

BC Counsellor

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Going Upstream, Vol. 1: Social Justice in School Counselling

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Health Crisis



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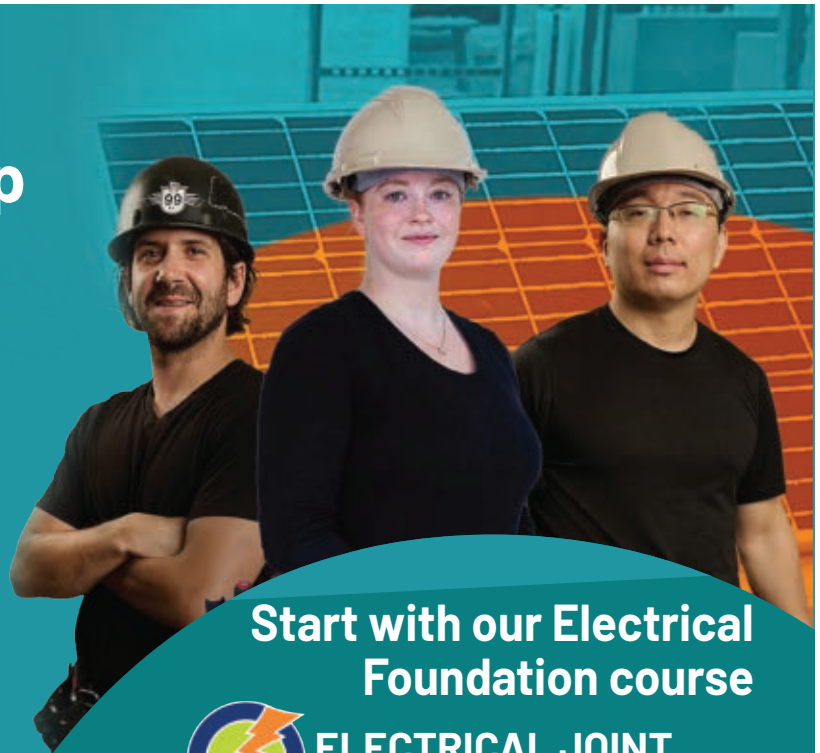
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The BCSCA is a Professional Specialist Association of the B.C. Teachers' Federation. It is made up of members of the B.C.T.F. who are mainly teacher/counsellors or those who are interested in counselling issues.

The objectives of the BCSCA are to:

- Promote school counselling in the province of B.C.
- Define and promote professional standards and qualifications for school counsellors
- Define and promote the role of the school counsellor
- Encourage the formation of chapters to establish a strong professional organization
- Promote professional growth in school counselling
- Support research in counselling
- Publish periodicals in pursuit of the purpose of the association
- Define and promote adequate counselling facilities

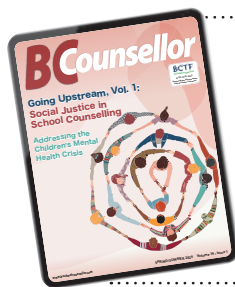


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BY NORBERTA HEINRICHS
PRESIDENT, BC SCHOOL
COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION

It is a pleasure and an honour to introduce myself to you as the new President of the BCSCA

Dear BC School Counsellors' Association (BCSCA) membership,

My name is Norberta Heinrichs, and I am writing to you from the Coast Salish unceded territory of the Qualicum First Nations. My privilege started when my father followed a group of Portuguese settlers from an island in the Atlantic to another island in the Pacific, later sending for my mother and their unborn child.

I have been an educator since 1990 and have taught grades three to 12 at various schools. In 2011, I began a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology while serving in leadership roles for my local union branch.

Today, I work as a high school counsellor in SD69 and as a Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC) in private practice.

I am thrilled to continue to serve this great organization as president, having previously taken on the Membership Chair and Secretary roles. Dave Mackenzie, our former president, has been a mentor to me over the years. At the 2023 BCSCA Conference, Dave spoke about our responsibility to "Gather the voices of counsellors in advocacy." My goal is to continue that work; to amplify the voices of school counsellors through purposeful work that unites and guides us through the blessings and challenges ahead.

The BCSCA is working to (1) enhance the awareness of school counsellors as qualified mental health professionals, (2) support school counsellors' well-being, and (3) improve students' access to school counsellors. These goals, which were shared at the Annual General Meeting, guide the initiatives established by our team.

It is with absolute admiration that I introduce you to your BCSCA Executive team. These volunteers, through their gifts and talents, will communicate and engage with membership, facilitate, and advocate for professional development, liaise with organizations, and address concerns in order to strengthen and support this professional body.



Aron Reusch (Technology Chair) is an elementary school counsellor, ELL, LA, and SPED teacher so he can stay in one building all week. He works in a Prince George (SD57) school as well as in private practice for neurodiverse people. He joined the BCSCA to provide computer and technical support.



Danniel Lin (Vice President – Advocacy) is a secondary school counsellor in the VSB (#39). He has also served as Union Staff Rep, Department Head, Vancouver Secondary School Counsellors' Association President, and a member of the BCACC. He is grateful for the opportunity to listen, learn, and lead.



Katherine Brach (Vice President – Professional Development) is a high school counsellor in Comox (SD71) where she settled after years teaching in Northern Canada. She is passionate about creative art therapy but also enjoys crafting a perfectly balanced timetable in MYED. She loves connecting with colleagues across BC and sharing learning together.



Katie DeReus (Secretary) is an elementary school counsellor in Coquitlam (SD47) who also works privately supporting children and families in Fort Langley using NSST. She is passionate about the transformational powers of play and relationship for kids and their grownups.



Rebecca Britten (Local Liaison) is a high school counsellor in West Vancouver (SD45) and also works as a private practitioner in Vancouver. She is passionate about effective supervision for school counsellors, reducing mental health stigma, and supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth.



Shannon Confortin (Membership Chair) is a high school counsellor in Parksville (SD69) who has served in various roles with the BCSCA. She loves connecting with other counsellors around BC and how the collaboration, dedication, and passion of our executive invigorates her work with students.



Sharon Sall (Treasurer) is a high school counsellor in Surrey (SD36) whose passion is meeting counsellors from around BC and advocating for common goals. In her free time, she facilitates drunk driving courses, educating people on the driving laws of BC.



Shirley Giroux (Vice President – Wellness) is the school counsellor in Valemount (SD57). She is an experienced teacher and RCC who holds a PhD in Health Sciences, for which her award-winning research investigated ways female teachers in BC enact resilience when caring for students all day while also having care responsibilities at home.



William Nicholls-Allison (Publications Chair) is an elementary school counsellor in Greater Victoria (SD61) and RCC. He also enjoys teaching other counsellors and educators about the Person-Centred Approach and Trauma-Informed Practice. Since 2022, he has advocated for Guaranteed Access to Mental Health Care for Every Child.

NOTE: the Conference Chair position remains vacant. Please contact BCSCA.executive@gmail.com if you are interested in joining the executive.

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BY WILLIAM
NICHOLLS-ALLISON
PUBLICATIONS CHAIR

Going Upstream to Address the Mental Health Crisis

Dear Colleagues,

Our students are growing up during a mental health crisis. For example:

- Since a public health emergency was declared in 2016, more than 13,000 people have died to toxic drugs in British Columbia (BC)¹;
- In the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, 17% of students, and 44% of non-binary students, reported they had seriously considered suicide in the past year²; and
- Research in Ontario between 2002-2019 revealed a 139% increase in child and youth eating disorder hospitalizations.³

Furthermore, there is a yawning gap between the level of need for child and youth mental health services and the actual availability of those services. Researchers at Simon Fraser University have called this state of affairs “an invisible crisis in children’s mental health.”⁴ This gap exists despite the facts that access to healthcare is a fundamental right of all children and that mental health problems early in life can have severe long-term impacts on individuals and society.

In 2021, Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt and colleagues wrote:

“Even before the pandemic, children and youth in Canada were not faring well in large part because mental health has not been prioritized... The pandemic has put a spotlight on this problem and with this attention comes the need for action.”

School counsellors hear this call to action because they are on the front line of child

and youth mental health. The services school counsellors provide are crucial to addressing the mental health crisis because the majority of mental health and substance use problems begin in childhood and adolescence.⁵ Since children and youth spend much of the week at school, it is the ideal setting for promoting their well-being and preventing relatively minor mental health challenges from developing into more severe (and costly) mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

“Upstream approaches such as high-quality promotion, prevention, and early intervention programs can have a tremendous, positive impact on the success and well-being of our students.”

Prioritizing the mental health of children is an upstream approach to addressing the mental health crisis, which stands in contrast to the reactive, downstream approaches which have historically been the norm. Downstream approaches are like throwing a life preserver to a person drowning in a river. Upstream approaches are like warning people about a dangerous section of trail to prevent them from falling in the river in the first place.

Upstream approaches such as high-quality promotion, prevention, and early

intervention programs can have a tremendous, positive impact on the success and well-being of our students. However, many mental health challenges are also caused and/or exacerbated by factors such as the climate emergency, discrimination, poverty, and violence to name but a few. Therefore, upstream approaches are also inherently connected to social justice.

With all that said, I am excited to share with you the articles in this issue of BC Counsellor, which focus on the social justice element of going upstream. 🌱

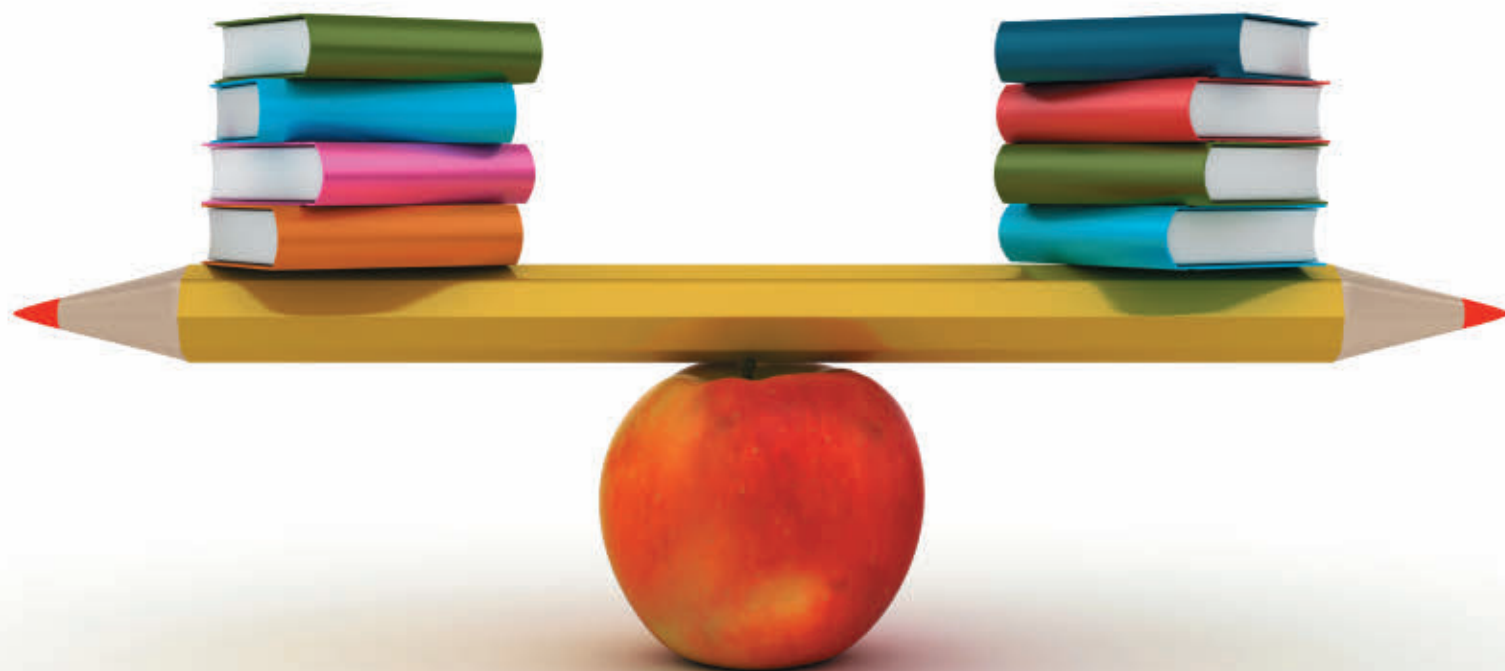
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What's Behind Weight-Based Bullying?

Causes and Potential Solutions for Weight Bias in the School Setting

BY ELIZABETH TINGLE, MA, AND SARAH NUTTER, PHD



Body-based discrimination compromises students' well-being. A form of body-based discrimination that happens frequently in the school setting, but is rarely directly addressed in school policy, is weight-based teasing or bullying. International research demonstrates that weight forms one of the most frequent bases of discrimination at school, ahead of categories such as race, socioeconomic class, physical ability, or religion.^{1,2} Canadian students of all sizes experience weight-based teasing, although those in larger bodies experience the highest rates of this form of discrimination.³ Some students may be teased for being "too small" while others are teased for being "too large." Approximately 25-50% of adolescents report weight-based bullying,⁴ with those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+

reporting higher rates of weight-based teasing than their peers, suggesting that weight-based bullying may be a coded, or less visible, way for students to discriminate against vulnerable youth.⁵ We consider it a social justice imperative that every student feels welcome and safe in the school environment, regardless of their weight. In this article, we aim to explain where weight-based discrimination comes from, its potential negative impact on students, and possible strategies to reduce its frequency and harm.

Weight Bias

Weight-based bullying is one form of the broader weight bias that is so common in our society. Weight bias includes the stereotypes and negative attitudes about people in larger bodies and has permeated

our culture for well over a century. The diet industry, worth hundreds of billions of dollars,⁶ has shaped core assumptions and beliefs about weight and health ("diet culture"), consequently inflaming and perpetuating weight bias. Diet culture's central messages are that fatness is to be avoided at all costs and that a smaller body is more healthy, attractive, and virtuous.⁷ Diet culture also perpetuates misconceptions about an individual's ability to lose weight and maintain weight loss over the long-term. Research demonstrates that that weight is profoundly complex, contributed to by over 100 different and highly interconnected factors beyond individual control, such as genetics, socioeconomic status, and access to fresh food and recreation.⁸ Moreover, nearly 95% of diets result in weight regain, often resulting in

the regain of even more than what was lost.⁹ Students today are likely to receive weight-biased and pro-diet messages about food, bodies, and exercise from mass media, social media, healthcare settings, the classroom, family members, and peers. With enough exposure to such weight-biased messages, this bias often becomes internalized. Depending on personality and individual circumstances, internalized weight bias can become the loudest voice in a person's mind, affecting their interpretation and evaluation of information, others, and themselves.

Potential Harms

Weight bias in the school setting is multi-faceted and has numerous potential harms,¹⁰ forming one of the more discriminatory lessons students learn in the "hidden curriculum." Students may suffer academically because of weight bias, as research suggests that some teachers have reduced and provided inaccurate estimations of students' academic abilities if they are in larger bodies.¹⁰ Weight stigma also contributes to social rejection and exclusion.⁴ Students who experience repeated weight-based teasing are more likely to experience higher rates of stress and anxiety, symptoms of depression, and a desire to avoid forms of physical activity where their body may be on display and commented on by others.^{4,11} Weight-based teasing is also considered to be a strong risk factor in the development of disordered eating and eating disorders.¹² Ultimately, the negative impacts of weight bias compound across the lifespan to reduce overall life expectancy.¹³

Weight-based bullying also impacts those who are not directly targeted. When it is not addressed or corrected, weight bias is taught to both victims and bystanders. One study reported that at least 84% of students have observed weight-based bullying in the high school setting.¹⁴ Witnessing weight-based bullying may also increase the likelihood of internalizing weight bias, which represents a risk to student well-being regardless of body

size. Those with greater internalized weight bias have higher rates of psychological concerns, including anxiety, depression, disordered eating, eating disorders, and suicidality.¹⁵ The chronic stress of internalized weight stigma may also play a role in one's physical health as higher rates of internalized weight stigma are correlated with increased risk for high blood pressure and cardiometabolic risk factors across the size spectrum.¹⁵ It is in everyone's best interest to reduce weight bias in our society.

Possible Solutions

Given the risks of weight bias to all students, we advocate for taking a weight-neutral approach in all aspects of the school setting. School is simply not an appropriate setting to discuss weight, and efforts to monitor or manipulate weight in schools are potentially harmful.¹⁶ Health messages in school should look and feel distinct from the appearance-focused messages proclaiming health that circulate in diet culture.

There are multiple steps that can be taken in the school setting to create a weight-neutral context where all students feel welcome and the well-being of those with weight- or food-related issues is considered. Formal school policies must explicitly prohibit weight-based bullying. Teachers, administrators, and school counsellors should respond to incidents swiftly. When weight-based bullying is reported, adults involved should focus on redressing the harm done by the offending student rather than offering reassurance about the victim's body size. School counsellors can help victims of weight-based teasing to understand that their body is not a problem to be solved and that body-based discrimination of any form is inexcusable. Teachers can also proactively set expectations in their classrooms that body acceptance is expected through mottoes like "We don't talk about people's bodies" or "All bodies belong."

Messaging around food and physical movement, whether in the carrying out of curricular outcomes in the classroom or through the informal conversations that happen in the hallways, staffroom, field, or playground can similarly focus on adding health rather than losing weight.¹⁷ Fortunately, there are an increasing

"With greater awareness and intention, schools can be a place where everybody can feel that they belong."

number of resources to support teachers in shifting to a weight-neutral approach to teaching nutrition (see Healthy Schools BC: Teach Food First and Teach Nutrition). We recommend that students should never be weighed or assigned to measure their bodies or calculate their BMI for a learning assignment. Similarly, avoid assignments that invite students to track their personal eating choices, daily calories, daily steps, or other exercise logs as this can reinforce the myths of diet culture and contribute to explicit and internalized weight bias. The potential risks for these learning activities are simply too high to justify their use.

Shifting towards a weight-neutral culture is something that will take time and intention. We ought to be compassionate with each other and ourselves as we learn new ways of teaching and talking about food, movement, and bodies. Many teachers and school staff have their own histories with diet culture and weight bias. They may have personally been impacted by weight-based bullying or have had an unhealthy relationship with food or movement. If a student or colleague seems preoccupied with their body size or eating habits, you can express your concern and encourage them to seek help from a mental health professional, especially one with expertise in eating disorders. People in all kinds of bodies can struggle with an eating disorder, and prompt referrals can be life-saving. With greater awareness and intention, schools can be a place where everybody can feel that they belong. 🐾

Author Bios



Elizabeth Tingle, a former teacher in the K-12 setting, is currently a sessional instructor and the Body Image Lab Coordinator in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. She is a producer and co-host for two podcasts – The Podclass: Conversations on School Health and Teacher Fan Club.

"It is in everyone's best interest to reduce weight bias in our society."



Sarah Nutter is an assistant professor of counselling psychology at the University of Victoria, on unceded Lekwungen territory. She conducts research on weight bias, body image, and eating disorders.

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Moving Beyond the Binary to Support TGNB Students' Identity Exploration

BY MEL VOULGARIS, MA, AND SHAN SPROUL

There are over 100,000 transgender and non-binary (TGNB) identified Canadians, with 18,000 calling British Columbia (BC) home.¹ This means that 1 in 300 Canadians are TGNB, with the majority being young people under the age of 35. Considering this from a school perspective means that there will likely be a handful of TGNB students at every school.

This population faces overwhelmingly disproportionate difficulty compared to their cis-gender peers. They are oftentimes subjected to bullying and harassment, and thus, are more likely to skip school.^{2,3} As a result of such ongoing experiences, TGNB students experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide.^{4,5}

Many BC schools have recognized the aforementioned harms and have positioned themselves as inclusive.^{6,7} They understand the ability of environmental factors to instead promote resilience. For example, the BC Teachers' Federation encourages educators to enact various inclusive ideas, such as using affirming language and ensuring representation within curriculum.⁶

At the same time, TGNB youth continue to struggle with their identity while at school,^{2,8} as messages about how to look, sound, and act persist.⁹ Such messages received in school negatively impact TGNB students,⁸ and can be explicit (e.g., statements, policies, and practices) or implicit (e.g., remarks around female/male binary gender identity categories, including respective roles and expressions). Impacts may show up as uncertainty around one's gender identity,¹⁰ compulsion to hide one's identity,¹¹ and restrictions on authentic identity expression.^{8,11} Contemplating on the present to guide the next direction while applying the aforementioned recommendations can reduce the negative messages TGNB students face at school, such change is insufficient. It offers recognition and acceptance from others yet misses out on nurturing students as active agents navigating their identity, which is critical for their ability to realize their potential at school.^{12,13} A TGNB student who has not been given the support and tools to begin to understand who they are and how they want

to navigate the world may find it difficult to accept their whole 'self' and to ask for what they need.

In order to facilitate such self-work, we, the authors, offer a reflexive exercise called the **Identity Dimensions (ID)**. It represents a conceptualization of gender identity and its oftentimes assumed associated counterparts of expression, roles, and sexuality (see infobox below).

Introducing ID with students

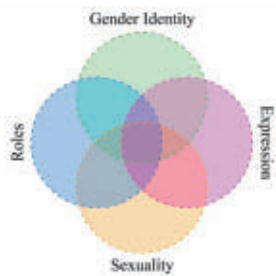
The first author's method for introducing ID during their counselling work at Simon Fraser University from 2022-2023 will be articulated

next. During those two years, it was incorporated in individual and group counselling that included TGNB students. For brevity, the group context will be shared.

The diagram was introduced as part of a 2S/LGBTQIA+ questioning group that included students who were anywhere along their identity questioning process – ranging from those who were afraid of and muddled in their identity to those who felt certain and were wanting to take action. Each meeting presented a prompt for discussion, and ID was introduced alongside one of those. The prompt giving way was: What stories have you heard, or experiences have you had, that get in the way of exploring who you are?

Discussion on the influence of the gender binary intuitively ensued from the above question and this discussion was used as a segue to introduce ID. It was introduced as a way of putting aside the binary for a moment to focus inward and explore how we experience and/or might want to experience ourselves. The

ID is transformative in two ways. First, compared with other conceptualizations – such as the genderbread¹⁴ or gender unicorn¹⁵ – this diagram intentionally omits the female/male binary. In doing so, it provides opportunity for TGNB students to, at least momentarily, step outside of the prevalent and often limiting framework, to reconsider what parts of the binary, if any, resonate with them. This de-emphasis of the binary leads nicely to the second way this diagram is transformative – by removing the assumption, it allows for a person-centred exploration of the self. And there is further flexibility, making this reflexive exercise truly person-centred. The dashed lines aim to represent that parts of ourselves may change over time. What feels central to identity now may not hold as much weight later on; so, parts may move in and out of the circles freely over time. Further, the circles may overlap as much or as little as is relevant to the student and the size of a circle may be changed or a circle removed. Below is an example that illustrates this room for individual complexity.



first author would reveal their personally filled-in example to explain the various components, and then open the floor to participants to share their reflections.

Overall, feedback was positive. Students noted that while ID feels complex, needing time to fill in, they welcomed the complexity as it had them consider themselves more deeply. Some were curious about trying iterations of their image over time to see how things changed or remained. For other students, the diagram became a focal point, something they related back to throughout their time in the group.

Carrying ID further

Given that high school students can organize multiple ideas, consider abstract concepts and their relationships, and think critically,¹⁶ ID can be introduced with this population as previously outlined, whereby the facilitator discusses an example. Indeed, the first author will soon begin sharing the diagram with high school students in this way. We also wish to offer a consideration for younger students in K-7, particularly because ID offers an important reflexive opportunity for students to put aside constraining binary categories that are so pervasive and to consider themselves more deeply. The following consideration is a starting point, to spark contemplation amongst school counselling colleagues to generate their own ideas that are unique to their contexts. Indeed, adaptation is encouraged for different age groups to support TGNB kids and their peers to think about and safely explore their identities.

It makes sense to start simple with younger students given that, as they grow, thinking becomes more organized and logical, with an ability to consider more complex ideas.¹⁶ A suggestion is to begin with one circle and build from there. With the youngest students for example, one might start with the topic of expression which is more readily conceptualized, and prompting with questions about how students like to show up in the world (e.g., favourite things to wear or do, nicknames they enjoy). Later on, roles may be added alongside, prompting about roles that are relational (e.g., sibling, caregiver of pet) and non-relational (e.g., piano player).

As students become older and understand more and given that some students experience

new physiological changes that may be associated with gender, the concept of gender identity can be integrated as a third component. The gender binary can be introduced as a teachable moment, around how some identify with this classification and others feel differently about it. A further point is that circles can remain separate until such time where there is room for discussing how the categories might, or might not, connect to each other.

Further, and perhaps most importantly, what is critical when introducing ID regardless of age or approach is allowing ample time for reflection and discussion with trusted individuals. As a reflexive exercise that is truly person-centred and which can be returned to over time, ID presents a much-needed starting point in bridging the gap between educational institutions' encouragements to be inclusive and TGNB students' ongoing difficult experiences at school. ID offers a chance for TGNB students to anchor themselves confidently within their identity and to cultivate resiliency, authenticity, and agency.

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Cultural and social justice responsiveness in school systems: A necessity to support the mental health of diverse students

BY ANUSHA KASSAN, PHD, RPSYCH

Mental Health services receive failing grades across Canada
CAMIMH 2nd Annual Report Card – Selected Findings

There is a mental health crisis occurring in Canada — a reality that held true before we were confronted with a global pandemic.¹ Currently, the prevalence of mental health challenges is unprecedented among children and youth, a large proportion of which stem from social, political, and economic disparities. A significant body of research has demonstrated that “the intersections of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, socioeconomic, age, religious, spiritual, and disability identities have important influence on mental health outcomes and disparities.”² Clearly, this is a topic of critical importance for school counsellors and other partakers across school systems.

While education is a fundamental human right, students from racialized and minoritized backgrounds — those who have been socio-politically marginalized based on their race and/or other non-dominant cultural identity or social location³ — often face social, emotional, and academic barriers within various educational contexts. This is further complicated by limited access to care, which is often more pronounced when it comes to mental health supports for children and youth who have been marginalized. Recently, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) conducted a survey on mental health and substance misuse supports across Canada. The results: the Canadian public gave provincial and federal governments D- and F-grades in access, confidence, satisfaction, and effectiveness of services.⁴

Schools have an ethical responsibility to meet the needs of all learners, including their mental health needs. Given that the educational and psychological disparities among children and youth in Canada stem from the same social determinants of health, it is critical to reconsider inclusive approaches that will support students holistically.

Cultural and social justice responsiveness centres on supporting the mental health needs of students in ways that align with their worldviews⁵ are imperative. This means

	Total Score	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NS	NB	NL
Access	F	F	D	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Public Confidence	D	D	D	F	D	D	F	F	D	D
Satisfaction	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	D
Effectiveness	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Total Mental Health Score	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	D	F

considering the role of accountability within the system, of educational policies and curricula, and of professional development and training approaches in responding to the needs of all students, particularly those who have been racialized and minoritized. Responsiveness also means considering the lived experience of the people in schools and the ways in which the counselling context can be leveraged to make an important difference in the everyday lives of students.

Systemic Accountability

In recent years, educational systems have been tasked with addressing the topic of mental health, in part due to the increasing manifestation of such difficulties in schools. The reality is that numerous children, youth, and their families are experiencing significant psychological challenges, and these are impacting the school context. Conversely, such difficulties can also emerge from the school setting, particularly when considering the Western, individualistic, and colonial nature of education.

In response to this reality, it is necessary for efforts of cultural and social justice responsiveness to begin with administrators, leadership, and decision-makers within schools as well as their larger governing bodies (i.e., School Districts, Ministry of Education). That is, it is critical therefore, to infuse principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigenization (JEDI) at the core of school

policies, curricula, pedagogical strategies, counselling models, social interactions, and beyond.^{6,7,8,9} This overarching approach will help provide a unified philosophy that can influence all aspects of the school system, including the conceptualization and delivery of counselling services. In turn, these shifts will provide diverse students with more adapted, individualized care. To learn more about JEDI, visit the UBC “Activating Inclusion Toolkit” online:

<https://equity.ubc.ca/resources/activating-inclusion-toolkit/>

Prioritizing Lived Experiences

While system change is critical, an inductive approach, which considers the lived experiences of those who are most vulnerable within the system, often individuals who have been racialized and minoritized, is also needed. In developing and implementing new, JEDI-oriented policies, it is important to gather detailed information about the experiences of those who spend most of their time in the school setting (e.g., students, teachers, and other partakers). It is critical for these lived experiences to be elicited with a genuine interest, appreciated, and taken at face value.

Pedagogical approaches and counselling models have often been developed based on Western values and beliefs from experts in the field. Despite the increase in qualitative research in education and counselling, as well as approaches that preface lived experiences

(e.g., Critical Race Theory¹⁰), education and counselling remain largely deficit-based and expert-driven. When it comes to supporting the mental health needs of diverse students, school counsellors can go beyond client-centred approaches and implement practices that prioritize lived experiences and JEDII principles.

The Counselling Context

School counsellors are ideally positioned to support the evolving mental health needs of diverse students. Of course, this work is always easier to achieve when the broader systemic values align with the importance of mental health supports. Regardless of the broader climate, there are tangible actions that school counsellors can take to attend to mental health in schools.

When it comes to individual or small group work with diverse students, it is critical for school counsellors to approach their work with cultural humility. Cultural humility is an interpersonal stance that is Other-oriented.¹⁰ It entails an affirmation of the importance of relationships and rejects power dynamics that are fostered by an expert position. There are three core principles that inform a stance of cultural humility: (1) a commitment to lifelong reflexivity, (2) a desire to repair power imbalances, and (3) a commitment to advocacy within systems that maintain oppressive practices.¹¹ These principles of humility represent a helpful way of conceptualizing the work that school counsellors can do to support the mental health needs of diverse students.

In essence, cultural humility begins with the counsellor's own reflexive practice in order to engage with clients in meaningful ways and take concrete steps towards advocacy. Superimposed onto an educational setting, this means that school counsellors need to engage in ongoing efforts to recognize their own values, beliefs, attitudes, and biases to understand how they might impact their work with students. Further, school counsellors need to consider ways of engaging differently with students in order to dismantle the power differential that exists in counselling relationships. By approaching these relationships differently, counsellors will be able to explore students' mental health challenges in context, understanding multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations.

Most importantly, and returning to the beginning, school counsellors need to develop competencies in the area of advocacy. Similar

to the idea that students' lived experiences come with a wealth of important, new knowledge, school counsellors also hold a unique vantage point on how to address mental health in schools. Ideally, this unique perspective is valued and invited into policy-making spaces. However, the reality is that, at times, school counsellors' experiences that stem from working directly with students must be voiced assertively and repeatedly.

This article would not be complete without mentioning the role of Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) in school settings. Attention to principles of TRC align quite strongly with the idea of infusing cultural and social justice responsiveness across school systems. Of course, addressing and dismantling coloniality is a huge task. While it will not be resolved on an individual level, school counsellors can prioritize their own decolonization, which includes critically evaluating the counselling models they have learned and adopted. It also involves addressing TRC with the students they are supporting so they can reflect on the influence of colonization in their own lives and possibly make decisions about how to move forward as someone who has been colonized or represents a settler in Canada.

Conclusion

The experiences of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism — to name but a few examples — represent the root of mental health difficulties for many children, youth, and their families. These mental health challenges often manifest in schools, and they can sometimes be exacerbated by systemic inequities in educational settings. School counsellors can play a vital role in connecting with and supporting diverse students through approaches that take into account JEDII values, TRC, and cultural and social justice responsiveness. Inevitably, to be successful, this will involve advocacy within the school system.

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