

"Reading, Talking and Thinking About Mental Well-Being"

"What are the components of Well Aware"

Linda Millar, Teacher's Resource Author, Well Aware Series: In the first two videos we talked about mental health and why we need to address it. And then we tuned in to see what some Grade 6 students had to say about stress and mental health. And now it's time to introduce you to the Well Aware series.

Image of Well Aware cover: The Well Aware series is accompanied by a professional development resource by psychologist Dr. Patrick Carney entitled *Well Aware: Developing Resilient, Active and Flourishing Students*. It outlines the research that supports the importance of a positive mental health approach with our young learners. He believes that positive mental health strategies help all students to flourish in the classroom and beyond. Let's hear it from him.

Dr. Patrick Carney: The reason mental health strategies help all students is because mental health, you know, if you ask a child "What is mental health?" they'll often define mental illness. And, really, mental health is about happiness, so we all want to be happy. You can be a child that doesn't have any condition, any symptoms, but you may not have really good mental health in the sense of living your day with joy. And so the strategies for mental health are about -- it's like being fit. I mean, you may not have any physical symptoms, but you may not exercise and you may be dragging around and you just don't feel energized. It's the same with mental health. So mental health strategies make everybody feel happy and healthy. Not only that but then mental health strategies help the kids that don't have symptoms right now but someday soon may. They're ready to, you know, be able to respond effectively and continue to have very good function despite what comes along. They're resilient. Then there's children that are or do have mental health difficulties. When they have positive mental health strategies, they can be a child that's flourishing, even though they have a major depressive disorder. A child can be flourishing even though they have a big anxiety condition. They're flourishing in the sense that they have good relationships, they know what they're good at, they can bury into things that they're good at and lose themselves and lose track of time and feel the joy of competence developing. All those things are there for the full range of children, whether they have mental health conditions or not.

Images of Well Aware texts, grade 4 to 8.

Linda Millar: The next step is to take this information and translate it to the classroom experience. The Well Aware classroom series opens the doors for safe and important discussions and activities. Designed to be incorporated into your existing literacy curriculum, the Well Aware series consists of four texts per grade for Grades 4 through 8. These short, engaging texts focus on issues related to mental wellbeing. Written by acclaimed Canadian authors such as Deborah Ellis, Marty Chan, Richard Van Camp and many others, the texts include a variety of reading levels and genres. Well Aware offers something to make every reader think about mental well-being. At the end of each text there are a series of

questions that act as discussion starters. These questions have been incorporated directly into the lesson plans and serve to get students talking and thinking.

One of the student text authors, Robert Cutting, tells us how the Well Aware series has been designed to capture the attention of all students. He reminds us of the importance of active listening and balance, the balance that actually we need to have between body, between mind, heart and spirit.

Robert Cutting, Kanien'kehaka(Mohawk)ancestry: Connection has always been a very important aspect to Aboriginal life. We see connection among all things, from person to person, to person to all living things, from the planet to all of creation. We call the interconnectedness of everything. And when we are interconnected or connected to anything, we are truly listening. That's what it means to be connected, you listen. You are part of and you are engaged. And when we listen to stories, for example, we find ourselves going along with what the character is doing and saying. We find ourselves being part of that story. And so we say we're connected to what is going on. And that is so true of what is happening with the stories in the Well Aware series. When we find a story in Well Aware we are connected to, or the characters that we are connected to, we see how that character is travelling on that pathway and we see ourselves moving with that character toward a more positive mental health. When we move towards positive mental health we are putting into play the four aspects of the mind and body, heart and spirit that the Aboriginal people talk about as being important towards reaching a balanced life. When we reach a balanced life we put those four aspects together and we see ourselves on that pathway towards positive mental health, just as we see the characters in the Well Aware series. And then we take a look at all the different people that can read these stories from wherever they are coming from and when they connect with those stories they are on the same pathway. We see this as being essential to getting that balance, to finding yourself interconnected and to finding that true connection for yourself that is going to help you on that path.

Linda Millar: To learn more about Robert Cutting and other acclaimed authors in the Well Aware series, please visit Well Aware Author site at www.pearsoncanada.ca/wellawareauthors/.

Image of teacher resource books, extension activities, and line masters.

Accompanying the text at each grade is a teacher resource. Written by educators, for educators, the teacher's resource outlines some key research and includes helpful tips on setting up your classroom for success. Also included are lesson plans for each of the four books. These are called Invitations to Learning. Although Literacy is the primary vehicle, each invitation also includes a number of extension activities that allow for student expression in other areas of the curriculum such as Fine Arts, Music, Drama, Social Studies and Health.

Additionally there are reproducible line masters on the Well Aware website for students to use as part of their learning experience. The line masters also include some home connection letters you can

personalize to help acquaint parents and caregivers with the work students are doing with the Well Aware series. This diagram shows the structure of the Invitations to Learning. They're organized in an approach that we call the Six Cs.

The first C refers to Centering and asks the question, "How do I prepare for this learning experience?" This may take the form of deep breathing, stretching, guided imagery and many more classroom-tested techniques to help students focus.

The second C refers to Contemplating and asks the question, "What is this text about and why is it important to me?" Once they are relaxed and ready to learn, the students have an opportunity to contemplate what they think the session will be about and why they would like to know more.

Connecting is the next C and here we ask the question, "What do I already know and what do I need to know?" Here various rating and grouping strategies are used to help the students engage in the actual reading of the text.

The Confirming section asks, "How do I practice what I have learned?" After reading, students confirm their earlier questions and participate in a series of activities that help them to develop the important skills they will need to transfer what they've learned to their own lives.

Finally, the Creating section asks students to think about "what are some other ways that I can use what I have learned?" Here, students are invited to use their limitless creativity to strengthen their learning and apply it across the curriculum in activities that relate to subject areas such as the Arts, Social Studies and Health.

The idea of celebration plays an important role in the Well Aware series. Celebration helps to promote confidence, efficacy, self-regulation, competence and self-concept and helps students to say "I can!" as they express what they now know and then share their accomplishments with others.

Image of Parent/Caregiver Connection text.

As parents and caregivers are an integral part of the team that shapes students' lives, each Invitation has a Parent/Caregiver Connection that helps foster a friendly and supportive approach between home and school.

Text on screen: What has been your experience with introducing mental health topics in the classroom?

Lindsey Bowen, Teacher, W.I. Dick Middle School: I think it's been something that hasn't really been happening because of the amount of resources. I also notice with Grade 6s is they've been really apprehensive when you talk about health, like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about health." Where this way, these were non-threatening resources where we could bring them out, they could read. They're not even 100 percent aware that they're talking about health so it's not as threatening and as

scary as some of the other things so it's a nice, comfortable resource for everybody.

Text on screen: How important is it to have mental health integrated into what you're already teaching - not an add-on?

Lindsey Bowen: I think it's huge. I mean, mental health is one of our biggest hurdles right now with students, one of the biggest issues we're dealing with. It's something that we can bring into the literacy program that is something that every kid can relate to and I think that that's the biggest part is that now we can combine the two, where we haven't necessarily been able to do that before unless we invented our own resources. And it's a good starting point for kids to be able to start talking about things so you get your Oral Communication marks, you can get Media marks through doing that and just get them talking about something that they can relate to.

Christine Bejjany, Principal, W.I. Dick Middle School: I was thrilled to see how connected they were. I found also that they were all able to access the materials, which is something that we struggle with at times. So it was really nice to be able to see that when students were given an opportunity to use a text that was broken into a smaller story or one that they could work with their peers, that everyone had an entry level access point for those resources and that was a really helpful piece for us.

Linda Millar: The Invitations to Learning are connected to text at each grade level and you can think of them as a library of ideas that you can use to suit the needs of your class and you. To see Well Aware in action in the classroom, please view videos 4, 5 and 6.

www.pearsoncanada.ca/wellaware

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