

Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum Secondary

>> In Sean O'Toole's, writer's craft course, writing topics often have ties to mental health.

>> My obsession addiction. Now that is one that isn't just as it seems because as soon you'd hear that, you think alcohol, drugs, that kind of thing. This could be anything at all that --

>> Where sometimes students bear their thoughts and feelings.

>> It can be lighthearted. It can be intense. Whatever the case may be.

>> The students say writing helps them to discover who they are.

>> What they're writing is like the best way to like understand yourself and for like other people, like even if you were to give it to like your parents like for other people to understand you too.

>> And for the community around them.

>> I do try to make it that they're writing about things that matter to them and things that have a lot to do with truth and accepting things. And being okay with things. And it's not all about that. That's -- you see a lot of cathartic there. But it's -- you know it's also -- they can be also about, you know, how you see the world or experiences you've had that have been funny. Or a great bonding experience. You know that kind of thing.

>> Opportunities to learn about mental health and well being currently exist within the curriculum with the most direct connections in health and physical education, social sciences, and humanities, and technological education. But learning about mental health and well being can be incorporated into all subject areas.

>> It does pervade the curriculum in all aspects, in all the different areas of curriculum. For example, if we're talking teaching the concept of proportion in math. Why don't we talk about the proportion of mental illnesses across Canada as opposed to the proportion of raw materials or something?

>> I could be an English teacher. I could be a history teacher. I could be a phys-ed teacher but really, I'm teaching them about -- I'm a life teacher, I guess. Does that make sense?

>> In her English course, Grace infuses opportunities to learn about mental health and well being through novel studies. The students are reading, writing, and speaking about resiliency and themes related to mental health like challenging assumptions and thinking about perspectives.

>> In the book, right, she seemed like out of it kind of. Right? Like not all there but what you saw from the video, she was like a regular little old lady with paintings.

>> I mean I'm not an expert but you know, you kind of -- you read about these things so you wonder based on the behaviour in the book. But now, I think we've changed our ideas, right? Once we -- we've started talking about our own parents, right? When we're looking at interviewing our own parents. And by doing that, that's going to change everything. All right. Because now we got to look. We got to look in here.

>> If you look closely, you may be able to see that some of the meaning of this artwork is also worked into the medium with the raw canvas and the materials students used in this board wide art project focusing on supports for mental health and well being. While there's a cathartic value in creating art and the display of the artwork helps to challenge stereotypes and change perspectives, this project also shows the breadth and depth of opportunities for a student learning about mental health through the arts curriculum.

>> The project addresses the 3 strands in the curriculum which are creating and presenting. So they're doing self expression and using media to put across a theme about, in this case, mental health and wellness. Then there's reflecting, responding, and analyzing. They did a write up on it. They really thought this through and that definitely hits that strand. And then also foundations which is terminology learning different ways of displaying your work.

>> Jane also sees links within Native studies.

>> So we talk about being in balance a lot in terms of the medicine wheel in the Native studies courses. And I support the teachers. We've done a lot of art projects in the Native studies courses as well. And so it definitely it links into what they're doing. I think you can use mental health initiatives in any subject area. I think teaching students to pause and breath and again respond instead of react before there's a test. Before there's anything that they're about to do.

>> These students in a grade 9 health class are also using art as a culminating activity to discussions on thoughts on what wellness means and what they want their peers to know.

>> Treat others the way you want to be treated.

>> The work is explicitly tied to the curriculum. Students are developing living skills, personal skills, interpersonal skills, critical and creative thinking. And also skills for healthy relationships.

>> I wrote be you because there's nothing truer than that. You should always be yourself and you should never let anybody change that.

>> And their work will extend beyond this class. The artwork will be showcased in a busy school hallway and will act as a conversation starter for other students.

>> So they know that they're not alone and there's other people going through the same things.

>> In another health class, a four corners activity.

>> Self-care is the most important part of my day.

>> Well looking at yourself.

>> How many grade 9 and 10 students do you think chose to take this stand that it's absolutely important or somewhat important? None. The majority said self-care was selfish but the mental health counsellor who is co-teaching the lesson offers another perspective.

>> I am important. I am valued. By taking care of myself, it's not being selfish. It's giving me the opportunity to be better and more present in my other relationships.

>> And after class, students said that message was one they wanted to know more about.

>> I'd like to hear about ways you can take care of yourself. So it's nice to hear. You're important too. You matter too so you have to take care of yourself.

>> I am really tired because --

>> Educators use a range of instructional strategies to promote discussion.

>> I want students' voices to be heard. Their voice and their feelings and their emotions and their health to give them the confidence to take a stand for their well being.

>> The discussions give students an opportunity to learn the meaning behind mental health language which helps reduce stigma and develops an understanding of mental illness from the perspective of care for others.

>> And I feel like depression is a word that's misused and misunderstood. Because people don't actually understand the true meaning and the true affect of what it is. It's not just being sad over one day. It's a long-term thing, right?

>> It's not the role or the responsibility of educators to diagnose and treat student mental health issues but mental health is fundamental to student learning, achievement, and well being.

>> You're not just looking at a physical or a mental or emotional aspect. You're looking at everything including that spiritual. So there's almost 4 elements to a person. All are equally important to be healthy.

>> There's more to come. Watch the video supportive learning environment to see more on the classroom environments and to learn more about resources, watch continuing conversation.