

Creating Supportive Environments for Students with Mental Health Issues Using Restorative Approaches – the remix

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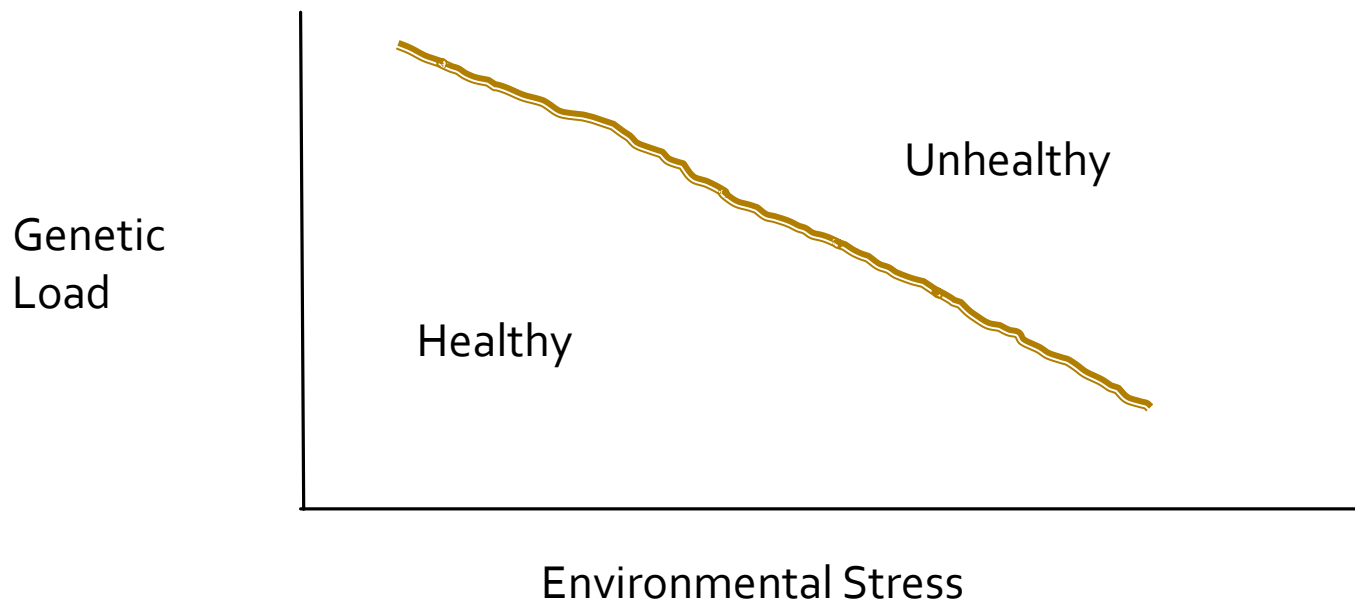
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Who Is Robert Wright?

- A registered SW Private Practitioner
- Former Coordinator Family Mediation Programme, YOU Inc., Worcester, MA
- Former Student Support Worker HDSB
- Former Race Relations Coordinator of the Dartmouth District School Board
- Former Ex.Dir. NS Child& Youth Strategy
- Former Ex. Dir. Child Welfare – Cumberland
- PhD Student in Sociology – Race, Identity, Power

Mental Health

- Mental Health influenced by interaction of “genetic load” and environmental stressors



Mental Health

- Most frequently encountered in schools:
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Mood disorders
 - Developmental disorders
 - Substance abuse/addiction
 - Stress disorders
 - Personality disorders

School is a Stressful Environment

- Increasing need for education requires retention of broader scope of students
- Schools no longer natural extensions of nurturing communities (external soc. forces)

Life is More Stressful

- Social progress and population prosperity is on the decline
- Social and economic forces are creating increased challenges for even the most resourced families
- Increasing diversity in such times inflates tensions if these trends are poorly understood

Restorative Principles

- Adaptation of Indigenous cultural world view
- Used to bring sanity to justice approaches
- 3 major principles
 - Promotion of peace and inclusive community is the ultimate goal
 - Interventions focus on repairing relationships
 - The whole community is harmed, the whole community responsible for restoration

The Application

- Restorative approaches can . . .
 - Be used to promote a community culture
 - Be used to reduce the environmental stresses
 - Be used to promote awareness of social forces
 - Be used to create a community in which persons can self disclose their challenges without stigma (secrets confound community)
 - Be used during interventions when student mental health issues are at the centre of conflict

Building Intentional Community

- Exemplified in “whole school” behaviour code programmes (eg. PEBS)
- GSA’s demonstrate an “intentional” programme of cultural change in support of inclusion
- Leaders of Today (LOT) has worked to link the “network of youth networks” provincially, always asking “who’s not at the table . . . yet”

Building Intentional Community

- “goals” and “rules” must be developed, not imposed
- Opportunity for discussion of “meaning” and “purpose” must be given (process focus)
- Acknowledgement of conflict between intended community and larger society
- Acknowledgement of tensions caused by contradictions and hypocrisies
- Seeks to engage the disenfranchised

Building Intentional Community

- A perpetual process
- Establish a school council responsible for community and inclusion
- Talk about the challenges, tensions and excluded groups
- When the community experiences a loss or rupture – talk about it!

Building Intentional Community

- How do you “include” the drug user/dealer?
 - First acknowledge the tension of conflicting needs: to include and to protect
 - Develop process to engage in conversation – what “rules” will govern the process
 - Explore first the needs and goals of the affected students – understand before you reality test
 - Find and Provide real supports where possible
 - Recruit some as leaders to help “outliers” find place in larger community

Example of Engagement

- Violent girls in inner city school – started a group that met weekly to explore social roots of violence

Other Examples

- Ceasefire
- “Group” at YPT
- Nia Centre

The Discussion

- Your Questions here:

The Plan

- What are your next steps as school communities?

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