings for students, weekly team meetings between administrators and counselors, weekly collaboration between subject teachers, monthly staff meetings, and quarterly staff meetings to identify student academic progress and to put in place supports if achievement is still lagging. At the very beginning of the student wellness journey, the staff were provided with top-notch mentors who enabled a clear understanding that collaboration was essential to student success.

Kainai High School leadership, teachers, and support staff are not afraid to try innovative and creative ways to respond to student wellness needs. Due to the successes achieved, school members continue to seek partnerships to provide innovative programming including: Science Technology, Engineer and Math (STEM), robotics, dual credit, mentorship, distance learning, and Career Technology Studies (CTS). Partners in the process have included: the University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge College, Merit Contractors, The Paul Martin Foundation, First Robotics Championships, Red Crow College, and various provincial and federal government agencies outside of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. The ability of students to adapt and respond to their environment remains central to the school’s vision of developing vibrant, responsible, independent, and healthy adults. ■

¹education.scholastic.ca/category/READ_180

AUTHOR BIO

Annette Fox-BruisedHead, Naato’saaki, is currently the principal of Kainai High School on the Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta. She was born and raised in the Kainai area, graduating from St. Mary’s Indian Day School, now known as Kainai High School. In September 2007 she became Associate Principal of Kainai High School and began a Master of Education degree at the University of Lethbridge. She became the Principal in May 2010 and completed the M.Ed. in December 2010.

Dr. Carmen Mombourquette is an Associate Professor of Education specializing in Educational Leadership at the University of Lethbridge. For many years he was an elementary, junior high school, and high school principal in Alberta and Ontario.

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Oh, What a Difference a Simple, Peaceful Moment in Time Can Make!

By Maureen Miller

At 8:45 am on a mid-February morning; O Canada and the business announcements for the day are complete. “Staff and students, let’s take a moment to get ourselves ready for our Mindful Moment”. I pause, take a deep breath and focus on the mindful script before me. There is a peacefulness in the office, I am in the moment, and our secretary and Assistant Principal are both modeling for the late comers and enjoying their own mindful moment as they listen to my voice. I am aware of my own breathing, the sound and rhythm of my words. I feel a sense of calmness inside my own mind and body. There is a tranquil, quiet feel throughout the building. If you listen, you can hear the striking of chimes in each classroom. “Everyone should take another 3 slow breaths. In through your nose and out through your mouth, slowly and gently. Let your body relax and get ready to start your day”.

Six months earlier in September 2015, North Star Elementary had a new administrative team, 4 new staff members, and 30 new students bringing the school population to 315. Our high-needs Kindergarten numbers increased from 7 to 17. We were dealing with extreme behaviors across the school... hitting, kicking, and punching of teachers and other students. Some incredible four letter words coming out of the mouths of 5 and 6 year olds. Little Kindergarten students refusing to do most everything, crying children everywhere! We had a 25 per cent increase in Kindergarten students with receptive language delays, and the list goes on. We felt as if the school had imploded, there were so many behaviors and so many crying children, stressed and frustrated teachers at every grade level. What was happening?

My Assistant Principal and I spent September and October putting out fires, dealing with 6-8 severe behavior episodes on a daily basis, meeting with teachers and parents all in an effort to establish peace and calmness in our classrooms and out on the playground. We increased our Student Advocacy Counselor to .6, increased the number of playground supervisors, introduced the Zones of Regulation Program, reviewed our behavior matrix, and held staff meetings to discuss the frenetic feel to the building and how we could all work together to calm things down. Despite our best efforts, there was little change.

Our two diagnosed severe behavior students were spiraling out of control. The grade one student was repeatedly hitting, biting, and kicking the teacher and other students on a daily basis. He was swearing and basically robbing the other students of their learning time due to the amount of time and effort required to deal with his behaviors.

None of us, especially the two teachers and students in the classes with the most severe behavior students could continue in this atmosphere. We decided to hire two substitute teachers to cover these teachers and to bring them, as well as our SAC worker, Assistant Principal, Wellness Coach and myself to my home for a day. We would look at Dr. Ross Greene’s work from his book “The Explosive Child”. We spent the morning watching some of Dr. Greene’s videos and working through his ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS & UNSOLVED PROBLEMS (Rev. 11-12-12). It was a great exercise and developed a deeper level of empathy for each of our severe behavior students. By noon, we had the first steps of a plan for our severe behavior students.

In comes Carol Hendricken, our wise and wonderful Wellness Coach. Carol has been a part of the NorthStar staff for three years now. She knows firsthand how very different things were in those first three months of 2015 compared to the previous two years. Carol had come prepared with her chime, her calmness, and a plan. It was Carol who suggested we begin a school-wide mindfulness program, beginning with a simple mindful moment each morning delivered over the Public Address system. She explained her work from the previous two years with our Grade Two and Grade Three students, focusing on mindful breathing and shared several excerpts from “Planting Seeds” by Thich Nhat Hanh. It didn’t take long to convince our two teachers to begin our mindful journey! We knew with their “stamp of approval” the majority of the staff would climb on board.

We did want everyone to hear the same message from Carol and to have her model the breathing techniques. Carol presented the idea of a school-wide Mindfulness moment and potential “lessons” to further develop mindfulness with our students at the December Staff meeting. She demonstrated the breathing techniques, shared a very powerful video “Just Breathe”, and asked if the staff thought our students could benefit. Our two teachers from the home session shared their thoughts and desire to see us try the ideas for the benefit of our students and the staff. To our great relief and excitement there was about 98% “buy in”.

And so our journey began in early December 2015. Each class has its own chime to use at the appropriate time in the daily morning script. Carol has modeled breathing techniques from kindergarten to grade three. December was an amazingly calm time in our building. We are steadfast in ensuring each day starts with the mindful moment. We check in with our teachers regularly at staff meetings and on PD days to discuss the effectiveness/ changes that they are seeing and feeling. Many of our teachers are now implementing a daily sharing circle or peace circle as well as additional mindful moments throughout the day with their students. We encourage all of our students, but especially those who struggle with self-regulation to use their mindful breathing to help calm them and to be aware of how their “anchor” (heart) is feeling.

“ Many of our teachers are now implementing a daily sharing circle or peace circle as well as additional mindful moments throughout the day with their students. ”

The few reluctant staff have reported that their students are using the techniques and participating more fully each morning as time goes on. Several staff are now using the Mind Up Program on a daily basis! While other staff members attended sessions at Teacher’s Convention dealing with mindfulness and yoga. And still others have started wellness practices such as Joga.

Student behavior log entries have significantly decreased and the numbers of students arriving at the office due to behavior difficulties is down to 1-2 on a busy day. When a student does lose control, their ability to regroup and calm themselves occurs in a much shorter time frame. We have seen grade one students organize themselves into

sharing circles, and use deep breathing when stressed or frustrated. Several parents have shared that the oldest sibling in the family is teaching “milkshake” breathing to their younger siblings. Parent volunteers and Alberta Health Services staff have commented on the positive changes in the atmosphere of the building.

“ We have seen grade one students organize themselves into sharing circles, and use deep breathing when stressed or frustrated. . ”

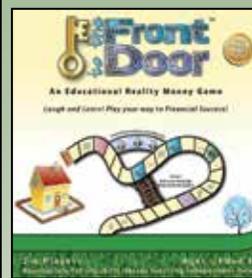
Our next step on this journey will be the development of a grass roots program for our school written by our amazing Wellness Coach. Carol is developing a set of 15 lessons geared towards 5-8 year old children. We are very grateful to have a wonderful partner in the Successful Families, Successful Kids Program of the Northern Lights School Division. They provide the funding for our Wellness Coach and are assisting with additional funding for our project.

We know that our journey has only just begun, but we are able to see and feel the effectiveness of a simple, peaceful moment in time, that is set aside each and every day to stop, breathe, regroup and get ready to play and learn together. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Maureen Miller is a first-year principal at North Star Elementary School in the Northern Lights School Division No.69 in Alberta. For 26 years, she has taught Grades Kindergarten to 5 in various schools throughout Cold Lake, Alberta and then moved into administrative work as Assistant Principal at North Star Elementary School.

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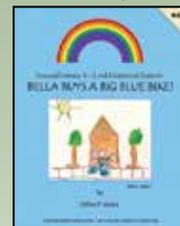
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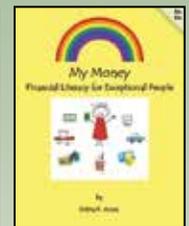
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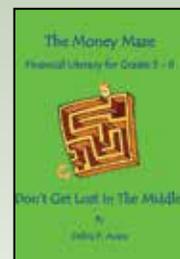
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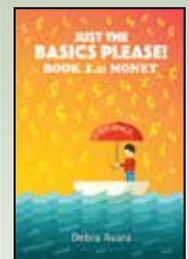
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IMPROVING STUDENT WELLNESS

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

By **Patrick Douglas Phillips** - University of Lethbridge

This paper chronicles the first year of a wellness initiative called Well Ahead in a Northern school district in British Columbia. The purpose of this initiative is to ameliorate student mental wellness. Throughout the discussion, the importance of working collaboratively with stakeholders is underscored.

Background of Well Ahead

Well Ahead is a five-year philanthropic initiative of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. The focus of the first year was to determine how everyday practices could lead to greater integration of wellbeing in schools. Well Ahead deems everyday practices as sustainable school approaches that are not one-of events (e.g., Valentine's day, etc.,). They are not add-ons (e.g., after school programs) but rather approaches that naturally fit within the role of schools. They are built upon existing assets and strengths and are based on what people already do. They are not approaches that require a lot of extra work for certain individuals (Bain, 2015). The values inherent in this initiative include: collaboration, mass participation, collective ownership, transparency, and emergence (Bain, 2015).

During the summer of 2015, six school districts in British Columbia were selected as pilot districts for the program. During the fall, the initiative provided a community-led process that brought multiple stakeholders together to identify ways (everyday practices) of integrating wellbeing into school communities (Bain, 2015). Our district was one of the six pilot districts selected. It is located in northern British Columbia and it is comprised (almost entirely) of people of aboriginal descent. Since the Well Ahead

initiative was intended to be a community-led process bringing multiple stakeholders together, a potential problem seemed to emerge.

Dating back to the beginning of residential schools, a feeling of mistrust on the part of aboriginal people towards the public school system has tended to exist. So, how successful could a wellbeing initiative that relied on values like collaboration, mass participation, and collective ownership really be in our district?

For the project to have a chance at success, partnerships between Aboriginal government and the school district needed to be forged. Hopefully, in so doing, an environment of trust could be promoted and relationships between stakeholders could be strengthened (Townsend & Adams, 2009).

Wellness in our School District

In an attempt to engender optimal levels of student learning and development, increasingly more attention is being paid to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Hoffman, 2009). Inasmuch as healthier students are better learners, effective educators must attend to the overall wellbeing of children (Basch, 2010). While it is true that educators are not health practitioners, we must be open to accessing and using resources like the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) and other evidenced-based

(SEL) programs. These SEL programs include Mind-Up (The Hawn Foundation, 2011) and Calm, Alert, and Learning (Shankar, 2102).

Levels of student performance in our district have been consistently among the lowest in the province. Seemingly, historical trauma relating to residential schools and colonialism and rampant poverty are contributing factors. Too many of our students come to school without having had proper sleep or nutrition. Many of them are dealing with intense and chaotic home environments. Absenteeism is an ongoing problem. In many respects, it appeared that the timing of the Well Ahead grant was rather auspicious.

Well Ahead in our District

In early discussions with the superintendent about the project, it was agreed that we should begin by connecting with senior members of Aboriginal government. In August 2015, a letter was drafted and sent to the Deputy Director of Programs and Services announcing the school district's confirmation of the Well Ahead grant. Her response to the letter was one of excitement and pleasure that our district was being recognized on the provincial stage. The next step was to bring together the Deputy Minister with a senior member of the Well Ahead team. In September, a conference call with the minister, the provincial lead for Well Ahead, and I was arranged. During



the call, we talked about the goals of the project and our desire for the school district to work collaboratively with government on behalf of our students. The conference call was productive and the member of government relayed her appreciation for being included in the process.

Later that month, I met again with the Deputy Minister and another senior government coordinator. We talked about the possibility of building synergy between projects like the Well Ahead project and other ongoing initiatives like Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWR). On September 17, I attended a VAWR conference in government chambers and gave a presentation on Well Ahead to the attendees. The participants were excited to know that a wellness project was being undertaken in our school district. On October 4, I had a meeting with the chair of school trustees. He voiced concerns about our students getting neither enough proper sleep nor nutrition. We talked about the importance of our schools being a place where students were properly cared for and nurtured. I was emboldened by meetings like these and the enthusiasm that was expressed for the project. The desire on the part of community members for enhanced student wellness was very evident.

At this point, it was important to begin collaborating with educators in our district. A meeting was arranged with the teachers'

union president. During the meeting, he mentioned that, while most teachers would certainly be enthusiastic about the project, it would likely be challenging for them to devote after school hours to it. I began to consider ways to best promote the project among teachers. Certainly, the message that the focus of this project was on everyday practices that could ameliorate student mental wellness needed to be underscored to them.

“ The desire on the part of community members for enhanced student wellness was very evident. ”

Once a connection with senior government officials and the teachers' union president was established, it seemed advantageous to connect with local government officials who could help move the project forward. More specifically, it was important to reach out to Education Coordinators in each of the four villages. On October 7, I met with the Education Coordinator in the village where I work. I outlined the project to him. Once again, he appeared enthusiastic and supportive. From him, I obtained contact information for the other three coordinators. Over the course of the next three weeks, I planned community ideation sessions with each of the village coordinators. Ideation sessions were designed in such a way that

all stakeholders could give input and that a list of everyday practices could be generated. On November 10, 17, 25, and 27 we held ideation session in each of the villages. I believe that because the events were planned and promoted jointly (aboriginal government and school district partnership) they were a big success. Community members shared thoughtful and impassioned ideas about how to improve student wellness. The next phase of the project included a refinement session where a short list of everyday practices were created. This occurred on February 17, 2016. Four elementary teachers have agreed to participate in the project and to prototype the everyday practice in their classroom.

Conclusion

To date, the Well Ahead project has been very well received. I firmly believe that this is, in large part, due to the collaborative way that we rolled it out. In an attempt to improve student learning and development, increasingly more attention is being given to student wellness. When initiatives like Well Ahead are rolled out in a collaborate fashion, the likelihood of meaningfully engaging stakeholders is improved. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Patrick Phillips is a school principal in a remote Northern community in British Columbia. He holds a Master's degree in sociology and has a keen interest in promoting wellness.

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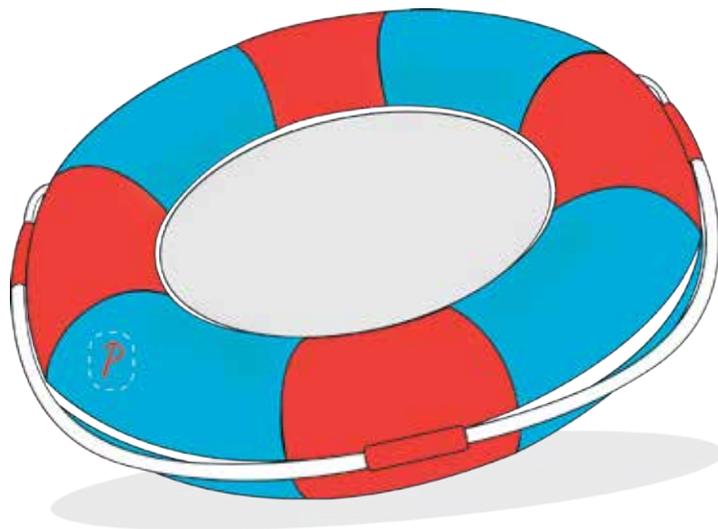
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LEADING PERMISSION-BASED ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT





HEALING HARP & RESTORATIVE DRUMMING

A PILOT PROJECT AT **GRENVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

By Nancy Bennett, Principle, Grenville Elementary School

We live in the Age of Anxiety. For many children, parents, teachers, EAs and principals, anxiety and stress frame much of our daily reality. Studies point to anxiety as the root of depression, dis-engagement, autism spectrum and myriad other conditions. We all know and live the numbers.

At Grenville Elementary School, we have begun to address the matter of anxiety and stress through an innovative pilot project called 'Healing Harp & Restorative Drumming' which places Mindfulness Training at the center of its practice.

The project takes place one morning a week and consists of three modalities:

- drumming circles for groups of 4-6 students;
- one-on-one harp classes which include breathing exercises and Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy; and
- Tai-Chi, which takes place in the school gymnasium for the entire student body.

The students taking part in the drum circles and harp classes are referred by the principal and staff for a variety of learning or behavioral challenges.

Mindfulness Training, and its application within the context of this project, is defined as the practice of opening, whole-bodily, to this moment of experiencing. The children are instructed to sit up straight, feel the breath moving in and out of their bodies; to open fully to Seeing, Hearing, Taste, Touch, Smell and Feeling and to watch the rising and falling of thoughts. Depending upon their capacity, they are invited to look into how anger, boredom, frustration or happiness are physically experienced within their bodies.

Within the context of drum circles, the children are encouraged to work together to create a dynamic and creative environment. Hands-on rhythmic exercises and drum patterns develop a variety of physical, social and cognitive skills. The sonic space encourages expression and freedom that is naturally found in drum circles. Mindfulness is used to create the cohesion necessary for a positive and rewarding group experience.

The harp sessions are designed around the particular needs, abilities and skills of the individual child. The very nature of the harp is soothing and invites pleasing experimentation. For children with complex needs, the harp can be tuned in such a way (pentatonic mode) as to produce immediate calming results with a minimum of technical skill. The Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy component of this work is an energy therapy with a proven record of success for children on the autism spectrum (please see www.vibroacousticharptherapy.ca for further information). It is not the intention of the harp modality to create 'harpists' but to use the instrument as a medium of body and mind connection.

Mindfulness Training is at the heart of the Tai-Chi component of the project. This all-school activity is designed to embody the basic principal of Mindfulness - that each individual lives in This Moment and This Moment contains all possibilities - that no one can be defined by just one state of being or one state of thought.

So, what does this actually look like?

Here is how a recent session of Tai-Chi unfolded:

The children and staff came in from mid-morning outdoor recess and filed into the gym where they found the two instructors sitting silent and cross-legged at the front of the gym. Responding to this expectation of silence, they were, in turn silent. During the three to four minutes it took for everyone to find a spot on the floor, there was no sound. Once settled, a small gong was struck three times and, with few words, the children and staff were guided through several minutes of breathing exercises to calm and center them. Standing up, everyone was guided through eight basic Tai-Chi movements - all performed in silence. Following this, the children were invited to find a space on the floor while the instructors moved a harp and djembe (African hand drum) to the center of the gym. The children were guided through the basics of sitting-up straight, opening to breath, seeing, hearing, and awareness of sensations and then calming music was performed on harp and drum. After experiencing the quietness and dignity of the session, everyone was invited to take this awareness back to their classroom and throughout the day. The session ended with three strikes on the gong and a silent departure.

Healing Harp & Restorative Drumming



All photos submitted by Nik Schnell,
Teacher, Grenville Elementary School



One teacher observed: "The time following Tai-Chi is the only opportunity in the week when I am able to present advanced concepts because then I have the children's entire attention". Feedback from parents has been equally positive and supportive. One parent wrote:

"Dear Mrs. Bennett,

I would like to thank you for including my son in the Grenville Elementary School Harp & Drum program. This program has not only benefited him musically, but he now has more confidence in himself and is proud of what he has accomplished. I am very grateful that my son has this opportunity and I hope that he will be included in this program in the years to come."

As a school community, we are seeing that children are transferring what they learn in the project to the reality of their own lives with a resulting reduction of anxiety and stress. Students have become calmer and better able to attend to the work at hand - allowing the focus of our teaching to be on student success rather than on correcting negative behavioral issues. We fully endorse this as a model for use by other schools. ■

Grenville Elementary School is one of the smallest schools in the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. The Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board is the third largest English school board of the Province of Québec. Its territory comprises the administrative regions of Laval, Lanaudière, and the Laurentides, spanning over 35 000 square kilometers. The student population is over 13,500 students, attending classes in 26 elementary schools and 9 secondary schools and 5 Adult Education and Vocational Training centres

AUTHOR BIO

Nancy Bennet has been the principal of GES for nine years. She graduated in 1971 from McGill University in Montreal, Québec and began her teaching career in Hull, Québec for the Western Québec School Board. After getting married in the summer of 1972 she moved with her husband to Prince Edward Island and returned to Québec in November of that year. She was engaged by the Laurentian School Board in January of 1973 and taught at Laurentian Regional High School for a period of eight years. She interrupted her teaching career to have a family but stayed active in the educational field during this period. In 1998 she re-entered the teaching field and taught at Grenville Elementary School where she was Head Teacher for ten years. In 2008 she became Principal of this school and currently maintains this position.

In 2012 she was extremely honored to be awarded Canada's Outstanding Principals Award by the Learning Partnership for her vision, dedication and leadership.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

Ian Hepburn holds Piano Performance and Piano Pedagogy diplomas from the Royal Conservatory of Music. He has taught piano and harp privately for more than forty years. Ian is a certified Vibroacoustic Harp Therapy practitioner at Hawkesbury & District General Hospital in Hawkesbury, Ontario. Contact: i.hepburn@outlook.com.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

William Laurin has studied music at Vanier College and, most recently, at Carleton University. William brings his love of drumming and its potential for personal expression to his teaching. His engaging rapport with students is contagious and makes lessons a joy. He looks forward to sharing this with participants in the drum circles. He has toured throughout Canada, the United States and France and pursues an active performance career.

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Creating Responsive Communities For The Prevention Of Peer Victimization



By Dr. Stan Kutcher

BRINGING MENTAL HEALTH TO SCHOOLS:

it's time to do the right thing instead of doing something.

Addressing mental health in school settings is complex and multilayered. One part of the “onion” traditionally addresses the school setting: is it safe; does it enhance social and emotional wellbeing, does it promote individual growth and development, does it encourage going beyond the ordinary (such as embedding the spirit and activity of volunteerism and altruism) does it help build resilience, does it encourage students use their innate competencies to adapt to life’s circumstances. Or, does it do the opposite? Could the school environment reinforce avoidance of the

usual and necessary “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and by so doing lead to learned helplessness or the inability of students to understand that usual daily stress is good for your health and that solving the problems that lead to an experience of the normal and expected stress response is the well-worn route to adaptation and resilience. Does the school environment inadvertently “de-skill” students by “medicalizing” normal life, by teaching that usual daily stress is bad for you, by encouraging stress response reduction over problem solving? All these are very important questions and must be addressed by schools in the

context and with the understanding now available from advances in neuroscience in which the dreaded and very rare “fight or flight” consideration (one that many if not most students will rarely if ever experience) is instead conceptualized as the “excite and delight” consideration (a stress response that most people experience daily). These issues however are beyond the scope of this review and educators that want to think critically about what schools are doing in developing a climate to encourage adaptation and resilience may want to read “The Upside of Stress” by Kelly McGonigal—sobering for sure!

Another part of the “onion” however, and not completely divorced from the issues raised above, focuses on interventions brought into the school setting that schools think are going to be helpful to students, or at least more helpful than harmful. This would include programs that purport to impact positively on improving social interactions amongst students or decrease interpersonal conflict (such as anti-bullying programs) or purport to deal with significant health related concerns – such as suicide prevention interventions. These programs are usually expected to be applied with fidelity, are expensive to purchase and apply, are well marketed and often promise well beyond that they can deliver.

A third layer of the “onion” is attention paid to enhancing in-school services for youth who may need additional support or engagement. These run the gamut from resources that can provide on-site counseling to resources such as youth health centers that may effectively and relatively inexpensively address mental health concerns within a wider health and sexual health context.

Yet another part of the “onion” focuses on prevention of mental disorders by applying best evidence supported interventions, either as universal programs or targeted to symptomatic youth. Group sessions designed for students who demonstrate substantive depressive or anxious symptoms are an example of this. Unfortunately, the best research focusing on evidence based interventions (such as CBT) provided to targeted student populations have not provided comfort that these can indeed prevent mental disorders, and universal programs addressing “wellness” certainly do not.

And, the various levels can go on and on, and some can be subdivided into other layers. Sometimes different layers will house more than one activity, sometimes an activity may involve different layers. No wonder that the topic of school mental health can seem confusing at times! Yet, all aspects are important and all must be considered and addressed on their merits and, according, to a hierarchy of need. And for each level of intervention, the best available research evidence must be used to guide what is being done. Its not good enough to do something, we are tasked with doing the right thing.

Mental Health Literacy

Recent years have seen the evolutionary development of a key concept that is thought to underlay all of the “onion” layers described earlier, and perhaps many more as well. This concept is mental health literacy. It is a derivative of health literacy, which, according to the World Health Organization is one of the most important domains through which both individual and population health can be improved and health inequities remediated. And, one thing that schools are tasked with doing, and on the whole, do well, is enhance literacy. Although the definition of mental health literacy is still in evolution and the age specific details of what is meant by mental health literacy may not yet be clearly defined for all age groups, there is general consensus that mental health literacy can be understood as focusing on the following four aspects.

First, mental health literacy encompasses the capacity to understand what constitutes positive mental health and personally apply strategies to achieve and maintain positive mental health. Second, it includes knowledge of mental disorders and their treatments based on evidence-based research. Third, it decreases stigma. And fourth, it enhances the capacity and capability to know when to seek mental health care, where to seek that care and enhances student and teachers competencies for effective self-care.

Mental health literacy interventions set the foundation for mental health promotion, stigma reduction, secondary prevention, early identification, diagnosis, best evidence based

interventions and ongoing support for young people (and families) living with a mental disorder. When used in the school setting, provided as usual curriculum they provide a key component to enhancing the lives of young people and help to improve access to mental health care for young people who require it.

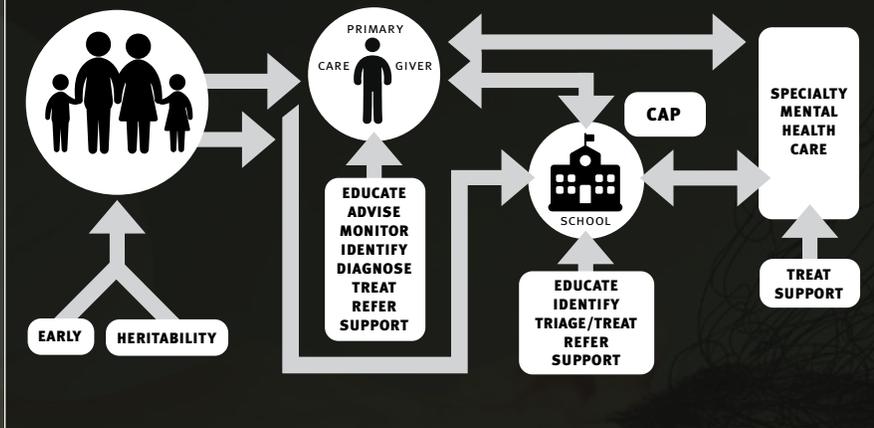
Schools are arguably the most appropriate location to implement mental health literacy interventions. In particular, if these interventions are seamlessly integrated into existing curriculum (such as health, healthy living, physical education, etc.). When mental health literacy is embedded into everyday school life through curriculum, students may be more likely to engage in the experience as part of “normal” or “usual” school life. This stands in stark contrast to stand alone or one-off interventions such as mental health training programs, mental health assemblies or suicide prevention events, which, although they may have popular support in some circles, have been generally found to produce little if any long-lasting changes in attitudes, which may be difficult to sustain and integrate into existing systems and changes in educational programming over time and which may even have unintended negative consequences.

The Mental Health Curriculum Guide resource and teacher training program, developed in a collaboration between myself, members of my team at Dalhousie University and the Canadian Mental Health Association (national branch), is an example of such an approach. Recently completed and peer reviewed published studies have demonstrated

Figure 1: Published, in press or in preparation for publication evidence for significant, substantial and sustained positive impact of the application of the Guide resource into usual school classrooms. (Sustained over at least a two month period on repeat testing.)

Province	Study type	Year	Participants	Increased Knowledge	Improved Attitudes	Improved help-seeking
Nova Scotia	Program Evaluation	2012-2013	218 Educators	Yes p<0.0001, d=1.85	Yes p<0.0001, d=0.51	
Ontario	RCT	2011-2012	362 Students	Yes p=0.0001 d=0.46	Yes p=0.0001, d=0.30	Yes p=0.01; d=0.18
	Cross-sectional Study	2012	409 Students	Yes p<0.001, d=0.9; p<0.001* d=0.73*	Yes p<0.001, d=0.25; p<0.007* d=0.18*	
	Program evaluation	2013	74 Educators	Yes p<0.001, d=1.48	Yes p<0.03, d=1.26	
	Cross-sectional study	2013	175 Students	Yes <0.0001, d=1.11; p<0.001* d=0.91*	Yes <0.03, d=0.66; p<0.001* d=0.52*	
Alberta	Program evaluation	2013	325 Educators	Yes p<0.0001, d=2.03	Yes NS, d=0.21	
British Columbia	Program evaluation	2015	43 Educators	Yes p<0.001, d=2.40	Yes p=0.002, d=0.55	
	Cross-sectional study	2015	60 Pre-service teachers	Yes p<.0.001, d=2.30; In Progress	Yes p<0.001, d=90; In Progress	

Figure 2: the role of schools in the pathway to mental health care for young people (note: CAP is Community Access Point – ideally this could be a school based health center)



substantial and significant improvements in mental health/mental disorder knowledge and stigma reduction in both teachers and students exposed to this curriculum (see figure 1). To our knowledge, this is the only approach with such robust evidence of positive impacts sustained over time that impacts on teachers and students concurrently.

The Bigger Picture

Essential as this foundational approach may be, by itself it will not address many of the most pressing mental health concerns of educators, students and parents. These are often focused on the mental disorders themselves and this raises the question, how can or should schools be involved in helping to address the pathway into mental health care for young people? (see figure 2)

Mental disorders in young people are a major health and social concern. Approximately one in five young Canadians will experience a mental disorder requiring professional care between the ages of 12 and 25 years, and most mental disorders can be diagnosed by age 25 (figure 3). Most of these can be diagnosed early after onset and are mild to moderate in intensity.

Early identification, diagnosis and appropriate interventions can be expected to improve both short and long term outcomes. While some mental disorders begin at a high degree of severity and go on to a chronic long term course, many experts consider that a lack of best evidence based

early intervention can result in conditions that, left untreated, will also progress to more severe and chronic conditions.

Mental disorders in young people contribute the largest single component to the burden of illness in this age group. Despite this burden and their high prevalence, the majority of Canadian youth who require mental health care do not receive it in a timely manner. Unrecognized or untreated mental disorders may lead to numerous negative social, vocational, interpersonal and family outcomes, as well as a reduced life expectancy due to associated medical conditions and suicide. The development of effective approaches that enhance capacity for early identification and early effective interventions for youth with mental disorders is necessary to increase the possibility of positive short and long term outcomes for young people and their families.

Given this epidemiologic reality and our better understanding of how to identify and effectively intervene to address mental health

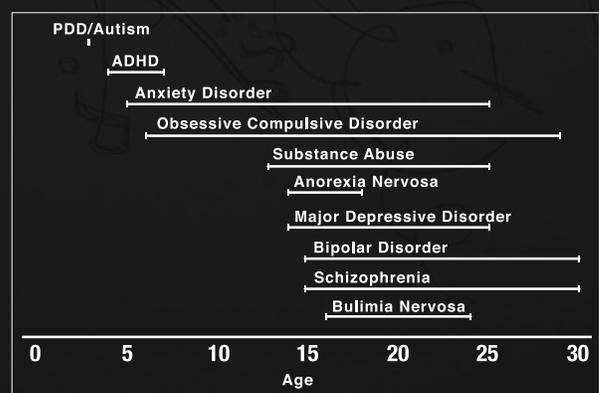
needs of young people, it is relatively easy to conceptualize how schools can become an important part of the pathway into care for young people who develop a mental disorder. And, mental health literacy, for both students and for educators, is a fundamental component of that consideration.

Just as students who are literate in mental health may be able to better understand how to promote their own mental health, display more appropriate attitudes towards those living with a mental disorder and be better able to identify and seek help for mental disorders should they experience them, so too can educators develop mental health literacy. This literacy can be similar in nature to that achieved by the students, but in addition, can include components pertaining to: the ability to identify students who are showing signs and symptoms of a mental disorder; assessing and triaging students into school supports or referral to an appropriate health care provider; addressing in-school academic and social needs of students who are receiving care for a mental disorder; networking with on-site student services providers; and communicating with parents and the wider community.

In this model, educators (including teachers, student services providers, administrators and others) can participate within a pathways through care approach that may be able to more appropriately address the mental health care needs of young people than the chaotic, fragmented and confusing routes into mental health care that are currently the norm in much of Canada.

Such an enhanced mental health literacy for educators is well beyond the scope of traditional approaches to enhancing rudimentary information about mental health and mental disorders, such as that provided by community directed programs

Figure 3. Ages of Peak Onset for Selected Mental Disorders.



Bringing Mental Health to Schools

(for example: Mental Health First Aid). To be useful, this knowledge must be contextualized to the school setting and must include as its goal the development of capacity within educators and within educational settings to support identification, triage, referral and support of young people at risk for a mental disorder. Thus, it can contribute to an enhanced community capacity to effectively address youth mental health and improve youth mental health care, rather than existing in isolation from such a pathway.

School Based and Contextualized Mental Health Literacy Programs

Such contextualized school based mental health literacy programs have been recently developed and evaluated. For example, the High School Mental Health Curriculum Guide, which was mentioned earlier, underwent substantial field tests in its development. Subsequently, the guide training program and a companion training program designed to enhance capacity within schools to identify, triage and support young people with mental disorders (the “Go To Educator” Program), was created and extensively evaluated by the author and his team. The results from some published studies are found in table 1 while others are in press or are currently being conducted (for example in Alberta and Manitoba).

Initial research into the impact of this approach in enhancing mental health literacy has been very promising. Program

evaluations of the effect of teacher training on increasing teacher’s knowledge about mental health/mental illness and decreasing teachers’ stigma about mental illness have shown very positive and statistically significant results. Additionally, similar positive and statistically significant results have been demonstrated for the “Go To Educator Training Program” that addresses the capacity within schools to identify, triage and support young people with a mental disorder (to view program evaluation reports please visit our website).¹

This type of rigorous evaluation of school mental health interventions is also now being considered when educators are being faced with making decisions about which (if any) programs pertaining to mental health they will apply in the school setting. Regardless of whether those programs address mental health promotion, prevention or are designed for specific interventions, these should pass the scientific sniff test: do they do what they say they do and how do we know?

How to Pick a Program

Before programs are implemented it is a good idea to ask if they have clearly demonstrated the following: effectiveness, safety, feasibility and cost effectiveness. If the answer to one of the earlier evaluation criteria is no, or if it is not clear that any one of the criteria has been established, then it may not be appropriate to apply that intervention. Ideally, the testing of the intervention should have been conducted

by individuals or organizations that do not serve to profit from its implementation and are independent of the company that is marketing the product. An example of this is the resource Critically Evaluating School Mental Health which can be found on the website,¹ and is available to schools, school boards or Ministries of Education who request this service.

The evidence for effectiveness should include a randomized controlled trial with a placebo or no-intervention control arm and the results should be both ecologically meaningful and statistically significant. The program should be assessed for its safety, particularly if it addresses an issue that may be associated with harmful outcome, such as a suicide prevention program (to ensure that application of the program does not lead to increases in suicide or self-harm). Furthermore, the intervention should be feasible, that is, it must be able to be applied in the real world in the location desired. Programs that very tightly adhere to “fidelity” criteria are often not feasible to apply. Programs that are “add-ons” to existing in school activities may be difficult to add for logistic or pedagogic reasons. And finally, if at all possible, programs should have demonstrated cost-effectiveness or be deemed to be cost neutral in their application. This is particularly important during times of economic concern and tightening of educational and health care budgets.

“Regardless of whether those programs address mental health promotion, prevention or are designed for specific interventions, these should pass the scientific sniff test: do they do what they say they do and how do we know?”

Four of the most well-known approaches used to address the earlier issue are the Oxford Center for Evidence Based Medicine Levels of Evidence; the GRADE criteria; the “What Works Repository”: Evidence Based Effectiveness Analysis Classification Framework; and The Society of Prevention Research Standards of Evidence. Their application requires expertise in research evaluation that is not easily available to educators or senior administrators in educational systems. Currently, a pilot program is underway to determine the feasibility and

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potential utility of creating a national database of independent evaluations of various school based mental health programs for educators and education administrators to assist them in their decision making about program purchase and implementation.

Unfortunately, there is often little good evidence that many highly marketed mental health programs do what they say they do. For example, in a recent systematic review, Wei and Kutcher found that in an independent evaluation of globally applied school mental health programs, fewer than 10 per cent demonstrated high levels of effectiveness or safety and none had considered cost effectiveness in their evaluations. The take home message here, at this time then, is buyer beware

For example, two commonly applied school based suicide prevention programs (Yellow Ribbon and Signs of Suicide) have not been shown to prevent suicide and a recent study of Signs of Suicide reported 5 suicide attempts in the intervention group compared to none in the control group, yet both programs continue to be marketed to schools. The peer reviewed scientific evidence for the well know program safe TALK consists of one paper reporting that 17 veterinary students in Glasgow Scotland liked the program and thought it helped them. Hardly the evidence needed to support its implementation. Knowing that the program is effective, safe and less expensive than an alternative activity is essential to determine before application in the school setting.

Changing How Mental Health Care is Delivered

Finally, this integrated approach to addressing youth mental health in the school setting will need substantial changes in how mental health care is delivered. The current system of mental health as a silo service, essentially divorced from usual health care, is not effective, un-sustainable, stigma enhancing and unable to meet the mental health care needs of young people and their families. Enhancing the capacity of primary care health providers to seamlessly be able to provide mental health care as an integrated part of their usual provision of health care is needed to more effectively and more appropriately meet the needs of young people and their families.

Such direction is beginning to occur in some parts of Canada. In British Columbia, for example, the Physician Support Program of the British Columbia Medical Association has

developed and extensively field tested an entire training and capacity building program for primary care physicians.² Early outcome details are positive and statistically significant. Time will tell if this approach will percolate across Canada.

Overall, this is an exciting time for school mental health. The breadth of opportunities to now advance improvements for the holistic health of young people in schools is historically unprecedented. And, while the challenges are considerable, inroads, based on good evidence, have been made. As long as educators, young people, parents, health providers and others work collaboratively with each other, sharing best in class resources

and promoting collective rather than parochial solutions to common problems, the common goal we share—improving the lives and helping to optimize outcomes for young people—will be achieved. ■

¹ www.teenmentalhealth.org
² www.bcma.org/node/1942

AUTHOR BIO

Stan Kutcher is the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, and Director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Center at the Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Center. A complete list of further reading materials, provided by Dr. Kutcher, is available at www.mass.mb.ca.

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Using Standards of Practice to Drive School Growth:

STORIES FROM THE FIELD COMPETENCY TWO:

Embodying Visionary Leadership

By Carmen Mombourquette

In the first contributed article, we spoke of the first of seven core professional competencies for principals which emerged during our research into the implementation of school principal standards in Alberta, fostering effective relationships. This month, we continue to share our research findings with the second of seven competencies, embodying visionary leadership. Read on to discover why and how this essential competency, which when practiced by education leaders will optimize learning and development for all students.

Adhering to the Guidelines: What the Literature Says

“The principal collaboratively involves the school community in creating and sustaining shared school values, vision, mission and goals” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 4).

Many researchers have shown that the complex issue of school vision influences student learning gains. According to Alberta Education (2009), the successful principal needs to be “guided by an educational philosophy that is based on sound research, personal experiences, and ongoing reflection” (p. 4). The principal must also be proficient in communicating this educational philosophy to key stakeholders in the community. Core to the principal who embodies visionary leadership is the belief in education and students’ ability to learn. When a principal is guided by an educational philosophy, he/she can establish goals relating to the perceived needs of the school community, further influencing student achievement.

Due to the collaboration between principals and their school districts, an awareness of the district’s vision and mission for education must be maintained by each principal. Research has revealed that an alignment of school goals with district goals, for example around learning improvement, has produced sustainable gains in student achievement (Bedard, Mombourquette, & Aitken, 2013). This sharing of leadership, referred to in the literature as distributed leadership, increases, rather than diminishes, the demand for leadership by the principal (Leithwood, Mascall, & Stauss, 2009).

Engaging the school community in identifying and addressing areas for school improvement helps the principal lead the visioning process.

Stories from the Field : Adhering to the Guidelines

Framing questions that lead the community towards discovering more effective means of meeting student learning needs has shown to be effective in helping the process of vision setting evolve (Copland, 2003).

The relationship between the culture of the school and a principal's instructional leadership is further dependent upon the presence and creation of group interaction. When principals are free to collaborate with teachers to form a positive school culture, instructional leadership and culture blend, benefiting student learning (Seashore-Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). This is an important consideration as culture influences student learning, for better or for worse. For school culture to foster positive impact on student learning, a principal must facilitate change in accordance to current and future school community needs. A strong sense of community, emphasizing learning and setting high expectations for all students, and caring for the well-being of all school members are factors of school culture that result in positive influence.

A principal who effectively embodies visionary leadership must first display vision – an ability to see and articulate a compelling and improved future for the school followed by the development of goals to achieve this objective (Ylimaki, 2006). Then, to ensure that the visionary goals are actualized, the principal needs to effectively analyze a wide range of data. Finally, when goals are achieved, it is important to communicate and celebrate the school's accomplishments, inspiring continuous growth.

How Are Principals Measuring Up?

Through our interviews with 10 high-achieving principals, themes around embodying visionary leadership emerged. All interviewees spoke of their school's unique driving force when asked about the vision of their respective schools. Some visions focused on specific

ideas such as being child-centred or community-focused, while others strove to attain more generalized idealistic standards of being truthful, respectful, and responsible.

Principals shared stories that expanded on the ways in which their visions were embodied by themselves, staff, and/or students. Many expressed their role as keepers and spreaders of the vision within the school community. In this same capacity, they were driven by their own visions of education, while at the same time worked collaboratively with their school communities to further develop a shared sense of vision, mission, and goals.

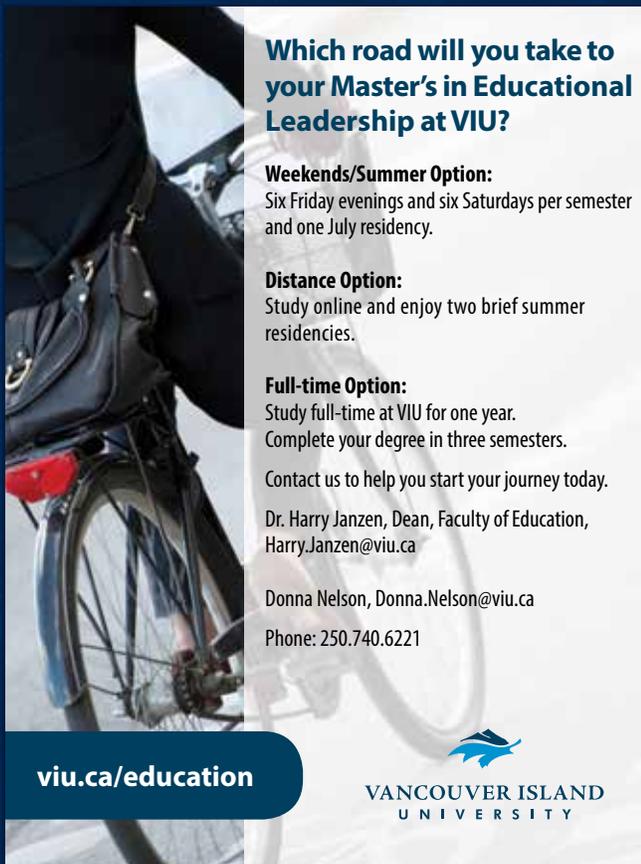
The important role of data in the accomplishment of vision, mission, and goals was also noted. Varying sources of data were utilized to achieve the proposed plans. Both quantitative (from items like provincially administered tests and surveys) and qualitative (student focus groups sessions, parental feedback, community assessments) data sources were used to assure vision fulfillment.

“Context matters”, is a phrase commonly heard in educational circles. Context proved critical in the vision, mission, and goals developed by each of the principals interviewed in our study. Though philosophically similar, the approaches taken by the principals were widely different in practice. Familiarization with the school and its people was a crucial first step for each of our principals when they first arrived on their school premises. Understanding the school and the people that made it unique was achieved in the first year through conversation and exploration. Only after this knowledge was acquired did they begin the process of conceptualizing and putting into motion their respective vision, mission, and goals.

Establishing trusting relationships, whether intentionally or by accident, was a necessary precursor to change for many of the principals. As part of this trust-forming, principals presented appropriate data when proposing their innovative ideas. This strategy not only led to vision conversations, but allowed for the improvement of the overall quality of education in their schools by attending to the needs of staff and students.

Interview Conclusions

That school vision influences student learning gains is supported strongly in the literature. Based on our assumptions that because districts had ready-made visions articulated for schools, and there is lively professional skepticism that the visioning process produces more hot air than purposeful direction, we were not sure our sample would be as engaged in visioning as we found them to be. Principals showed us their articulated visions in a number of visual expressions, but what was noteworthy for most was that the “official” language of the vision was frequently replaced by more down-to-earth language, such as “we are here to serve the kids and their parents,” or some related theme close to that sentiment. Mintzberg (1979) pointed out that one tendency of “professional bureaucracies” like schools was that of “provider capture,” where professionals with high job autonomy and a great deal of discretion to work directly with their clients (students) may bend the vision and goals of an organization to serve their own needs at the expense of the clients. The exhortation that “we are here for the kids and their parents” we think has its power



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in refocusing teaching professionals, at regular intervals, to consider whose interests they should be serving. Schools and educators are not immune to the seduction of provider capture.

Identification with the local community was seen as an important factor in refining the pedagogical and affective goals of the vision. School goals are more concrete expressions of vision statements, and in our sample, principals made sure that the number of goals was small and their objectives significant. Gone are the days when school goals took on the characterization of a laundry list that keeps getting bigger each year, to the point where trying to do everything means accomplishing nothing. The vision of the principals kept the focus, as articulated by goal development and implementation, clear and concise.

From what the principals told us about the visioning process it was clear that they had a strong sense of beliefs that they actively communicated. For example, several were committed to ensuring that inclusionary practices were embraced in the school community and they would not allow complacency on this issue. Their beliefs were well defined and then communicated and in turn blended with those of the teachers and the community. Beliefs formed the bedrock upon which the collective vision rested. When disputes arose around vision issues, and they did, principals were able to negotiate an agreeable way forward because of the strong connection between personal beliefs, community context, and the mutually agreed way forward. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Carmen Mombourquette is an Associate Professor of Education specializing in Educational Leadership at the University of Lethbridge. For many years he was an elementary, junior high school, and high school principal in Alberta and Ontario.

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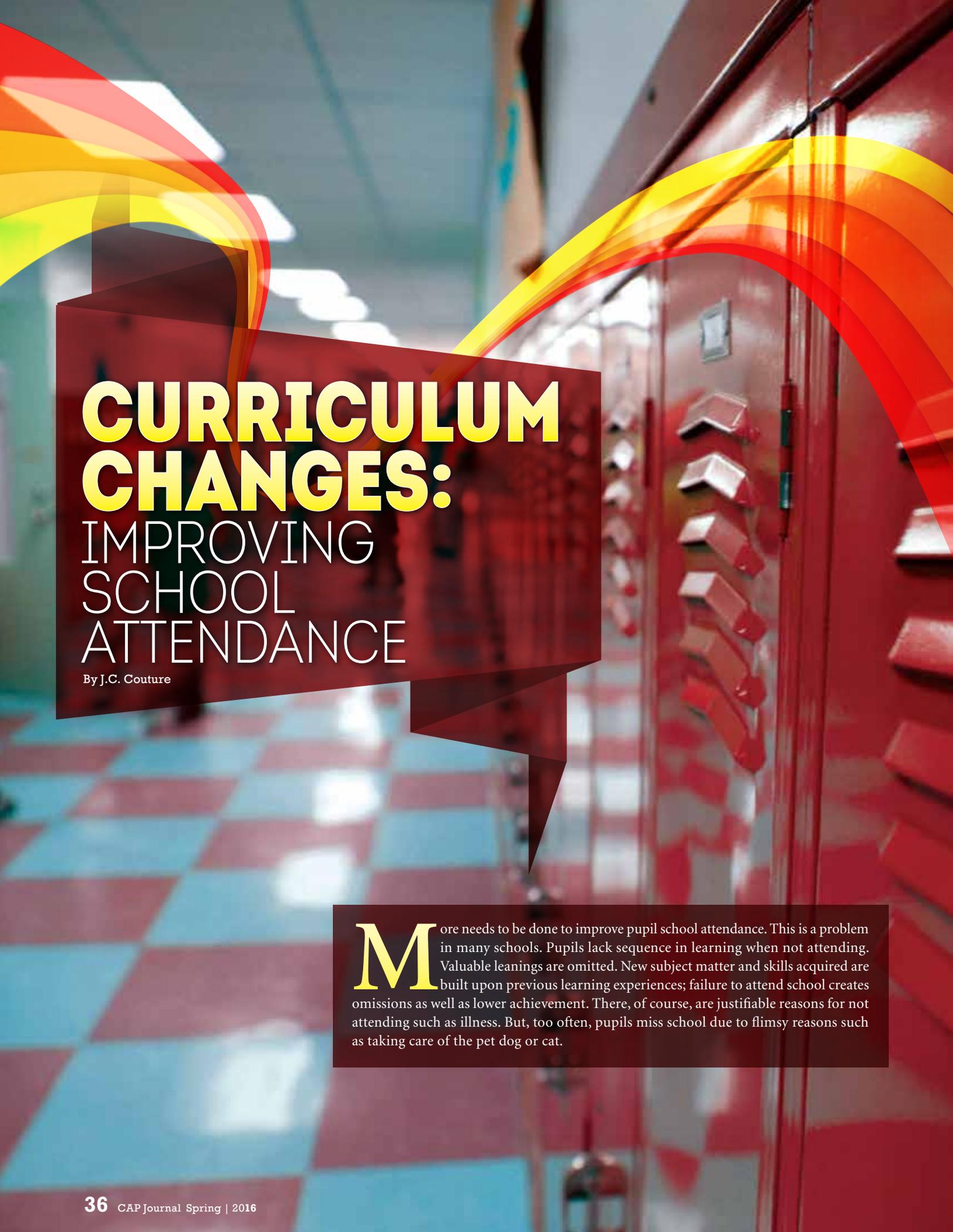
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CURRICULUM CHANGES:

IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

By J.C. Couture

More needs to be done to improve pupil school attendance. This is a problem in many schools. Pupils lack sequence in learning when not attending. Valuable leanings are omitted. New subject matter and skills acquired are built upon previous learning experiences; failure to attend school creates omissions as well as lower achievement. There, of course, are justifiable reasons for not attending such as illness. But, too often, pupils miss school due to flimsy reasons such as taking care of the pet dog or cat.

To encourage school attendance, the school environment needs to be free from dangers, including the following:

- harassment in its different forms
- bullying situations
- unkind, uncaring teachers and supervisors
- racial prejudice and bias
- rudeness by pupils toward each other
- inferior teaching with teachers being unable to motivate pupils (Ediger, 2008).

No doubt, learning goes downhill when a negative classroom and school environment is in evidence; pupils might wish to stay away from school when unpleasant settings occur. Add to that, a home setting which is uncaring, hostile, as well as a neighborhood fraught with dangers. Poverty is a major item which hinders achievement in which learners suffer from inadequate food, clothing, medical care, and shelter. In winter, the choice for individuals might well be between heat or meat in attempting to keep up with paying bills. It is no secret that in suburban schools where family income is high, pupils achieve at a much higher rate than in lower income urban schools (See Kindervater, 2010).

Pupils must experience a safe environment in going to and from school. Too many pupils are afraid of going to school, as well as what happens during school time. Absences occur in these cases.

Improving School Attendance

There is much that teachers can do in lesson and unit planning which in its implementation encourages learner attendance. When supervising university student teachers, the writer has noticed the interest factor in pupil progress. The interest factor permeates excitement in learning. There are planned lessons which fascinate children and their attention is focused upon what is presented. These children are then interested in what transpires, not in boredom or misbehavior. Thus, for example, when children watch tadpoles moving around in a gallon glass container filled with pond water, their wholehearted fascination with these happenings is remarkable. Here, they ask a plethora of questions of each other and of the teachers. A lively discussion ensues, especially on how tadpoles can become frogs. Here, each pupil desires to attend school! Many reference sources are utilized to secure information.

To be sure, observing live tadpoles is more interesting than a formal writing activity in poetry to be turned in to the teacher for grading purposes. But the pupils' enthusiasm for the live tadpoles can be passed on to such an activity. Enjoyable forms of poetry such as couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, and haiku might then be correlated. Poetry writing which is introduced to pupils needs to meet the following standards:

- it must make sense whereby pupils see models of each being stressed
- it is introduced enthusiastically, not in a dull and boring manner
- it emphasizes the teacher reading aloud, with voice inflection, in bringing in the interest factor in writing poetry through modeling
- it seamlessly correlates the lesson/unit being studied, such as science/social studies, with poetry
- it encourages sharing of products with classmates
- it may emphasize individual work, collaboration, and/or class as a whole endeavors with respect and acceptance of others being in evidence (See Rojas and Manning, 2011).

In addition to interest factors to encourage school attendance, the classroom teacher also must emphasize relevancy as a key concept in teaching. How can learnings be made relevant? The learner must perceive that what is achieved is significant. The toad/frog population is going downhill in number, and there needs to be balance in the ecosystem. Pupils might well consider this as a problem area in answer to the query, "Why?" Gathering information from computer sources, among others, might well provide relevant information. This aids pupils in broadening their horizons in thinking about animal life and its relationship to the environment. When relating poetry as another avenue of communication, the learner expands the scope of learning. As units and lessons progress, pupils will notice more avenues of vital ways of written communication such as write-ups of science experiments, reports, summaries, outlines, diary entries, logs, among others. Integrating content being studied with diverse communication skills is vital. Interesting, fascinating experiences in school improve school attendance (Kumar, 2011).

Teachers must plan for and involve pupil purpose in ongoing experiences in teaching and learning. With purpose, learners perceive the need for learning. In whatever the writer participates in, he/she must experience purpose, or drudgery might be felt in the ongoing task. Thus, one perceives purpose in reading a novel to see how it ends. There will be much suspense here in reading. Also, individuals may feel a need to read during the day and that purpose may be for sheer enjoyment. Enjoyable experiences in reading may include sustained silent reading. During a designated time, pupils are free to select a library book of their very own choosing. These books might pertain to amphibians and reptiles. A highly exciting discussion followed in the writer's supervision of a university student teacher class when pupils presented information in the ongoing lesson pertaining to what had been read. The content came solely from a library book. It was surprising with the excitement of content presented by different pupils pertaining to what had been read from library books (See Rodgers and Basca, 2011). Pupils tend to want to come to school when the learning activities are interesting as well as exciting. This cuts down on absences and tardiness!



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There are a plethora of specific ways to emphasize pupil regular attendance in school. If, on the average, 10 per cent of the pupils are absent/ tardy on a given school day, the names of these pupils must be available to make home calls to ascertain reasons for this occurrence. Alarm clocks may need to be furnished to homes where these chronic problems exist. Parents must assist children to get up on time so they are ready to get on the school bus or walk to school, if the distance is short. Programmed messages might be sent to the home as wakeup calls. There are numerous ways to remind parents of the importance of children being in school on time. Among others, the following are salient:

- sending a brochure to homes on the importance of educating children. E-mails and letters should also be sent periodically.
- presenting relevant information at parent/teacher conferences, as well as at open house pertaining to the importance of coming to school and on time.
- the school district shoring up and modifying weaknesses of present day policies on regular school attendance.

In conclusion, regular school attendance is important since each pupil loses out in sequential progress if there are unexcused absences and tardiness. Parents need continual reminders of how salient this is. Whatever a learner loses out on, he/she must be assisted in closing the gap. If this is not taken care of, then a pupil regresses in achievement. ■

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Leader, Know Thyself

By Susan E. Murray

Principal, leader, dad, mom, spouse, son, daughter, friend - these are only a few of the roles and titles that we wear on a daily basis. Each of these require us to be responsible, to be genuine, to be something to someone.

As a principal, we have made a choice to lead. We spend countless hours leading, managing and engaging to build relationships based on common vision and action for student success. An increased sense of accountability and visibility is coupled with the challenge of time for thoughtful reflection. Communication is instant and expected. The ultimate mandate of schools has not changed but public expectations, social media and economic pressures have increased the sense of urgency.

Daily, we continue to lead and make choices, hoping our decisions are wise. Often, these decisions are grounded in care and awareness of others. What we often neglect is ourselves. How do we continue to nurture our own growth and development as a leader, ensuring that we integrate the meaningful components of our personal and professional lives? How do we keep it real?

Both academic and mainstream literature provides insight into the behaviors and competencies of great leaders. While no one “best” approach or competency model is promoted, what is often most telling is the story of the “leadership journey” of the leader. Bill George, in his work on authentic leadership (2007), through the stories of effective leaders, shares common insights and practices that allow them to “Keep it Real”. These leaders demonstrate strong self-awareness, balance their motivations, are grounded in values, have a strong support team and inspire others to lead.

Know Thyself...Self-awareness is essential to growth as a leader. Truly knowing yourself, both your strengths and weaknesses, is critical to personal and professional growth. This is not always an easy task, requiring honest reflection and feedback from trusted colleagues. Taking the time to be introspective is a key component of your leadership development. Your leadership journey is unique and reflective of the successes and failures that you have experienced. It is these experiences that also define the values and motivations for both work and life goals.

Value Relationships...Who is there for you? In our many roles, it is essential to define the key relationships, the people who are our mentors, our colleagues, our family and friends. Leadership may be a lonely job but by placing value on these relationships we develop a strong, open network for support. These are the people who make you feel guilty if you miss the coffee date and gently remind you to turn off your phone. Strong social networks provide support,

create confidence and encourage honest feedback. Effective leaders not only craft these valuable relationships but also continue to build and invest in them both personally and professionally, knowing they are grounded in authenticity and respect.

Stay Grounded... One of the most recent and popular topics in management literature is the concept of “balance”- the ability to manage and maintain your professional and personal self. Reflect for a moment on the daily choices you make both at work and home. To what do you say no? One leader noted, “The world can shape you if you let it. To have a sense of yourself as you live, you must make conscious choices.” (George, 2007)

Think about this. Are you the same person at home that you are at work? Would your family be surprised to see how you interact with people at school? Are you able to integrate your personal and professional self? In dealing with the stresses of your role, are you able to maintain equilibrium, to integrate the key elements of your life that are important to you? As we strive to create safe and successful schools, we have to remember to take care of ourselves too. Knowing what makes you “tick”, what brings you joy, what keeps you grounded is vital to your role as a leader. If you don’t take care of yourself, how will you be able to lead others?

Leading others...inspiring others. As leaders, we truly value the impact of our team and recognize both the challenges and joys of working together. Are your actions and daily work inspiring others? Are you able to bring your whole self to your work? Do you model good time management and healthy living? Do you demonstrate the value of relationships? Do you encourage your staff and students to “keep it real”?

The job of a leader is daunting, yet I somehow believe that those of you reading this journal appreciate the successes of students and teachers on a daily basis. It’s why you chose to be a school leader, why you continue to seek professional learning with a focus on student success. As principals, you are experts at taking care of others, of motivating the disengaged, of supporting the weak and advocating for those in need. You make a meaningful impact on many people, especially when you keep it real. Find those moments for you to reflect, to keep the coffee date, to realign your work with your values, or just simply to breathe. Take care of yourself. ■

AUTHOR BIO

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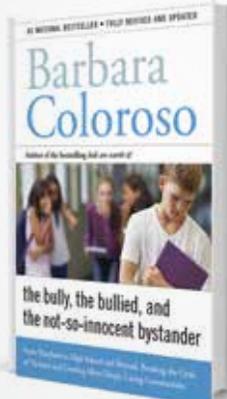
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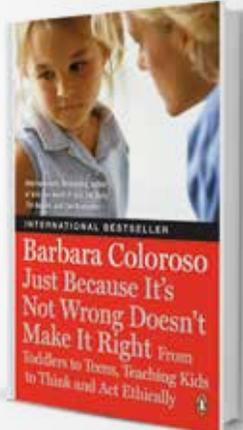
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