SYMPOSIUM ON "STUDENT MENTAL WELL-BEING AND WELL-BECOMING"
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Focus 3:
What Do We Mean by "Mental Well-Being"?

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Having watched the video, I will present a chart (below) regarding what research has noted as some human qualities that describe children/youth that experience mental well-being (Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

QUALITIES	QUALITIES
Maintain positive relationships	Able to share emotions
Show empathy	Able to take others' perspective
Cope	Sense of enjoyment of life
Communicate and socially connect	Show happiness
Sense of belonging	Willing to Learn
Sense of autonomy	Able to adapt to change
Sense of competence in their own abilities	Able to 'pick self-up'
Care for and contribute to others' well-being	Self-directed
Aware of emotions	Willing to problem solve

How Has Mental Well-Being Been Described within the Context of Children's Development in Canada?

First, there is no unified meaning yet (Pollard & Lee, 2003). However, there are 3 major perspectives to the definition of mental well-being, especially for children/youth: individual, context and individual in relation to the context (Brennan, 2008).

Individual definition locates mental well-being within the student as a 'state' or capacities and personality assets which the young individuals possess or not. Children and youth demonstrate mental well-being when they have the capacity to motivate themselves to their potential and to work towards a cohesive sense of self, fulfillment and/or satisfaction of their basic psychological needs including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Keyes, 2002). Mental well-being is therefore that state of 'being' in which young people feel and act in ways that indicate that the skills, assets and supports required to 'live', 'connect' and 'become' are within their reach (Fredrickson, 2001). Children who experience mental well-being have greater probability of attaining positive outcomes in academic, behavioral, social and emotional areas of functioning. Conversely, children/youth that have positive outcomes in these areas have better chances of experiencing mental well-being compared with their peers. This supports a cycle of success in whatever form that is personally meaningful to a student.

Context focused definitions of mental well-being speak to the conditions that qualify a context such as school, to be described as "a well-being context". Research that speaks to well-being contexts indicates that the mental well-being of youth is impacted by several nested social systems which actively interact with each other (Manderson, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Family, school, and community have been identified as the three core systems that shape the mental well-being of youth (Rodríguez-Fernández, Ramos-Diaz, Fernández-Zabala, Goñi, Esnola et al., 2016; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Carr, Dykstra, et al. 2014) While family is reported to have the most lasting influence on the mental well-being of children/youth, school has been noted as the system with the greatest potential to provide the continuum of services that can support a vast range of their social and emotional development needs. School might be the SOLE consistent source of mental well-being support for some children (Ruini, Ottolini, Tomba, Belaise,Albieri, et al. 2009; Olsson, 2009; Ekornes, Hauge, Lund, 2012). However, children thrive and flourish better when the school, family and community work together as partners to provide a continuum of mental-being context (Kearns, Whitley, Bond, Egan & Tannahill, 2013; Berth, George, Plessis, Bothat, Basson, Villiers, & Makola 2013). Young people therefore experience mental well-being to the extent that they perceive that their contexts (homes, school or communities) have qualities that promote their personal growth, quality relationship with others, mastery, self-acceptance, and purpose (Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007; Collins, Newman, McKenry, 1995). Conversely, they languish when they feel that the context is unresponsive to their social and emotional needs ('cold', 'distant' and not nurturing enough) (Rafelli, Iturbude, Carranza & Carlo, 2014; Newland, 2015). They may even be unable to deploy whatever strengths they have in mental well-being deprived contexts. For example, when the home is not a well-being context, parents/guardians may maintain an unbalanced focus on future orientation, materialism, hierarchy, and competition resulting in diminished attention to 'what matters to children' especially during the formative years (Newland, 2014). The children may feel emotionally neglected, psychologically deprived and may experience ill-being (Newland, 2015) despite the provision of much material resources. Similarly, when schools adopt exclusive emphasis on academic accountability and curricula excellence, attention to the emotional needs of students may suffer (Kroesbergen, Hooijdonk, Viersen, Middel-Lalleman, & Reijnders, 2015; Seligman, 2005).

Qualities Describing Mental Well-Being Contexts

❖ Emotional nurturance
- nurturing adults maintain presence which communicates to young persons that the adult is "with" and "for" them (Gleason, Narvaez, Cheng, Wang, and Brooks, 2016); the adult feels deeply engaged in children's experiences and demonstrates an expanded sense of awareness of what 'matters' to them (Murray-Harvey, 2010);
- teachers' practice of their daily pedagogical 'presence' skills such as listening, unconditional acceptance, and identification of success in each student, becomes part of the creation of a mental well-being context;
- caring adults model characteristics of mental well-being including emotion regulation, acceptance of 'obstacles', citizenship, respectful interpersonal connection, maintaining of relationship, problem solving, and growth-focused communication in their nurturing roles;

❖ Mental well-being contexts sustain awareness about:
- the emotional needs of children/youth; well-meaning parents or teachers may inadvertently neglect children when they lack awareness;
- what it takes to promote mental well-being for young people;

- cultural/contextual specificities related to mental well-being;
- mental well-being contexts establish and consistently strengthen platforms for interconnectivities across the three major nurturing systems (family, community, and school) (Murphey, Stratford, Gooze, Bringewatt, Cooper, Carney, & Rojas , 2014; Horstmanshof, Punch, & Creed, 2008).

Mental well-being among children/youth has also been described in terms of the interaction between the individual and the context, including the processes by which they make meaning of their experiences within the transactions (Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2007; 2008; Pervin, 1992; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2000). Young people continuously evaluate the fulfillment of their needs as they encounter their environment in daily activities (Van der Kaap-Deeder, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Mabbe, 2017; Emadpoor, Lavasani, Masoud Gholamali, 2016). They engage in continuous emotional and cognitive appraisal of the way they experience their environment, even in situations which adults will describe as neutral or 'idle' moments. They draw from their background experiences including class, age, gender and ethnicity/race to make value judgements about what is realistic, expected and possible through and in their interactions with the environment (Khosrotash, Hejazi, Ejei, Bonab, 2010; McLeod and Owens, 2004) . This subjective information is integrated into their functioning across the domains of academic, social, emotional, and behavior including future orientations. For example, when youth encounter negative experiences in their daily engagement with peers, depending on belief/value systems as well as developmental stages, they may develop negative thoughts and emotions about school in general, leading to the experience of social and emotional distress. Without appropriate support, this experience may diminish the mental well-being of the youth and impact outcomes in other essential developmental areas such as academics and behavior (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). One implication is that the work which teachers do daily is perceived by children/youth as part of the process of creating contexts for mental well-being (Shoshani and Steinmetz, 2014). Overall, the various contexts serve the well-being development of children/youth uniquely and in interconnected ways depending on personal background factors including Socio-economic status, age, gender and ethnicity/race. This underscores the question: Who are the main actors for the promotion of children's mental well-being considering their various developmental needs?

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