

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Implementing Mental Health Literacy: Model, Scaffold, Coach

School District #73 (Kamloops/Thompson, BC)

Background

For the past 3 years, secondary physical and health education teachers have expressed low levels of confidence in facilitating the Mental Health Literacy (MHL) component of the redesigned B.C. Physical and Health Education curriculum. This is due to a lack of knowledge expressed by teachers as well as a lack of evidence-based resources available. A total of 12 of the 19 curricular competencies in the B.C. curriculum address the attainment and maintenance of physical and mental health.

Promising Practice

Knowing that teachers were expressing a knowledge gap in facilitating MHL, the school district was looking for ways to intentionally model skills and dispositions to scaffold MHL so teachers feel confident facilitating it. The idea was to reduce barriers for accessing evidence-based resources by creating one point of access to quality mental health literacy curriculum and research. In January 2018, five secondary physical and health education teachers piloted an evidence-based mental health curriculum designed to improve both teachers' and students' mental health literacy. The purpose of this pilot project was to scaffold MHL in teachers to improve understanding of mental health, reduce stigma, and support the prevention and management of challenges in students.



CONNECTING STUDENTS
TO THEIR FUTURE

A MHL curriculum supports strategies and actions committed to promoting positive mental health for both staff and students to increase awareness and knowledge of mental health needs, and decrease the stigma that is often associated with mental illness. For the MHL pilot project, teachers wanted to draw connections to core competency development for students as a metric to provide evidence of personal growth and shifts in thinking as it relates to understanding how to obtain and maintain good mental health, reducing stigma, and increasing help-seeking efficacy. To *model* the content for the teacher participants, a half day professional development day was provided to review teacher and student tasks, determined entry point for teacher facilitation with the intention of releasing responsibility to the teachers. To *scaffold* teachers, as a prerequisite to participate, they had to take the [Bringing Mental Health to Schools](#) free online course. The *coach* aspect provided teachers with targeted support, guidance, encouragement, and relevant resources to implement the new Mental Health Curriculum.

A Mental Health Team was then developed to work with teacher participants to come up with guidelines for MHL curriculum facilitation, building safe plans, establishing respectful vocabulary, and knowing when to support if required. The school board then piloted the MHL curriculum in grade 9 Physical and Health Education to build capacity, competency, and confidence in teachers. To capture the learning of the pilot project, various teachers within the school board met to reflect on the process of learning mental health literacy content, delivery, and assessment of curriculum content, and time duration for integration into PHE curriculum. They collected both student pre/post assessments and interviewed students and teachers about their experiences in this project.

Impact

Creating a one-point MHL access for physical and health education teachers has inspired further inquiry into quality evidence-based research. The pilot teachers are excited to share their learning journey with counsellors and teachers in the implementation of a district MHL plan. On all school sites of the pilot project, students were intrigued with the interrelated states of mental health and signs and symptoms of eight mental illnesses. Students that were struggling with mental health issues, were glad their peers were gaining knowledge and learning about mental health. The district-wide launch of the MHL curriculum will track the number of students involved, collect student pre/post information, and debrief with teachers in order to assess if the initiative has improved the MHL of both students and teachers.

Sustainability

In transitioning from the MHL pilot project to the district-wide launch of the project, the district has embraced the *Model, Scaffold, Coach* approach. Schools in the district have now developed a school team of counsellors and a physical and health education teachers that are collaborating on MHL curriculum delivery, choice in content, and school timeline. The school teams are collecting pre/post responses over a three-year period for the district to track and evaluate the program. The district has also committed to continue to host professional development opportunities to introduce MHL curriculum for this project.

Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- Reach out to a local mental health advocacy or education centre and book a workshop for teachers or students to learn strategies to maintain their mental health.
- Research programs and approaches that other schools within your school board (or province/territory) are doing to improve their mental health literacy skills and implement them at your school.
- Create a mental health literacy campaign that includes posters with mental health tips, sharing *Mental Health Moments* during morning announcements, and building mental health strategies into school assemblies and classroom activities.

A PHE Canada campaign



Presented by

