Teachers, teacher education and mental health literacy

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The Landscape

Policy

- Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario’s Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy
  - Education, Children & Youth, Health ministries
  - 2011-14: focus on children and youth
- Goals:
  1. Fast access
  2. Early identification/intervention
  3. Identify and rectify service gaps

Practice

- Mental Health Leaders in all school boards (SMH Assist)
- Strengthening alliances with community agencies and building capacity in schools to identify and respond to mental health needs
- More mental health workers, nurses working with schools
- Role of teachers:
  - Creating caring schools and classrooms
  - Building social/emotional learning skills
  - Helping to identify students in need
Survey with 3,913 K-12 teachers at the Thames Valley District School Board (87% return rate); 14 years teaching experience

Key findings:
- Least aware of steps to access mental health services
- Not confident in talking to parents
- Not sure that children with mental health challenges belonged in their classrooms

Wanted more:
- professional support in schools, training
- peer support
- opportunities for collaborative peer and expert consultation
- but did NOT want web-based resources, print or video resources
Teacher candidates

- 700 teacher candidates took part in a day-long workshop on mental health for students and teachers at the Faculty of Education
- Keynote address by Dr. Ian Manion
- Workshops featured teachers and school leaders, and focused on self-care as well as supporting children’s mental health
- Resource fair
- Students found it very helpful, but wanted more.
The first steps - what are we teaching the teachers?

• National review of Teacher Education programs in Canada (n=66)
  • Regulated by each province/territory
  • One- and two-year programs

• Reviewed courses offered at 66 teacher education programs and identified 400 that appeared to be about mental health/well being

• Did not include courses that were labelled or identified as ‘special education’

• 213 courses were identified that had at least one of the four criteria
1. The title of the course includes key words (e.g. mental health, stress, well being, resilience)
2. The description includes:
   1. skills, strategies, evidence based practices
   2. building effective relationships
   3. Key words identifying that the course addresses mental health
Mental Health Literacy for Teachers

- Elective, online course
- 9 weeks (.25 credit)
- Guiding principles:
  - Holistic approach
  - Mental health on a continuum
  - Relationships make the difference.
  - Focus on what mental health ‘looks like’ in the classroom
  - Focus on how mental health impacts learning, and what teachers can do to support and assist students
- 38 students, fall and winter terms

http://www.edu.uwo.ca/source4allcourses/5449_MentalHealth_Rodger_ci.html
http://media2.uwo.ca/RODGER-Week-1.4-Mental-Health-Literacy.html
Next steps

• Evaluation of the online course
• Building a funding application to CIHR to develop, implement and evaluate a much better course across institutions/locations/groups
  • Teaching and learning groups
  • Teacher candidates
  • Parents
  • Foster parents
  • Medical students
• Development of a ‘mental health’ focus option in our teacher education program for 2015
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