



## Research Snapshot

# Mental health literacy curriculum in teacher preparation programs: Helping teacher candidates meet the mental health needs of students

### What is this research about?

Mental health directly impacts the outcomes of children and youth. Schools have long been recognized as an integral part in providing mental health related education and support to students. Teachers are in a unique position to act as positive influences with their students. In order for teachers to respond to the rising demands from students and boards, more training is necessary at a teacher preparation level. Curriculum focused on mental health literacy needs to be nationally implemented in teacher preparation programs.

### What did the researchers do?

Researchers conducted an environmental scan of teacher preparation programs in Canada to gain an overview of the mental health-related courses offered to teacher candidates. The scan rated courses on four criteria to determine the degree to which each course addressed issues of mental health literacy:

- The topic
- The course description
- A focus on forming helping relationships with student
- Relevance of course title to mental health literacy



### What you need to know:

The concerns of education stakeholders about teachers' mental health literacy mirror the lack of opportunities provided in their training. There is a need for a formal mental health literacy curriculum in teacher preparation programs. In addition, current teacher candidates must explore different avenues to prepare for the mental health needs they will face in their classrooms.

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Researchers also spoke to 50 teachers, students, and administrators to gather their perspectives on mental health in education.

### What did the researchers find?

The scan revealed that teacher preparation programs provide an extremely limited number of options for pre-service teachers to learn about mental health literacy. Of the courses reviewed, 217 of them met at least one criterion and only two overall were able to meet all four. The interviews and focus groups revealed that all stakeholders believed teacher candidates are not being adequately prepared to meet the mental health issues impacting their prospective students, classrooms, and schools. The report proposed the development and implementation of a mental health literacy curriculum in teacher preparation programs across Canada.

## How can you use this research?

As a current pre-service teacher, the developments of a mental health literacy curriculum will not directly impact your training. After graduation, mental health certificates such as those offered through Wilfred Laurier University will be available to you. Professional development may be provided through your school board. There are many ways of engaging in mental health initiatives during your training to prepare for work after graduation.

### At the faculty:

Your faculty may offer a professional development day focused specifically on mental health literacy. If you have a particular area of interest, reach out to your program coordinator and suggest workshops that you feel would be useful. If you have the qualifications, you could design and lead a workshop yourself.

You could also partner with faculty clubs, such as a student-led Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA), to discuss mental health issues that impact particular student populations. Or, approach your student council to organise and sponsor a guest speaker from a local mental health organization to come in and lead a lecture

Further, consider enlisting the help of a faculty member to support you in the design of a course that covers topics such as teacher roles in mental health and education, and child and youth mental health.

### During practicum:

With the support of your Associate Teacher (AT), challenge yourself to incorporate mental health topics in your lessons. There are many resources available to teachers that can aid you in this. Approach your school's mental health lead and ask about ways of getting involved at the school.

If you have the opportunity to attend a professional development day with your AT, ask if a mental health literacy option is provided, and voice your interest in attending it. Even if your AT is not attending, you might be able to attend with another teacher from your school.

### Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Rodger, S., Hibbert, K., Leschied, A., Pickel, L., Stepien, M., Atkins, M., Koenig, A., Woods, J., & Vandermeer, M. (2014). Shaping a mental health curriculum for Canada's schools: Rationale and a brief overview. *Physical Health Education Journal*, 80, 28-29.

### About the Authors:

**Susan Roger**, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Kathy Hibbert**, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Alan Leschied**, Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Laurel Pickel**, Western University. **Magdalena Stepien**, Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Melanie-Anne Atkins**, Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Adam Koenig**, Western University. **Jessica Woods**, Western University. **Matthew Vandermeer**, Western University.

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**About this Summary:** This summary was written by Jenny Kassen, MA Candidate at Western University. For further information about Western's Centre for School Mental Health, visit [www.edu.uwo.ca/csmh](http://www.edu.uwo.ca/csmh).