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It Takes a Village: The Role of Counselling Psychology in Advancing Health and Wellness in a Faculty of Education

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Abstract

Counselling psychology departments have historically been situated within Faculties of Education rather than Departments of Psychology. These placements within Faculties of Education have often led to confusion as to what the role of counselling psychology is, and how it relates to education. In this paper, we argue that there is an opportunity for counselling psychologists to impact and be impacted by their location in Faculties of Education. This paper offers an exemplar of how a counselling psychology department informed and impacted a culture of wellness within a Faculty of Education and also within the greater university culture, at the University of Calgary. Through partnership with other faculties and community partners, the efforts of counselling psychology began to impact other systems, which in turn influenced Bachelor of Education teacher preparation at the post-secondary level. Through collaboration with multiple partners and with the support of the Faculty of Education, a mandatory course on health and wellness was introduced to the Bachelor of Education curriculum. Perspectives of a counselling psychologist, faculty of education administrator, a community partner, and former counselling psychology graduate student are highlighted in this paper, with the intention of demonstrating how collaborations between two seemingly distinct disciplines can be mutually beneficial to the university, students, faculty, and also the greater community.

Keywords

counselling psychology, faculties of education, comprehensive school health, teacher education

Counselling psychology departments are situated within Faculties of Education rather than a part of Departments of Psychology, leaving counselling psychology programs to feel isolated or misplaced based on different professional interests, training, research emphases, and policy concerns (Beatch et al., 2009). At the same time, many academics and members of Faculties of Education are not psychologists, and for these individuals, departments of counselling psychology may come across as elitist or seeing themselves as unique. With experience that has grown with time, we (a group comprised of counselling psychologists, Faculty of Education administrators and community partners) have learned that departments of counselling psychology can be team players in the Education Faculties in which they are part.

In this paper, we offer our perspectives on how counselling psychologists are in a unique position within Faculties of Education and have the opportunity to impact and be impacted by other systems. In support of this argument, we provide an exemplar of how a counselling psychology department informed and impacted a culture of wellness within a Faculty of Education and also within the greater university culture. Further, we portray how leadership from the field of counselling psychology moved the core curriculum in a Bachelor of Education program to focus on wellness.

Rather than working independently from other academics and specialties found within Faculties of Education, departments of counselling psychology can be actively involved in various ways that are meaningful, not only to the students and faculty, but also to the encompassing political and cultural environment. Namely, of great importance is counselling psychology's impact and influence over health and wellness within a faculty, something that is not traditionally prioritized in Faculties of Education or their Bachelor of Education (BEd) programs (Russell-Mayhew et al., 2017). Until recently, in Canada, no existing BEd program provided mandated wellness education, yet teachers, principals, and school counsellors were expected to contribute to school wellness once employed in these settings (Russell-Mayhew et al., 2017). Further, prior research has suggested that pre-service teachers have a moderate degree of concern in regard to classroom management and instruction (i.e., task-related concerns), academic range and personal growth of students (i.e., task- and student-related concerns), along with professional adequacy and acceptance (i.e., self- and impact-related concerns; Hagger & Malmberg, 2011). In comparison to experienced teachers, novice teachers have commonly expressed concerns about classroom discipline, managing individual differences, motivating students, relationships with parents, organization of class work, dealing with student problems, and personal support (Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2007). Taken together, teachers are expected to contribute to school health and wellness and connect with the broader community, yet are evidently concerned with their competency in doing so.

Opportunity for Counselling Psychology

In order to have impact on the culture of wellness, the training of undergraduate students preparing to be teachers can be greatly influenced by counselling psychology, given the location within Faculties of Education. This location and close proximity to Education and related specialties allows for partnerships where ideas and pedagogies can be shared that may not be expected. In this same vein, research conducted by counselling psychology can inform practice and impact the

educational and health systems of the Faculty of Education and the larger university context. Further, to have impact within the Faculties of Education in which they are housed, the counselling psychology discipline can network inside and outside faculties with a focus on health and wellness for all stakeholders. Essentially, counselling psychology departments can become collaborative associates and even partners with the faculties in which they find themselves a part, and these collaborations can be mutually beneficial.

The increased public debate on health and wellness is evident, yet, little has been done to address how universities educate future school professionals (Russell-Mayhew et al., 2017). In order to address this critical gap, a system promoting health and wellness that is both research and practice-informed must be put in place. In response, a taskforce at the University of Calgary collaboratively worked toward this goal, and the applied outcome was a research and practice-informed system of wellness education that better prepares teachers to support their own, and their students' well-being, while improving the capacity of the larger educational system by positioning teachers as health champions to work on wellness from within the education sector. This endeavour required partnership across various faculties, support from administrators, and a shift in culture.

Objective

In this paper, we provide context for how counselling psychology can impact and be impacted by the faculties in which they are housed. Specifically, in order to demonstrate a successful partnership between departments within faculties, we describe how the department of counselling psychology within the Werklund School of Education (WSE) at the University of Calgary collaborated in efforts that have informed, and been informed by, the culture of wellness in the WSE. The result of this work is a prototype for a system of wellness education, modeled on the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach and involving the development of key partnerships, addressing the social and physical environment of the faculty, implementing healthy school policies, and requiring mandatory coursework in wellness.

We offer perspectives from multiple stakeholders in this paper, including perspectives from a counselling psychologist, a post-secondary administrator in the WSE, a community partner, and former graduate student of counselling psychology. Most counselling psychology programs in Canada are housed in Faculties of Education and are uniquely positioned to influence and be influenced by the teacher preparation programs with which they align. Thus, this paper serves as an example of that.

Key Perspectives

The need and priority of wellness is not a contested issue in education. That said, the challenge of multiple and competing demands has meant that teacher education programs struggle to make wellness a central and integrated component of their programs. Traditionally, wellness has been viewed as a subcomponent of health or physical education classes, which would have the expertise from those teachers who have had disciplinary knowledge in some aspect of these two overarching themes. However, if one starts from the assumption that all teachers have a requisite obligation to promote and foster wellness, as part of the broader culture and ethos of the school (Joint

Consortium for School Health [JCSH], 2018; Russell-Mayhew et al., 2017), then the responsibilities required for pre-service teachers change.

Political Context: Views from Post-Secondary Administration

Wellness initiatives have traditionally sat on the periphery of teacher education programs, given that a number of competing demands often take priority including English Language Learners, and increased Mathematics, Arts, Science, and Literacy. Further, once in the schools, lessons on wellness have typically been implemented by physical education and health teachers, sporadically at best. Thus, as an administrator in a Faculty of Education, I (DG) was curious how teachers could receive training on notions of health and wellness, aside from the professional learning workshops, commonly held only once, and assumedly easily forgotten. Thus, we were faced with a situation that needed to be addressed - while such traditional initiatives (i.e., one off training workshops) are a step, it does not start from the premise that wellness is a precondition for all student learning, and the concomitant responsibility of all teachers to embed and create a wellness-based learning environment in all aspects of the school community. Accordingly, political deliberations and shifts in discourse toward a mandatory wellness course into the BEd program took shape.

As discussions around wellness and incorporating this into the curriculum began, it soon became political from an administrator's perspective: Was it possible to mandate a course on health and wellness in teacher education? How would such a course fit into the existing curriculum? Would the political context within the WSE allow for this initiative to take shape? Was wellness valued by the faculty, and if so, what would be cast to the side to make room? The questions came faster than the answers.

Tracing back to 2009, wellness was not part of the initial task force report for the BEd program at the WSE. The fundamental changes to the BEd program reflected broader discussions about the changing nature of learning with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that was to be central to teacher education programs. While there was little pushback of the notion of wellness, it simply was not explicitly articulated or prioritized within the broader aims of education. The idea of adding a mandatory course that was not targeting traditional priority areas was simply not considered. While feeling this pressure and noticing the tension building within the WSE, we were cognizant of the broader public discourse growing regarding wellness and mental health. As public discourse grew, the topic of wellness trickled into faculty meetings and discussions about wellbeing. At the same time, the University of Calgary announced the Campus Mental Health Strategy, a plan recognizing the symbiotic nature between health and education, and the university's responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of their students, staff, and faculty (University of Calgary, n.d.). This initiative committed to enhancing the mental health of everyone within the university community, while encouraging the development and implementation of a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and sustainable approach to wellness and health (University of Calgary, n.d.). In addition to the institutional changes toward health and wellness, we also felt pressure from school boards in Alberta to address wellness for students and educators, and at the same time, changes to reflect a shifting priority on wellness was occurring in Provincial Programs of Studies. The implementation of the Comprehensive School Health and Wellness framework that was endorsed by the province, along with increasing discussions about safe and caring schools

necessarily highlighted a need for a more robust conception and implementation of wellness on multiple levels. With the broader public discourse as a driving force for change, administration made the compelling case that wellness was, and always had been, a pressing issue that deserved a raised profile internally within the WSE. In order to do this, we joined efforts with the counselling psychology and school and applied child psychology specializations within our faculty, realizing collaborations were vital in order to prepare BEd students for their teaching careers. Once in partnerships, impactful political strides were made to address other competing demands. In response to conversations with Associate Superintendents noticing the increase in medical leaves due to stress of new teachers, the pressure and feedback from school districts suggested that the need for a mandatory wellness course was of critical importance. After years of negotiations and making a case for the importance of wellness education within administration, the WSE was able to create a mandatory BEd course on CSH. The Faculty of Education's culture and priorities underwent a shift, largely made possible through partnership with counselling psychology and also through community partnership.

Provincial Context: Views from a Community Partner

In addition to the support of WSE administrators and the role they played in the political climate of including wellness into BEd teacher training, the inclusion and reliance of community partners reflecting the values of the province was also essential. In this section, I (KM) will offer the perspective of a community partner, highlighting the critical role of community partners in supporting Faculties of Education and associated professionals who can be effectively positioned as central in advocacy efforts and action in the advancement of wellbeing.

To provide context, Ever Active Schools is a provincial initiative in Alberta that promotes healthy school communities. Ever Active Schools supports student, staff and whole school community wellbeing in a universal and upstream manner through a CSH approach. By recognizing the importance of teacher preparation in the development of healthy school culture as a foundation for successful health and learning outcomes, we welcomed a partnership with WSE and leaders in counselling psychology passionate about the inclusion of health and wellness to education, to explore how shifts in the Faculty around wellness could impact pre-service teachers as both students and emerging professionals.

Participating as a provincial community partner on the committee allowed us to bring practical experience from CSH systems change in the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) educational setting and apply it to the post-secondary setting. We were also able to convene collaboration from other community and government partners to amplify school health promotion expertise and situate the Faculty within the broader context of wellness work going on in the province. Evidently, the partnership proved beneficial for all collaborators in this effort. By partnering with leaders in counselling psychology within the WSE, as a community partner, we benefited from the research expertise of counselling psychologists and had access to the BEd students studying to become teachers. The partnership enabled us to collectively and bilaterally leverage further opportunities around content, funding and system alignment. For example, content from health promotion and wellness education experts was shared to inform the development of the course, while provincial dissemination platforms became available to disseminate research findings and knowledge applications from the Faculty. The partnership attracted funding opportunities for research and

projects alike due to our ability to act in support of wellness across the continuum of the education spectrum (i.e., pre-service and in-service teachers). As we developed our own curriculum, we were able to align broader systemic actions such as the development of provincial wellness curriculum and release of Teaching Quality Standards. Moreover, we recognized the provincial context for wellness, in that there was a shift towards mental wellness, implemented through a series of policies such as the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, sustained funding for schools around wellness through the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund and Mental Health Capacity Building Projects, and the emerging presence of wellness consultants within school jurisdictions. Thus, the time seemed to be right and welcoming of a strategic plan shifting post-secondary education of BEd students to include emphasis on mental wellness and a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to health. Made possible by those in counselling psychology that saw this as a critical evolution of the education system, the efforts of our partnership were deemed incredibly successful, as the first Canadian BEd course on CSH became a part of the mandatory curriculum.

Training Context: Views from a Counselling Psychology Graduate Student

In addition to the beneficial collaborations that made inclusion of wellness into a faculty of education and its curriculum possible, partnerships with administration and community partners proved beneficial to aspiring counselling psychologists completing their training at the WSE. In this section, I (AI) offer a counselling psychology graduate student's (now a doctoral psychologist) perspective.

A focus on wellness is foundational to the work that counselling psychologists do. Those within the discipline are committed to advocating for greater wellbeing in our communities. Involvement with efforts to promote wellness within the WSE BEd program provided an opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding of wellness within the field of education, as well as to reflect on how promoting wellness aligns with competencies as a counselling psychologist. Involvement within this evolving wellness initiative yielded numerous insights into theory, research, and practice. Social justice efforts as well as opportunities to observe the overlap in principles of wellness, prevention, and CSH acted as helpful reminders of the discipline's key tenants, including: health as holistic, individual's pre-existing strengths and resourcefulness, and a sensitivity to diverse sociocultural factors (Bedi et al., 2011). Further, this collaborative effort provided experience with research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and dissemination of findings. Finally, being part of ongoing efforts to include wellness in the BEd curriculum, I learned about the application of health and psychological principles in educational settings, and how these concepts could be used to facilitate conversations and systemic change in relation to comprehensive approaches to health and wellness.

Consequently, working on this venture as a student within the WSE created many opportunities to develop as I transitioned from a Master's student, to a doctoral graduate taking on roles of research assistant, teaching assistant, and finally sessional instructor. Reflecting on my involvement with this collaboration, the efforts to help teachers better position themselves as health champions contributed to my key professional competencies as a counselling psychologist.

Conclusion

Evidently, collaborative practice within faculties is critical for advancement and remaining current with pressing public discourse on wellness and health. As a result of collaboration, we came to the realization that key partnerships, addressing the social and physical environment of the faculty, implementing healthy school policies, and requiring mandatory coursework in wellness were the pathways to promoting health and wellness not only within our Faculty of Education, but also within the larger community and system to which we belong. Counselling psychology specializations are in unique positions to inform and impact a culture of wellness within faculties of education. Through partnership with other faculties and community partners, the efforts of counselling psychology can have tremendous impact on other systems, which in turn influenced BEd teacher preparation at the post-secondary level.

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