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Supporting Student's Mental Health: The Teacher's Role

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss the problem of lack of teacher training and required coursework for pre-service teachers on mental health. In my literature review, I share the current offerings of teacher and pre-service teacher mental health training and note the lack of such research. To help combat the problem of lack of mental health training for educators, I designed an original one-credit course called EDUC 197: Supporting Students' Mental Health and taught it to nine Penn State students. While teaching the course, I collected data in a DBR model. After teaching the course, I reflected on the experience. I was able to develop several findings by analyzing my data. My findings were that many future teachers have a limited knowledge on mental health. I also found that students have an interest in mental health education, but do not have many options to receive it. And lastly, there is a large need for emphasis on virtual education and how to support students' mental health in an online setting.

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Chapter 1: Importance of Mental Health Education for Teachers

Each year, the number of students with declining mental health increases (APA, 2021). Many people play a role in helping to combat this problem. Parents, siblings, social workers, psychologists, therapists, and guidance counselors actively contribute to a student's mental health. However, unlike any of these people's role is that of a teacher. Teachers are often the first to notice declining mental health or the warning signs of a mental illness (Barile, 2020). Teachers can detect changes in a student's behavior that could lead to a referral for professional evaluation and help. Unfortunately, despite being an integral member of a child's support system, teachers are not required to have any training pertaining to mental health. This is more than not okay. It is dangerous for teachers to remain unaware and ignorant of the mental health crisis and how they can help.

Mental health education for teachers is vital because the rapid decline in students' mental health has been detrimental. According to APA (2021), currently in the United States, 7.1% of children aged 3-17 years old have a diagnosed anxiety disorder. This means that more than four million children are affected by a mental illness. Similarly, APA reports that "3.2% of children aged 3-17 years" have been diagnosed with depression. This is almost two million students. It is also very common for students with one mental illness to have a second. Lastly, APA reports that nearly three in four students with depression also have anxiety.

Even sadder, these numbers are increasing. In a research study performed by the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* referenced by APA, it was found that from 2005 to 2017, the number of

children eighteen and under reporting symptoms of major depression increased by 52% (APA, 2019). Mental health in children has been steadily declining each year.

If teachers do not assume the role they must have in their students' mental health, there will be extreme consequences. And being in a pandemic is not helping. This is exemplified through the increase in mental-health related Emergency department (ED) visits. From a study reported in November 2020, starting in April 2020, "the proportion of children's mental health-related ED visits increased and remained elevated through October. Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health-related visits for children aged 5-11 and 12-17 years increased approximately 24% and 31% respectively" (Leeb et al., 2020, para. 2). Suicide rates are also increasing in the U.S. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans ages 15 to 24 (Santhanam, 2019). Not only have suicides increased, but suicide attempts have increased. From 2007 to 2017, there was a 56% increase in suicide attempts in people ages 10 to 24 (Santhanam, 2019). Lastly, a haunting statistic that was discovered in a study performed by Dr. Michael Lindsey of NYU, one in five adolescents "are thinking about suicide" (Santhanam, 2019, para. 12). If teachers do not get involved, these numbers could continue to get worse.

Contrary to popular belief, students' mental health and mental illness are not just problems for high school teachers. Unfortunately, students' mental health decline and mental illnesses are occurring for younger children. In fact, "1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2-8 years had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, para. 7). Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the percentage of U.S. children under eighteen years old who have depression or anxiety. The number of children with these disorders ages eleven and under are shockingly high.

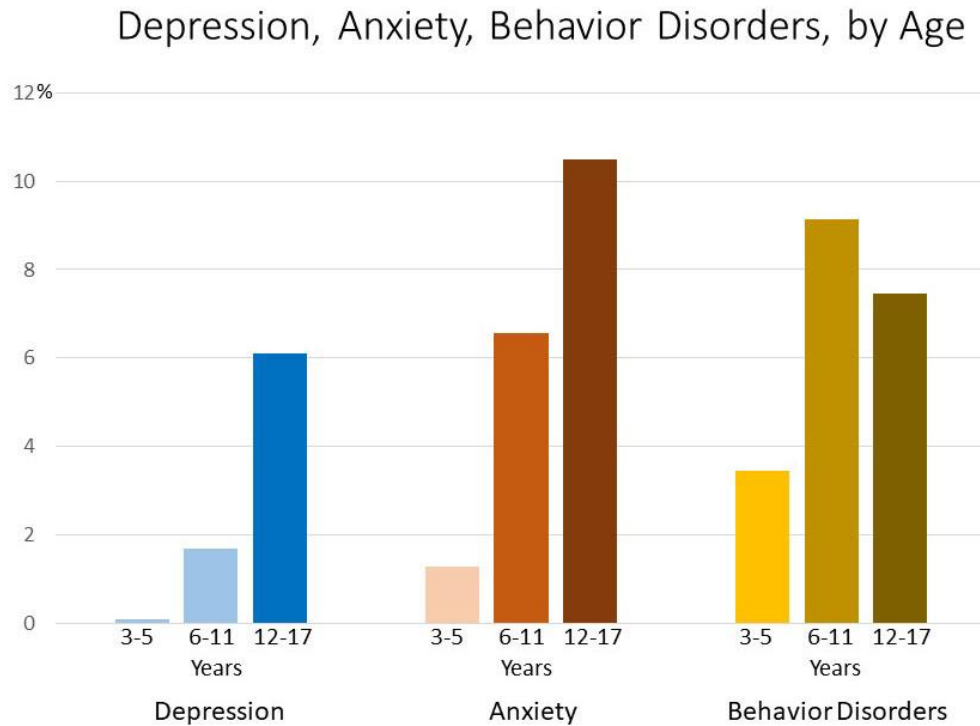


Figure 1: Depression, Anxiety, and Behavior Disorders by Age (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

One piece of good news in this saddening introduction is that teachers can have a positive impact on these statistics. If teachers are made aware of how they can support their students, they can help prevent these illnesses or contact licensed professionals to get involved with their students. Teachers can also employ simple classroom adaptations to help the general mental health and well-being of their students.

Above, I mentioned two problems. The first is that mental health in adolescents is in decline, and the second is that teachers are not prepared to support these students. To try and counteract the second problem, I decided to teach a class to pre-service teachers at The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) in the College of Education. This course was meant to better prepare future teachers in supporting students' mental health.

Chapter 2: Prior to Teaching EDUC 197

Building the Course: Students Teaching Students

While I always knew I intended on writing my thesis on mental health in schools, I struggled with the mode in which I would complete it. I wanted my thesis to have a discernible impact, in this case on future educators. A literature review thesis, although constructive for myself, does not spread the information to those who need it. I knew that in order for my thesis to actively advocate for mental health-informed education, I needed to find a way to teach what I was learning to other future educators.

This need and my desire to share knowledge and literature led me to apply to the organization Students Teaching Students (STS). STS is a Penn State student-run organization created in 2019 by two undergraduate students. STS philosophy is that undergraduate students are both qualified and have a desire to teach other undergraduate students. The idea stemmed from a program pioneered at the University of California: Berkeley called DeCals. Since UC Berkeley's inception of student taught courses in 1965, many other universities, like Penn State, have adopted similar programs that empower students to create and teach their own courses ("DeCal: Our History," n.d.). What drew me to apply to STS was the ability to design my own

original course. I was excited that I could have a platform to share what I consider to be necessary information about students' mental health with other Penn State prospective teachers. To begin the application process to STS, I was tasked with building my course syllabus, obtaining a "faculty champion," and justifying my credentials to teach.

My first step was contacting my thesis advisor and asking her to be my faculty champion. The faculty champion is someone who can attest to my ability to teach the course, provide guidance during the course design, and support me through the teaching process. My thesis advisor graciously agreed to be my faculty champion, so I began to design the course.

Building a novel course proved to be no easy task. I had many large decisions to make such as the course content, assignments, grading, and class format, but I also had so many smaller decisions to make as well such as the course title, class length, dates, times, number of students, department, and number of credits. The first step I took was deciding what exactly I wanted to teach. I knew that I wanted my class to prepare future educators to promote sound mental health in students. I also knew that my course was only going to be a one-credit elective, meaning I was constantly conscious of the limited scope of my class.

In my first draft of my course content, I came up with eight topics I wanted to talk about after reading more about the mental health support in schools. The topics I came up with were Assignment Deadlines, Getting to Know Students, Praise, Physical Exercise, Nature, Teacher Education, School Awareness, and Test-Taking Support/Assessment. In each category, I knew I wanted to talk about how these are related to mental health and how we might adapt our own classrooms or future classrooms to better support students' mental health. Later, I would add to this list the topic of Virtual Education.

Since I am cognizant of my lack of advanced degrees in this subject, I knew I wanted the course to stem from credible readings from experts. Therefore, my next step was finding these. This proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. While there is much research on mental health, there is a much narrower selection when we look at it through the lens of a teacher. The role of parent, student, school psychologist, guidance counselor, or therapist have much more defined roles in a student's mental health, but I wanted to explicitly look from the perspective of the teacher. Teachers play a tremendous role in the mental health of their students. They can enact preventative measures, aid in treatment of mental illness, and promote positive mental health (Barile, 2020). In my experience, teachers just do not know how.

After some time, I was able to acquire enough readings for my course. I strove to find two to three stimulating articles per topic. I purposely did not choose readings that were overly technical or lengthy because I wanted to respect the boundaries of a one-credit elective. I also didn't want to be hypocritical; I did not want to teach about supporting students' mental health and then overburden my students and contribute to their own well-being decreasing.

Creating Course Content and Assignments

After establishing the topics and readings, I had found the bulk of my course content. I now had to create the assignments of the class. Again, keeping in mind that this was a one-credit elective, I decided to keep the assignments brief. The final assignments were weekly reflections, in-class assignments, two "papers" throughout the course, a final group project, and one final reflection paper. The in-class assignments included informal lesson plans, Jamboards, and discussion. Ultimately, those who show up to class are given full points in this category.

The weekly reflection was an anonymous form where students share what material resonated with them, what they are still confused on, what they would still like to know more about, and whether they enjoyed class. Continuous feedback was important to me so that I could adjust the class to fit the needs and interests of the students. Since this form was anonymous, students who attended class were given full points, using the honor system that they completed it.

The two “papers” could be done at any point during the course and were a two-page reflection on how they will implement what they have learned into their own classrooms. I put “papers” in quotations because I did not want to limit the format of these. I wanted to accommodate students who do not enjoy or feel restricted with writing and allow them to provide these papers in an alternative format such as a podcast, PowerPoint presentation, song, poem, or any other approved way. The message I was trying to send students with this flexibility is that I care about their content rather than writing abilities.

In a nutshell, the group project let students choose their own topic that was not covered in the course and teach us how the topic can help support the mental health of our students. I had a few reasons for choosing to do this as a group project. First, I felt that it was important to provide space for the students to share on topics they are intrinsically interested in. And secondly, I wanted to exemplify how to incorporate group work into a classroom while still taking into consideration that some students get anxiety from group projects.

To alleviate the stress that comes with group projects, I created a survey for students to complete midway through the course. This survey asked students whether they preferred to work in a group or by themselves, if they had fellow students they knew they wanted to work with, and if they had a topic they were interested in. I felt this survey was important and powerful for many

reasons. First, it gave the students the choice of working with a group. I did not want to force anyone who did not want to work with others to do so. There are many factors that could affect a student's reason for wanting to work alone. For example, a student may have a topic they are particularly passionate about that others are not, and I want to allow them to choose a topic they want. Or a student may have an overbearing schedule that makes it difficult for them to find the time to work with a group. Whatever the reason may be, I think it is important to give students agency in their education. Another reason this survey was necessary is that I wanted students to work with classmates that they want to work with. Camaraderie among classmates is important, and in order to further enhance class relationships, I wanted them to pick their groups. The downside to this is that this means that some students may want a group, but not know how to join one. This survey asked already formed groups if they would be willing to have another group member. It also let me know if there were a few students who wanted a group, but did not have one, so I could pair them together.

The group project was purposely vague as I wanted students to take it in whatever direction they would like. I did not want them to feel boxed in with directions. I also provided about a dozen sample topics for students, although they are not required to choose one of these. I also had a resource sheet provided by a Counselor Education professor in the College of Education so that if any group was stuck, I could provide them with direction of where to go.

The final assignment was their final paper. This reflective paper asked students to think back over the entire course, talk about what they learned, what they will do differently in the future now, and let them evaluate me as an instructor.

Final Course Decisions

After creating the assignments, I moved on to how I would assess the students' work. As I stated earlier, many of the assignments were created so that effort and participation was rewarded. I decided to break down the weight of the assignments as follows: weekly reflections (10%), in-class assignments (20%), papers (15% each), group project (30%), and final paper (10%). My intention was to make the assignments that would take the most time worth the most. This way I was rewarding students for the time they were putting in. I wanted to show students that I valued their time and effort through my grading. All of the details regarding grading, assignments, and course information were all found in my course syllabus (see Appendix A). This syllabus was given to students prior to or on the first day of the course depending on when the student signed up.

My next steps were to check off a few logistical items. First, I had to decide on dates, times, and instructional mode. Since the course was only one credit, it was only going to be once a week. However, rather than have the course meet once a week for an hour for fifteen weeks, I decided to have the course meet for two hours for the first half of the semester. The last decision I made before formally submitting my syllabus for consideration to STS was the name and department of my course. Of course, my course would fall in the College of Education, and due to the general nature of the course, I chose to use the EDUC course prefix. The name of my course was "Supporting Students' Mental Health."

The last step to submit my application was answering short answer application questions. These questions asked why I created this course, who the target audience of the course is, and why I could teach it. I answered these questions as best as I could, and this completed my

application. I then waited to hear back from STS to see if I would receive an interview. I did receive an interview, and after partaking in the interview, I was accepted.

Advertising the Course

Now that my course was accepted, I somehow had to find a way to entice students to sign up. Unfortunately, my elective course did not count towards a general education credit like some other accepted STS courses. This meant that students did not gain any credits that they could use towards a major or minor. Therefore, the only students who would take my course would be ones who were interested in mental health awareness and advocacy or possibly a student who needed one credit to remain a full-time student.

The target audience of my class was students in the College of Education since it was geared to future educators. Therefore, the first step I took was to reach out to the College of Education Student Council. I knew that they would be able to help me advertise my course. I created a flyer with the course details to spread around the College. The College of Education Student Council connected me with the faculty member who sent emails out to the entire college. I sent this person my flyer and my course details were then mass distributed to the entire college. The day this email went out, I had eight people sign up for my course.

STS also helps advertise courses as well. STS makes flyers that have all the student-taught courses along with descriptions of the unique courses. They post this flyer to their website and Instagram. Next to each course on their website, they also have a link which takes you in LionPath to where students can sign up for the course. Because these two groups were so helpful

from the beginning, finding enough students to have my class run was never a problem. I was very grateful for everyone involved who helped with the outreach for my course.

Preparing to Teach

With the start of the course imminent, I still had a few tasks to complete. First, I met with my thesis advisor and a Counselor Education professor in the college at the request of Associate Deans of the College of Education. There were two purposes of this meeting. First, everyone just wanted to make sure that the course content was appropriate, meaningful, and correct.

Thankfully, there were not any problems in this department. The second reason was so that my advisor and I could receive advice on what to do if content was triggering for students. My takeaway from this meeting was to help students process the content.

I also continued editing the content of my course all the way up to the start of the course. A part of this included determining what the day-to-day plans for the course looked like. Creating individual lesson plans was therefore my next venture. When constructing each class's lesson, I was mindful that I wanted the course to have a lot of student engagement. In fact, nowhere in the course did I intend on lecturing. I find lecturing to be an ineffective way to distribute information. I instead wanted to incorporate discussions and activities.

I also had a unique idea to incorporate one way that students and teachers can take care of their own mental health at the start of each class. Therefore, to begin each class, we participated in guided meditation, yoga, journaling, or a fun game. The reason I chose to do this was to show my students that you can successfully integrate mental health practices into classes. I also think it is important to prioritize your own mental health, and if I modeled this in my class, I was seeking

to contribute to my students' mental health. It was important to me that the lessons I incorporated into my teaching are being practiced in my own class. I also made sure each week to add a break into class midway through. This is important because two hours is a long time. I wanted to give my students time to disengage from the course and relax so that they would not get burnt out in the second half of class.

Finding or creating meaningful activities was a bit challenging. I wanted the students to do more than just talk, but this was hard in a virtual setting. In the end, I was able to include a few activities such as creating informal lesson plans with a partner. Much of each day's lesson was discussion-based. I created sample questions that I could ask related to each topic. I knew that I would probably stray from these questions to follow the natural flow of the conversation; however, I wanted to have them just in case. All the lesson plans were done prior to the start of the course as well.

The next step was meeting with my Schreyer Institute of Teaching Consultant. Each STS student instructor is assigned a Teaching Consultant to aid us in the construction of our lessons as well as help with how we will grade the course, help with nerves, and help us teach virtually. I met with my Teaching Consultant twice. I first met with her before I made my lesson plans. We talked about the goals of my course and how I could accomplish those goals. Then I met with her after I had produced all my lesson plans. The lesson plans I created can be found in Appendix B. We then reviewed them together and decided to amend some activities that were not as meaningful as I had intended. For example, I had an activity where I was going to have two groups do the same task, and I would give one group more time than the other. Then we would discuss how it felt to have the pressure of time and how this relates to deadlines and mental

health. Ultimately, we decided that there were more related and meaningful ways to spend class since it is obvious that if we give more time, students produce higher quality work.

The very last step I took before the class began was to upload all my materials into Canvas. I am very fortunate to have had prior experience as an administrator in a Canvas course, so it did not take me very long to add my materials. I broke each week down into modules. Each module was named for the week. In each module would be the readings due for that class, any in-class activities, an agenda for the day, and the link to the weekly reflection. I had every week available in Canvas from the beginning because I know that students like to know where the course is going. There also is not anything on there that students could do ahead of time, so there was no harm in keeping the entire course's materials open from the start. After I added everything into Canvas, I had nothing left to do but teach the course I spent the last semester creating.

When I was building this course, it was really important to me that I was providing not only up to date and accurate information, but that I was also employing the relevant theories and pedagogies that come with mental health-informed education. Therefore, I acquired much background knowledge on mental health, mental health education, and what is currently taught to educators about mental health. In the next section, I discuss the information that I learned in this process.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

There is little literature on engaging pre-service teachers in learning about supporting students' mental health, although research has shown that practicing teachers have a need for training on this topic: "93% of teachers express concerns over students' mental well-being, but the vast majority feel ill-prepared to respond" (Mills College, 2020, para. 19). This is a large percentage of teachers who expressed a need for information about supporting their students' mental health needs. Given the lack of research on pre-service teacher education, I turn to the research on in-service teacher professional development to support the need for this project.

What Teachers Can Learn in Professional Development about Supporting Students' Mental Health

While it is unrealistic to ask teachers to take a college course on mental-health informed education, that does not mean that they cannot learn anything in a professional development setting. This has been done in a variety of ways, so we can see what mental health professionals are currently teaching the teachers.

One thing that teachers learn in these seminars is confidence in actions they can take to support students' mental health (Mills College, 2020). In order for teachers to do their role effectively, they have to know what their role is. Letting a teacher know what they can and cannot do eases the teacher's mind. Seminars have been developed that engage teachers in simulations of teacher-student interactions around mental health. The developers of such seminars argue that the more practice teachers have with dealing with situations and everyday interactions, the more confidence teachers gain. In these kinds of seminars, teachers can practice

their response to certain student behavior in a low-stakes environment so that their first handling of a situation is not with an actual student.

Teachers can also learn the science behind mental health. For example, teachers can learn about the relationship between mental disorders and the brain (“Teacher Knowledge Update,” 2017). Teaching the science and neurology behind mental illnesses and disorders can help reduce the stigma teachers may have surrounding mental health. A teacher may have inaccurate knowledge about mental health and mental illnesses, and the goal of professional development is to fix that. Many professional development seminars could also include a section on the causes of mental illness. This can help teachers learn warning signs to watch for so that they can alert a school mental health professional early on.

Many professional development seminars also educate teachers on specific mental illnesses. Some of the common mental illnesses that are touched on are anxiety disorders, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, substance abuse, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders (“Teacher Knowledge Update,” 2017). While this is not an all-encompassing list, it does account for many of the common mental illnesses that students can have. More specifically, the teachers can learn more specific information such as who is at risk, what to do if you think a student is showing signs of mental distress, and what the warning signs are (“Teacher Knowledge Update,” 2017). Effects of mental illness are also often discussed in professional development. Suicide is often mentioned as it is a possible outcome of a mental illness. Educators want to prevent this tragedy, and in order to do that, they have to know warning signs and response procedures (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, n.d.).

A second effect that is often addressed in teacher training is self-harm. Contrary to popular belief, self-harm is not always an indicator for pending suicide Centre for Suicide

Prevention, 2016). Therefore, teachers learn the difference between self-harm and suicide and the different responses to both.

While I have just mentioned the topics that are often included in teacher training on mental health, it is important to note that these kinds of trainings are rare - there are not many professional developments programs dedicated to mental health. One organization to put on these in-service trainings is “Mental Health First Aid.” They have created both online and in-person training to educate teachers on mental health and mental illness (National Council for Behavioral Health, n.d.). These courses are facilitated by trained volunteers and they are mainly run in New York. While this training has been given in schools, it is not necessarily designed for teachers specifically. This was designed to be given to any adult. However, Mental Health First Aid was created by educators. The founders of this organization created in 2001 are “Betty Kitchener, a nurse specializing in health education, and Anthony Jorm, a mental health literacy professor” (Roll, 2020, para. 2). Jorm’s background as a professor has made him an asset in the teacher education community.

Recently, the New Jersey Department of Human Services paid to have one person from every New Jersey school district to become a certified Mental Health First Aid Instructor through Mental Health First Aid (Roll, 2020). This occurred in February 2020, and it is unclear if there was any follow through with this partnership due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pre-Service Teachers and Mental Health Education

While Penn State does not currently offer an undergraduate course on mental health for educators, other universities and colleges do. One example of this is the University of San Diego.

Not only do they offer one class, they offer several that result in a certificate. Similar to a minor, if a student completes five courses on mental health, they receive a Mental Health First Response Certificate (University of California San Diego, n.d.). This is specifically offered as a certificate so that it could be targeted to current professors as well as undergraduate and graduate students.

Another college that offers mental health training for teachers is the University of Northern Iowa. Like the University of San Diego, the University of Northern Iowa not only offers a single course but an entire Mental Health minor (University of Northern Iowa, 2017). The minor is classified in the Department of Psychology, not Education, and it is still not a requirement for education majors as well. Utah State has a similar program. They offer a minor in Mental Health Advocacy and Awareness. This is also offered through the Department of Psychology (University of Northern Iowa, 2017).

The common theme here is that even though mental health education is available at some, but not all, colleges, it is rarely if ever specified for teachers. Colleges of Education across the country rarely, if ever, offer mental health training requirements or electives.

Connection to EDUC 197

After learning all of this background knowledge, I designed the course through the process outlined in Chapter 2. Since I learned that there is not a standardized curriculum for what to teach teachers about mental health, I realized I had a lot of room to choose what I would be teaching. Most of what I read showed that current programs teach teachers about mental illnesses. However, I felt that it was important to teach how to support students rather than diagnose them, which is not the role of the teacher. Therefore, I adapted my course to be more

about the role of a teacher in supporting students' mental health. This meant choosing topics that fit the responsibilities and tasks of a teacher such as lesson planning, creating and implementing assessment, and monitoring student wellness.

I also wanted my course to cover content so that future teachers could be helpful for all students. While not every student has a mental illness, every student has mental health, and it is important that we are supporting all students. Therefore, I chose strategies that help all students rather than focusing on mental illness. Mental illness would typically be handled by guidance counselors or school psychologists anyways. I wanted to emphasize that teachers are not therapists, counselors, or medical professionals, and if I focused on mental illness, there would be a disconnect as to what is relevant to teachers. This is why I chose to focus on general mental health in my course and not mental illness.

Chapter 4: Methods

Design-Based Research

Design-Based Research (DBR) is a type of research that aids in bettering educational practices (Armstrong, M., Dopp, C., & Welsh, J., 2020). DBR was created by researchers who felt that traditional laboratory research was not effective for implementation, meaning that research does not always help practitioners. It is a bit unclear who first founded DBR; however, Allan Collins, Ann Brown, John Chris Jones, Bruce Archer, and Herbert Simons (Christensen, K. & West, R., 2013; Armstrong, M., Dopp, C., & Welsh, J., 2020) are often associated with this research tradition. DBR has a more flexible approach in that the research is done through practice, which allows for contextualization. DBR lets us study the given in the setting it would be seen in the real-world.

DBR allows for solutions to be found through practice. In essence, since my focus was on providing pre-service teachers pedagogies and background knowledge on a teacher's role in a student's mental health, I can perform DBR through teaching. Then, throughout a teaching and feedback loop, I can adjust the course and my teaching to better meet my goal.

In DBR, the researcher often takes on the role of "curriculum designer" (Armstrong, M., Dopp, C., & Welsh, J., 2020, para. 9) which is what I did in my course. An important aspect of DBR is the adaptations in the research throughout the progression of the course. This is why feedback is imperative. It aids in the iterative form that DBR relies on.

One of the criticisms and apprehensions concerning DBR is its ambiguity. There is often debate as to what constitutes DBR (Christensen, K. & West, R., 2013). However, for the purpose of my course, the following figure was used to define the process of DBR.

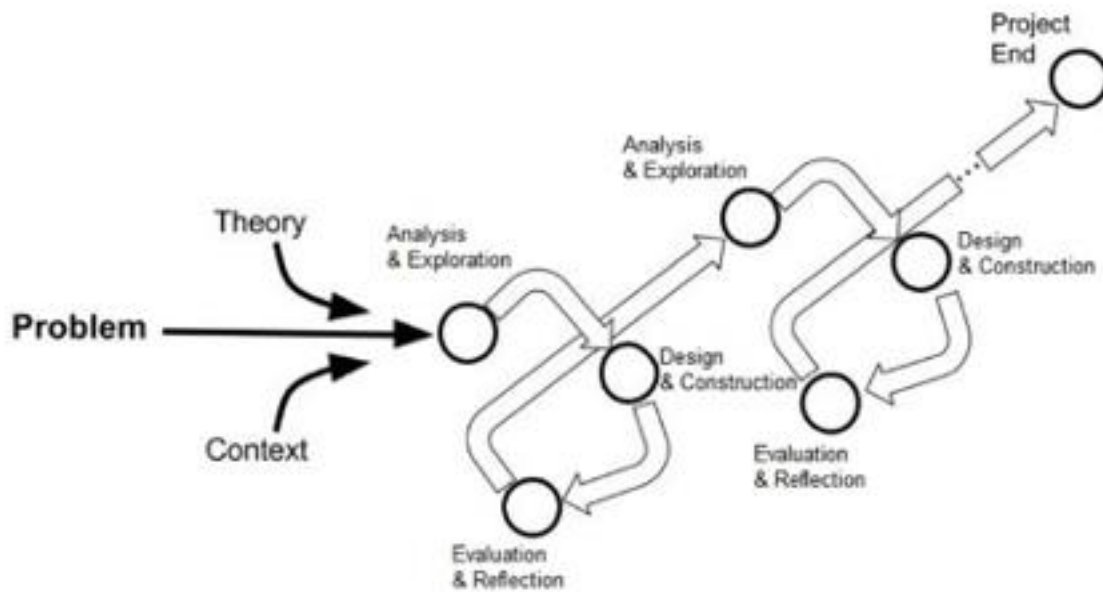


Figure 2: DBR Model (Armstrong, M., Dopp, C., & Welsh, J., 2020)

There are many parts to DBR, as seen in Figure 2 (Armstrong, M., Dopp, C., & Welsh, J., 2020). The research begins with a problem. This is backed with theory and context. Then follows several rounds of evaluation and reflection followed by design and construction. This eventually leads to the project end. This whole process with all of these components is what makes up DBR.

Course Design Through the DBR Lens

Taking all of this into account, I designed my course to be able to involve DBR. Here I define how my course fits the above model for DBR.

First, I started with a problem. My problem was that teachers do not have mandatory training on mental health in adolescents nor do they understand the role of the teacher in supporting students' mental health. My aim was to solve this problem by creating a course that teaches this. If this is my goal, then my project end would be to teach the course, collect

informative feedback throughout the course, adjust the course based on that feedback, and then look at the effect the course had on its participants.

The theory part of the DBR can be seen in the Literature Review. I looked at what is currently taught to teachers and pre-service teachers about mental health. I also read about the topic to become more educated about the teacher's role in supporting students' mental health. This was something I had to be very cognizant of because the role of a teacher is different from that of a parent, guidance counselor, peer, or school psychologist. I had to constantly ensure that the information I was providing was poignant to my audience.

The context was provided through Students Teaching Students. As seen in Chapter 1, I designed an original course and interviewed and defended it to be able to teach this as a real class. This was perfect as one of the staples of DBR is the ability to contextualize the research. This gave me a chance to teach my course to actual pre-service teachers.

Data Collection

All data collected for this project can be classified as artifacts from normal course activities. No data were collected outside of what the course students would complete to meet course requirements. I collected course-based data in a variety of different ways: the weekly reflection, final paper, pre-assessment, Get to Know You Survey, and course discussion. From these data sources, I was able to discern what students were learning, how they were thinking about course content, what they were still confused about, and anything else that stood out.

The first mode of data collection was through the weekly reflection. The weekly reflection was a Microsoft Form that the class spent the last five to ten minutes of each class

completing. This reflection was completely anonymous. It was graded on the honesty system, and if a student missed class, they were exempt from the assignment. In the weekly reflection, students were asked five questions: a) What did you learn this week that resonated with you? b) What still confuses you after today? c) What did you learn that surprised you? d) what would you still like to know more about? and e) Did you enjoy today's class? If yes, why? If no, why not? The variety of questions allowed me to look at a couple of different changes I could make. For example, should I change any content, adjust course assignments or activities, adjust grading, or anything else. By the end of the course, I had fifty-two responses for six classes of content.

The next method of data collection was from the final paper. This was one of the assignments that ended up changing based on student feedback as well as some personal reflection. The final assignment asked students three questions. What was your favorite week of class and why? What was your favorite activity we did in class and why? Any other thoughts on the class? In the next section, I explain why the assignment changed. I think it is important that students enjoy class, and I wanted to know what topics as well as what activities the class best liked.

The next data source was the pre-assessment. In this CANVAS assignment, students were asked four questions: What is your definition of mental health? What do you already know about mental health in general? What do you know about mental health as it relates to schools? What are three questions you have that you would like answered in this class? In particular, the last question allowed me to see if the interests of the class aligned with the topics I had chosen, and if not, how I could incorporate their interests.

Similar to the pre-assessment, I also asked students to fill out a form telling me about themselves. While I did not intentionally send this out with the purpose of using it for data, I did end up receiving a few helpful pieces of information that led me to alter how I managed the class.

The last data sources of data for this study were based in student communications. First, I took during group discussions. These notes focused on the conversations that students engaged in during class and I used them to gauge how they were feeling and enjoying the course. Second, I included emails that I received from students. I was pleasantly surprised with the number of emails I received from students showing vulnerability, openness, and honesty with me.

Through all of these data sources, I was able to engage in the DBR process to make sure I was being an effective educator while also taking into account the mental and physical health of my students. As such, I was able to analyze these data sources to make changes to my teaching to determine the success of my course in educating pre-service teachers on mental-health informed education.

Chapter 5: Findings

The DBR Process Findings

In this section, I present each data source and discuss how the data informed adaptations to the course through the DBR process.

Get to Know You Survey

Prior to the course, during the course, and at the closing of the course, I collected data. Throughout this entire process, I was constantly and consistently looking at this data to see how I could be adapting my course. The first data that I collected was from the Get to Know You Survey. As I mentioned earlier, I did not intend to use this as formal data. However, there were a few things that came up that made me conscious of how I wanted to start the course. For example, one of my students brought up how a recent suicide of a friend was what pushed them to sign up for this course. I already knew I was going to approach this course with sensitivity and kindness, but this already opened my eyes to the realities that my students are currently facing. This comment was a reminder to me that my course is not the priority in any of my students' lives, and I have to be cognizant of what my students are going through.

The second question that I asked that gave me insight into my students was: Is there anything else you think I should know? I had three students (a third of the class) mention how they were already feeling overwhelmed with their classes. They said they felt overburdened with readings and long amounts of time online. After reading this, I realized just how important it was for me to only assign work outside of the class when absolutely necessary. I was extremely grateful to my students for signing up for a one-credit elective. Unlike some other STS courses, mine could not be used to fill any general education requirements. This meant that the students signing up for my course wanted to be there. Out of respect for that, I kept the majority of coursework to being in-class. It also changed my perception on course readings. While I assigned readings, I never enforced whether they were read. I felt that the readings were supplementing class, and so I did not think it was necessary to burden my students with a reading quiz or assignment since they already told me how they were being buried by their other coursework.

Another small change that I made was to one of my warm-up activities. I started every class with an activity designed to promote positive mental health. I also tried to match these activities to the themes of the class. Therefore, since one of my classes was on exercise and movement in the classroom, I decided to have students dance. I had originally thought very long and hard about this activity. I wanted to pair students up to create a dance to a piece of a song that would be chosen beforehand. After giving each pair of students time in breakout rooms to choreograph their dance, I would call everyone back together, and we would do our dances as a class. I did this so as not to single anyone out who might not be comfortable dancing in front of others. Ultimately, I decided to cut this activity. In my Get to Know You Survey, I had multiple students tell me about their own struggles with anxiety as well as two students share that they are very shy and reserved. My goal as an educator is to alleviate unnecessary anxiety, not cause it. I decided to substitute yoga for this dance activity. This still involved movement and students could have their cameras off so that they are not self-conscious. Knowing my students more helped me know what they are and are not comfortable with.

Pre-Assessment

The next way that I used the data in the DBR process was through the pre-assessment. This was done through a CANVAS assignment where students typed their answers to questions. In this Pre-Assessment, students were asked to share their prior knowledge on the intersectionality of education and mental health. I also asked students to ask questions about what they would like to learn in this course. I was really happy to see that many of the questions aligned with what I already had planned such as how teachers can support students with test

anxiety, how teachers can implement de-stressing activities into their classroom, or how they can make mental-health informed decisions for content specific activities or assessment.

However, one theme I noticed was how my students were interested in age-specific information about mental health. For example, many of my students were early childhood education majors, and they wanted to know how to handle mental health in an age-appropriate way for their future students. I will admit that as a secondary education major, I had not thought in-depth about younger children. Right after this, I immediately went back through my activities and content and made sure to incorporate more information for kids in elementary school. While this was not hard to do, and there were accessible resources out there, it was something I had overlooked. One specific example of a change I made was in my class on how we can incorporate the outdoors into our classes. A large part of outdoors time in elementary school is recess, and I had neglected to provide any information on it. To amend this, I found an interesting video and added a reading to include more information specific to recess in elementary school.

Weekly Reflections

One of the most helpful ways I collected data for the DBR process was through the weekly reflection. This was effective because it occurred after each class, so I could have written data on each class. After each class, I read this anonymous feedback to make future changes. For example, my course was intentionally designed to be discussion-based. Since I am an undergraduate student and not an expert in this area, I wanted to refrain from lecturing. Not only is it not interesting or engaging for students, I did not feel qualified to lecture on this topic. This

allowed me to do many activities and discovery by discussion. An example of how I avoided lecturing was in my first class, when rather than defining mental health or mental illness for my students, I had them work together to make a definition as a class. Their definition was awesome and very similar to widely used definitions in the field, so I did not bother giving them another definition. However, after this class, some students requested being told the scientific or scholarly information. This caused me to change a few lessons. For example, I adapted my Virtual Education lesson to be a PowerPoint. I almost never used a PowerPoint so that I could see my students faces and so that it would not impede discussion. However, students responded positively to this PowerPoint, and the feedback said they appreciated being told information. While direct instruction is not always the right option, it can be used appropriately and in moderation so that students are learning.

As I stated earlier, I started each class with an activity to de-stress my students and build relationships. I incorporated guided meditation, yoga, and journaling into my class. At first, I was worried whether students would like this or find it helpful. My intent in having these activities was to model how to include mental health activities into the classroom as well as have an activity that allows students to refocus for my class. Because of the overwhelming response in the weekly reflections about how much students enjoyed this, I kept doing them. I even repeated them for specific activities that students enjoyed such as the guided meditation.

Something that I am most proud of, and that influenced many of my findings regarding my course, were the responses I received to the last question on my reflection: whether students enjoyed class or not. Of all 52 responses I received, all 52 said that the student enjoyed that class. While students could have been lying, their responses were anonymous which made me think they were not lying. Students who enjoy class are more engaged, and engaged students learn. I

continued to grow in confidence throughout the course because of the positive feedback that I was receiving.

Course Discussions

Throughout the course, I had a lot of great conversations with my students. These seemingly small conversations allowed me to change the course for the better. During breakout rooms, I would often engage in conversation with my students about the course. Something that one student told me was that she just wanted to clarify the final paper topic because she did not see how it was different from the two other papers the students had to write. After thinking about it a lot, I did see that the two regular papers were very similar to the final paper, and I did not want to force my students to constantly repeat the same things in their papers. Therefore, I brought up an amendment with the class. I asked if they would be alright if I changed the final paper because I did not want to stress them out by changing a paper without their permission. I changed the final paper to asking the students what their favorite class was, what their favorite activity was, and any other thoughts they had on the course. The students again responded positively to this change, and I was happy to take their opinions into consideration.

I also had discussions with my mentor Dr. Arbaugh. After the first class, we talked about how I could include the readings more. Like I stated earlier, it was intentional to not over-focus on the readings, but I did not want to neglect them. Therefore, we discussed creating questions to ask students what they learned from the readings. Then, throughout the course, I amended this again, and I made sure to mention the important aspects of the readings myself throughout each class without having specific time dedicated to the readings. If I had to redo this course, the

largest part of the class that I would change is how I would handle the readings. I want to find a way to include them more without causing unnecessary stress with them.

After one class, a student asked if she could speak to me. When we started talking, she told me how she was involved in a summer program where she would be teaching a class. She was told that she could create an elective to teach, and she asked if she could adapt my class to teach to students. This made me immensely happy because one of the criteria that I had to determine the success of my class was seeing if students used the information we learned. This was an immediate and direct result of taking my class, and I was happy to help her build her own course on mental health education that was appropriate for her audience. I also felt happy that she felt comfortable enough to ask me to help her, and I attribute this strong relationship to be from the relationship building I included in the beginning of the course. I am excited to see what her course looks like.

Final Paper

Since the final paper due date was after my last scheduled class, I used the final paper to analyze the course as a whole. I asked students what their favorite class was, what their favorite activity was, and any other thoughts on the class. There was no consensus on which class or activity was enjoyed the most, as there was a lot of variation in answers. I was happy with this because everyone was able to relate to at least one class and activity. Many students also expressed how they enjoyed the de-stressing activities such as the guided meditation.

The final papers confirmed for me that this course is something that is not only needed in the college, but also very wanted. Students expressed that they felt more prepared to handle

mental health situations in their classroom, and they learned ways to take care of their own mental health.

Findings Regarding Students in the Course

Finding 1: Students' Prior Knowledge is Limited

One of the findings from this course is that students in the Penn State College of Education have little background knowledge on a teacher's role in a student's mental health. In my pre-assessment, I asked students to put what their background knowledge on mental health and education. The responses I got were very limited. Many students were not coming to the course with a lot of background knowledge. While many students expressed their own struggles with mental health, they acknowledged that they did not feel like they knew a lot. Specifically, many students wrote that they knew that many students struggled with mental health, but they did not know what their role was. This confirms the need for this class. My class specifically targets pre-service teachers so that they can become literate with mental health and know how to best support their students.

A common theme was for students to say they did not know much about mental health. While this is not necessarily indicative of every student in the College of Education, it does show that the majority do not feel prepared to support students' mental health when entering the workforce.

Students were also quick to mention anxiety and depression, but this does not encompass the broad field of mental health. In the first class, we discussed the difference between mental health and mental illness. Many students were surprised to learn that these two terms are different. And while depression and anxiety disorders are some of the mental illnesses that affect

a large portion of students, it does not account for the mental health of every student. It is important for teachers to know the vocabulary surrounding mental health.

Finding 2: Students are Interested in Mental Health

When students enter college, they are encouraged to take courses in topics they are interested in. Unfortunately, there is not always a relevant class even at a large university like Penn State. I have always been interested in mental health and the ways that teachers can support their students, but unfortunately, there are no courses currently in the College of Education that teach this. One could argue that the course is not available because there is not a large enough interest in the subject. My course is evidence that students are interested.

I have said before in this paper, my course was a one-credit elective that did not satisfy any general education requirements, so students had no reason to take this course other than interest. I believe that a class taught by a professor would have an even larger turn out because they could bring a higher level of detail and depth to the course.

Students continuously expressed to me their interest in mental health. It was brought up in the Get to Know You Survey, Pre-Assessment, Final Papers, and in class discussion. During my course, a student in the College of Education passed away due to mental health concerns. My class talked about the difference between proactive and reactive measures for mental health. Responding to this untimely death of a student would be a reactive measure. I believe we owe it to her to create a more permanent course offering. However, I am also emphasizing the importance of more proactive measures. It should not take a death for the college to prioritize

mental health education for teachers. We need to take preventative measures to help support our students.

Finding 3: An Emphasis on Virtual Education is Needed

My last finding throughout this course is the need for more emphasis on virtual education. While many originally saw virtual education as temporary, it is still important to prepare teachers for virtual education. And while it is important for teachers to learn how to teach content virtually, it is also important to learn how to support students virtually.

It is well-known that virtual education can cause a decline in mental health. While teachers may not be able to prevent this totally, they can do more to support students' -- they just need to know how. Building relationships, assessing students, and providing instruction all look different in a virtual environment. So does supporting students' mental health. In a virtual environment, teachers do not see everything they would see in an in-person setting.

Evidence to support that this is necessary is seen through the weekly reflection. Each week, I ask students what they still want to know more about. While this question was often filled with "Nothing's," the week we talked about virtual education, it was filled with questions. Students wanted to know more specifically how to watch out for a student's mental health in a virtual setting, both in synchronous and asynchronous formats.

Lessons Learned

Personal Reflection

Going into this course, I was nervous about many things. What if no one signed up for my course? What if my students knew more than I did? What if I did not know the answer to a question? What if the students hate my class? What if they do not respect me because of my age? I had many fears before and during the course. I was very fortunate to not have many problems in my class.

I soon found out that all of my above fears had easy answers. At the end of my course, I had nine students. Sometimes my students did know more than me, and that was a positive thing. I did not know the answer to some questions, and I made sure to write them down and find the answer. The feedback from my class tells me they did not hate it. And despite my age, my students were kind, respectful, and compassionate. None of my fears ended up getting the best of me. This course reassures me of two very important aspects. First, I love teaching. I have wanted to be a teacher since I was in kindergarten, and a part of me has wondered if I never stopped to consider if this is still what I want after over fifteen years of wanting to. This course confirms my love for teaching and my students. And secondly, this course assures me that I can teach well. I am by no means perfect, and I would not teach this course exactly the same if I were to teach it again, but I am proud of the job I have done with this course.

Relationship Building

One of the largest lessons I learned from this course is the importance of relationship building. As I have learned in my courses throughout college as well as from what I have experienced in my own education, relationship building is crucial in a classroom. I chose to dedicate a class and a half, meaning three hours, to help build connections between me and my students and the students with each other. I attribute a lot of the success of my class to the emphasis I placed on relationship building. The students were able to find similarities amongst themselves. Some students realized they were from the same town, some students were connected to the Blue Band, and many students were pursuing similar or the same minors. In a traditional lecture, students would never find this information out about each other. In virtual education, it is especially important to prioritize engagement, and I was happy students enjoyed the discussion-based aspect of the class. One student in their final paper noted how in their six classes, mine was the only one that was not a lecture. While this saddened me to hear, I was happy they were able to talk to peers in my class. In all my future classes, I now know I will place a heavy emphasis on relationship building.

Compassion in the Classroom

The last lesson I learned was the importance of compassion as a teacher. Often, I think teachers become so focused on making sure that students are learning what we intend them to learn that we forget our classes are not the priority of their life. Teachers often are strict with deadlines and grading with good intentions to teach responsibility and hard work, but this does not account for mental health. During my class, many students opened up to me about personal

life events that were affecting their ability to focus on or prioritize schoolwork. I made sure in all my interactions with my students to remind them that I place their mental and physical health over any class or assignment. Therefore, when a death in the Penn State community affected some of my students, I let them know it was okay for them to miss class to mourn and attend the vigil.

This was also made clear in my syllabus. Under my section regarding absences, I made sure to tell students that their mental health comes first, and I was relieved and happy to see that students felt comfortable telling me when they were not mentally or physically able to attend class.

Next Steps

One of the purposes of this course was to show the necessity of a course like this. Teachers are given mandatory special education training because we acknowledge the vitality of having that information. However, at Penn State, students in the College of Education do not have any required training on mental health. Although I would like to see this training occur at the national or even state level, the change starts here. Mental health education is not just for counselors anymore. Teachers spend hours each week with their students, and the impact that teachers have is large. It is important that teachers know how to handle situations as well as day-to-day interactions to help their students.

I would like to see Penn State create a three-credit course for future educators that meets a general education requirement. My course was limited due to my credentials and the elective-status of the course. I believe a three-credit course is warranted for this. Many other topics could

be discussed in this course that I did not have the time to address such as mindfulness, trauma, suicide, and mental-health literacy. All of this is necessary information for teachers, and I hope that my class has shown the positive impact that a course like this can have.

Besides a required course, there are other options for how colleges can inform pre-service teachers of this important information. One way that colleges could do this is through a conference. Each year, the College of Education at Penn State puts on a Diversity Conference. This conference contains multiple days of panels and seminars for students. A conference for mental health could be put on by the College of Education. It could bring in guest speakers. For example, I had a speaker from the Counseling and Psychological Services come to my class and speak about mental health knowledge for teachers. There are also off-campus resources that do outreach for mental health awareness and education. There is also the Herr Clinic run out of the College of Education, and there are students and professors in the Counseling Education Department that are knowledgeable on mental health for educators. All of these departments and organizations could come together and put on a conference.

Another example of a way that the College of Education could disperse this information is through a single workshop. Workshops are often put on by the College of Education. Even if it were a one- to two-hour workshop, that is still better than nothing. Like the conference, we could work with local organizations and professors in the college to determine the most important information to start a conversation on mental health education for teachers.

Perhaps a bit of an undertaking, another idea would be to put on a national conference as well. This would be similar to the above idea, but it would include more colleges. I have been fortunate to be a writing tutor for Penn State Learning and I was also fortunate to present research at both a regional and national writing center conference. Penn State could put on a

conference about supporting students' mental health. This would allow professors, graduate students, and even undergraduate students from other colleges to present sessions. It would also diversify and increase the number of presenters and spectators. This also could start an annual event dedicated to learning about the recent research and pedagogies relating to mental health education.

There are many ways that the College of Education could begin to incorporate mental health education and training into its curriculum. Whether it be through a course, conference, or perhaps even a website, it is important that we start to see this information as vital and not an option to learn.

Appendix A: Course Syllabus

EDUC 197: Supporting Students' Mental Health

Course Description

While teachers are trained in many areas throughout their education -- special education, content area, assessment, homework, classroom management, etc. – there is one key area left out. Many students will enter the workforce as teachers or administrators without ever having discussed mental health and the impact it can have on their students. It is not an if but rather a when you have students struggling to maintain positive mental health, which you may or may not know about, it is crucial to know that you are doing everything you can to support these students. In this class, we will take an in depth look at the literature surrounding how teachers can support students' mental health. Students will be able to deeply understand their role in helping these students. Each week, students will be challenged to reflect upon their own education. Then, we will learn how to alter these conventional, routine methods of teaching to better support students. Students will be able to take away concrete ways to support their students, meaning we will not just be thinking theoretically. By the end of this class, students will have a strong idea of how they can change their teaching methods to support students with mental health.

Course Goals

Students will be able to

- Critique their own educational experiences on how they were supported or not supported
- Analyze current research on concrete ways to support students with mental illness
- Justify the importance of supporting mentally ill students
- Formulate new ways to help students based on literature and research

- Distinguish the limitations of the information presented

Course Details

- **Course:** EDUC 197: Supporting Students' Mental Health
- **Prerequisites:** None
- **Credits:** 1
- **Seats:** 15
- **Lecture Time:** Tuesdays 6-8 pm 1/19/21 through 3/9/21
- **Office Hours:** By appointment
- **Location:** ZOOM Synchronous
- **Semester:** Spring 2021
- **Textbook:** No required textbook; all readings will be provided on Canvas
- **Course Facilitator(s):** SaraGrace Kimball (sgk19@psu.edu)
- **Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Fran Arbaugh

Topics Covered

Syllabus may be subject to minor changes, but drastic revisions will require input of students/facilitators, and those involved will be notified immediately.

In this course, we will cover a variety of topics. Each week, we will look into one concrete way that teachers can adapt their classroom to help students with mental illnesses. We will get through as many of these as we can, but if we do not get to any of these topics, they may be used for the group project as well.

Topics:

- Assignment Deadlines
 - For the most part every assignment you've ever received has had a deadline attached to it. Together, we will discuss our experiences with deadlines. Were we able to ask for extensions? What were the penalties for missing a deadline? Do you feel deadlines helped or hindered you? Then we will compare our experiences to what research has shown us.
- Getting to Know Students

- While it may seem like an obvious concept that a teacher should get to know your students, do you feel that this has been the case for you? Has every teacher known your interests, hobbies, fears, etc? How did being close to a teacher make you feel? How did a distant relationship with a teacher make you feel? Together, we will see why it is so important that we are getting to know our students. We will also talk about how to do this appropriately and professionally.
- Praise
 - It has been engrained in every teacher's head that praise is important. But now we are going to talk about why. We will also talk about how to praise in an effective way, and we will talk about which types of praise support students' mental health and which can actually hinder.
- Physical Exercise and the Outdoors
 - Other than Physical Education, did a teacher ever take you outside? Have teachers ever given you a stretch break or incorporated physical movement into their classroom? Why is this so important? What are some limitations to this? Together we will brainstorm ways we can successfully and effectively do this in our own classrooms.
- Education and Awareness
 - In your experience, did anyone in your school, such as a teacher, guidance counselor, or administrator, ever talk to you about mental health? Did they ever tell you what resources were available to support students' mental health? We will look at what the research says about what is currently being taught to students about mental health, and we will talk about what research says should be done.
- Test Taking Support
 - Hopefully, test anxiety is a term you have heard of before. We will take an in depth look at test anxiety, why it is a legitimate problem, and how we can be supporting students who have it. We will also brainstorm other ways of assessment that can replace tests, since tests can often do more harm than good.
- Virtual Education
 - How has Covid-19 affected the mental health of teachers and students? What can teachers be doing to make sure that students are taking care of themselves?

Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignment
1 (1/19)	-Introduction to Course -Ways to Take Care of Yourself -Mental Health vs Mental Illness -Pre-“Quiz”	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM
2 (1/26)	-Assignment Deadlines and Getting to Know Students	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM -Readings due by class
3 (2/2)	-Praise, Physical Exercise, and the Outdoors	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM Readings due by class
4 (2/9)	-Wellness Day: No Class	
5 (2/16)	-CAPS Outreach Program -Introduce Final Project -Virtual Education	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM -Fill out Final Project Group Survey
6 (2/23)	-Education and Awareness -Meet with Group on Final Presentation	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM -Readings due by class
7 (3/2)	-Test Taking Support/ Assessment	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM -Readings due by class
8 (3/9)	-Group Presentations and Wrap Up	-Weekly Reflection due Wednesday at 11:59 PM -Readings due by class -Two Papers recommended to be done by this class -Group Presentation due by Class
9 (3/16)	-No Class ☺	-Final Paper due Friday by 11:59 PM

**Daily Schedule is subject to change. The class will be notified of any changes.

Grading

Grades will be updated and maintained through Penn State’s CANVAS platform. You will be responsible for all material discussed in lecture as well as other standard means of

communication (email announcements, CANVAS announcements.), including but not limited to deadlines, policies, assignment changes, etc.

Your final course grade will be determined according to the following percentages:

Percentage	Title
10%	Weekly Reflections
20%	Discussions/Participation/Class Assignments
30%	Papers
30%	Group Project
10%	Final Paper

Assignments

1. **Weekly Reflections:** After each class, students will be asked to submit a reflection on CANVAS. The reflection will open right after class on Tuesday. The soft deadline for this assignment will be Wednesday at midnight so that the class discussion and topic is still fresh. There will be about 5-7 of these reflections: one for each class.
2. **Discussion/Participation/Classroom Activities:** As this is an elective, it would make sense that students have an interest in this subject and therefore want to participate. Students will begin the course with a perfect score in this category. If students are not participating enough or an instructor believes the students aren't doing the readings, the instructor will contact the student individually.
3. **Papers:** There will be about six or seven topics for students to choose from in class. Students will choose two and write a two-page paper answering the following questions:
 - Why did you choose this particular topic?
 - What were some key ideas you learned?
 - Was there anything that surprised you?
 - How was this different from your own experiences as a student?
 - How would you implement this into your own classroom?
4. **Group Project:** After being exposed to six or seven ways to support students' mental health, students will be placed in groups and asked to research one new way that teachers can support students' mental health. They will then present what they learned as well as

provide references to their sources. Students may present this project in any format that they wish.

- a. Topics to Choose From (or pick your own!)
 - i. Mindfulness
 - ii. Groupwork
 - iii. Compassionate Discipline
 - iv. Homelessness
 - v. Racial Trauma
 - vi. LGBTQ+ community
 - vii. Restorative Justice
 - viii. Social-Emotional Learning
 - ix. Mental health literacy
 - x. Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - xi. Bias
 - xii. Bullying
 - xiii. Ableism and mental health
 - xiv. Homework
5. Final Paper: In place of a final exam, which would not make sense for a discussion-based class, students will be asked to write a reflective paper on the course as a whole. The paper will be about three pages in length. They will be asked to answer the following questions.
- What did I already know coming into this course?
 - What were three big ideas that I learned?
 - What would I like to learn more about?
 - Final paragraph: What were your thoughts on the course, instructor, etc?

Readings

All will be available through Canvas. Readings will be assigned for each week and posted on Canvas. It is expected that course readings are done prior to class.

Deadlines

As you can see above, one of our topics will be on deadlines. Research has shown us that being flexible or having nonexistent deadlines can increase submission rates and quality of work. Therefore, while there will be soft deadlines for assignments to keep students on track, students will not be penalized for late submissions. Similarly, students will see that many assignments do

not have deadlines as students may pick a topic of their choosing from a class that resonates with them.

Communicating with course staff

If you have a question about the course, please email SaraGrace first. If you have an issue that could not be resolved with SaraGrace or feel like you need to go to someone higher, please email Dr. Arbaugh.

Faculty Champion(s) Name(s) and Email(s):

- Dr. Fran Arbaugh: efa2@psu.edu

Student Instructors(s) Name(s) and Email(s):

- SaraGrace Kimball: sgk19@psu.edu

Excused Absences and Academic Accommodations

As you will soon learn in the class, it is important to prioritize one's physical and mental health. If for whatever reason you need to miss class, just email SaraGrace beforehand. There may be work that has to be made up at the instructor's discretion; however, there will be no grade penalty due to attendance. If students need to miss more than two classes, the instructor may ask the student to do an additional paper if she deems it necessary. The instructor just wants to stress that if you need to take care of yourself, please do so without fear of any repercussion.

Disability Policy

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Student Disability Resources Web site provides contact information for every Penn State campus:

<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>

For further information, please visit the Student Disability Resources Web site:

<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr>

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/applying-for-services>

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, the campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations. Note that it is not possible for your instructor to make accommodations for you without this paperwork.

Counseling and Psychological Services:

In this class, we will be talking a good deal about mental health. If any topic should ever make you feel uncomfortable, you reserve the right to leave class at any time and take a break. I also encourage anyone who may have any personal needs to read the below statement about Penn State's resources.

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and

embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395

Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Report Bias

Penn State takes great pride in fostering a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity by doing one of the following:

- * Submit a report via the Report Bias webpage

- * Contact one of the following offices:

University Police Services, University Park: 814-863-1111

Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students: 814-865-1773

Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity: 814-865-5906

Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs: 814-865-0909

Affirmative Action Office: 814-863-0471

Academic Integrity

Students with questions about academic integrity should visit <http://www.la.psu.edu/> and then click on "Academic Integrity." Penn State defines academic integrity as “the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner” (Senate Policy 49-20). Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without permission from the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students facing allegations of academic misconduct should not drop the course; those who do will be added to the course again and will be expected to complete course work and meet course deadlines. If the allegations are dismissed, then the drop will be permitted. Students found responsible for academic misconduct often receive academic sanctions, which can be severe, and put themselves at risk for disciplinary sanctions assigned by the University's Office of Student Conduct (see Senate Policy G-9).

Course Evaluations

If you have a suggestion for improving this class, don't hesitate to tell your student instructor(s). Throughout the semester, there will be opportunities for you to give feedback to your instructors and the STS Team. These evaluations are chances for you to improve the Students Teaching Students program and provide valuable information for the organization. If you would like to become involved in STS, or would like to contact the executive board directly, please visit stpsu.org.

Appendix B: Lesson Plans

Day 1: Introduction to Course, Ways to Take Care of Yourself, Mental Health vs. Mental Illness, Pre-”Quiz”

1. Go over Syllabus (20 minutes)
 - a. Make sure to mention NO class on Wellness Day
 - b. Papers can be done in Alternate Formats
 - c. Contact information
 - d. For weekly reflection, password
2. Create classroom culture as a class (10 minutes)
3. Ways to Take Care of Yourself/ Introductions (20 minutes)
 - a. Two rounds of break-out rooms where you share your name, major, why you took this course, what you hope to get out of this course, and one thing you do to support your own mental health
 - b. One person is the scribe and they will record everyone’s answers, and we will create a class list
 - c. Create a class list of things we do to take care of ourselves
4. BREAK (10 minutes)
5. Pre-”Quiz” to see what students already know (20 minutes)
 - a. Remind them a part of their final paper is to say what they already know, so they can use this in their final papers
6. Mental Health vs. Mental Illness (20 minutes) Do in Breakout Rooms
 - a. Create a Jamboard
 - b. Mental Health IS, Mental Illness IS, Mental Health IS NOT, Mental Illness IS NOT
 - c. Discuss
 - d. Give definitions that we will be using for Mental Health vs. Mental Illness
7. Go over what is due for next week (10 minutes)

Day 2: Assignment Deadlines and Getting to Know Students

Readings:

<https://community.chronicle.com/news/1531-it-s-time-to-ditch-our-deadlines>
<https://prism.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/handle/1880/46725/Death-to-Deadlines.pdf?sequence=1>
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/deadlines-real-world>
<https://www.bamradionetwork.com/the-importance-of-getting-to-know-your-students/>

1. Guided Meditation (10 minutes)

2. Let people say anything they found interesting in the readings
3. Getting to Know Students
 - a. Discuss: First in break-out rooms, then whole group (20 minutes)
 - i. Why is it important to get to know students?
 - ii. How did it make you feel when a teacher cared about your interests?
 - iii. How did it make you feel when a teacher seemed not to care about your interests?
4. Activity: “Ice Breakers” (15 minutes)
 - a. Do two to three ice breakers
 - b. Roll a dice and answer questions
 - i. 1. Who is your biggest role model?
 - ii. 2. What excites you about the future?
 - iii. 3. What book/movie has impacted you the most?
 - iv. 4. If you were to sing at a karaoke night, what would you sing?
 - v. 5. What would be your dream career if you were not afraid to fail?
 - vi. 6. If you could live anywhere, where would you live?
 - c. Rock Paper Scissors Tournament
 - d. Supermarket Game
 - e. This or That
 - f. Two Truths and a Lie
 - g. Complete the Sentence
 - i. I went to Penn State because
 - ii.
 - h. Sing Off
 - i. Star
 - ii. Summer
 - iii. Cold
 - iv. Boy
5. How Can We Get to Know Students (10 minutes)
 - a. Come up with a class list
6. BREAK (10 minutes)
7. Assignment Deadlines (20 minutes)
 - a. History: Why do we have deadlines? Come up with a list as a class
 - i. Example Answers
 1. Prepares students for the real-world where they have deadlines
 2. Helps teachers grade more easily (stay on top of grading)
 3. Prevents students from getting too far behind
 - ii. What are the drawbacks of deadlines?
 1. Students will rush through work just to get it done
 2. Students will stay up later to finish the work which is bad for health
 3. Students do not usually get a say in the deadline
 - iii. Debate: Are deadlines good or bad?
 - iv. How might deadlines affect mental health?

Day 3: Praise, Physical Exercise, and the Outdoors

Readings:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel_Landers/publication/266406071_The_Influence_of_Exercise_on_Mental_Health/links/551431c30cf23203199cfb4f.pdf

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1424736/pdf/pubhealthrep00100-0085.pdf>

<https://healthtalk.unchealthcare.org/mental-health-benefits-of-getting-outside/> (video)

https://luminohealth.sunlife.ca/s/article/Why-being-outside-is-good-for-your-mental-health?language=en_US

<https://educationandbehavior.com/how-to-help-students-with-behavior-problems/>

<https://blog.innerdrive.co.uk/is-growth-mindset-the-answer-to-students-mental-health-problems>

<https://mental.jmir.org/2015/2/e19/pdf>

1. Journal (10 minutes) Provide prompts. Discuss what you wrote
2. Physical Exercise: Discussion (15 minutes)
 - a. Why is physical exercise good for a student's mental health?
 - b. How can we include movement in our classroom?
3. Activity: Design a lesson plan part two (10 minutes)
 - a. Students will again be partnered up with someone in a similar major. Again, students will design a lesson that incorporates movement in some way
 - b. Students will then share their lesson with the class (15 minutes)
4. BREAK (10 minutes)
5. The Outdoors: Discussion: (20 minutes)
 - a. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmqguIFMC-Y&feature=emb_rel_pause
 - b. Has a teacher ever brought you outside? Did you like that or dislike it? Have you ever had a classroom with no windows?
 - c. Talk about the science of not going outside for an entire school day
 - d. What can we do in the winter when it is too cold?
 - e. Talk about recess: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iggQ7GrcinE>
 - f. Readings: 120 minutes a week,
6. Praise: Activity: Break students into groups of three: (20 minutes)
 - a. One student will be asked to speak about a topic they are passionate about for one minute. Then the other students will respond. One will respond with praise for the student, and the other will respond with a critique. We will do two rounds of this.
 - b. Discuss how this made students feel
7. Praise Discussion (20 minutes)
 - a. Talk about types of praise, growth vs. fixed mindset, how much praise, drawbacks of praise, benefits of praise
 - b. How can praise positively or negatively affect one's mental health?

Day 4: Wellness Day: No Class**Day 5: CAPS Outreach Program, Introduce Final Project, and Virtual Education**

1. CAPS Programs: Helping Students in Distress (60 minutes)
2. BREAK (10 minutes)
3. Introduce Final Project (15 minutes)
4. Virtual Education
 1. Journal: How has virtual education affected your mental health? (10 minutes)
 2. Discussion: Ways we can do better during virtual education? (15 minutes)

Day 6: Education and Awareness**Readings: I have the PDFs**

Reinke, W., Stormont, M., Herman, K., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools: Teacher Perceptions of Needs, Roles, and Barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, American Psychological Association, 26(1), 1-13. DOI: 10.1037/a0022714

Moor, S., Maguire, A., McQueen, H., Wells, E., Elton, R., Wrate, R., & Blair, C. (2007). Improving the recognition of depression in adolescence: Can we teach the teachers? *Journal of Adolescence*, Elsevier, 30, 81-95. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2005.12.001

1. Yoga (10 minutes)
2. Class Update: Have everyone go around and share something they've done so far this semester that they are proud of (20 minutes)
3. Journal: (10 minutes)
 - a. Was mental health ever brought up in your K-12 education? If so, in what way? If not, talk about that.
4. Discussion: (20 minutes)
 - a. Why is it important to talk to students about mental health?
 - b. What resources are there in schools for mental health awareness?
 - c. Often times, mental health awareness is done reactively, not proactively, meaning it only gets brought up once something bad has happened such as the death of a student by suicide. How might schools become more proactive?
5. BREAK (10 minutes)
6. Class List (10 minutes)
 - a. As a class, we will make a list about what we think is important for teachers to know about mental health.
7. Discussion: (15 minutes)

- a. What are teachers currently being taught about mental health? What are our reactions to this?
 - b. What are some ways that teachers can be informed
8. Group Presentation Work Time (25 minutes)

Day 7: Test Taking Support/Assessment

Readings:

<https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/counseling-and-psychological-services/managing-test-anxiety>

<https://www.turnitin.com/blog/how-can-teachers-help-students-combat-test-anxiety>

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/helping-students-beat-test-anxiety>

<https://cei.umn.edu/support-services/tutorials/integrated-aligned-course-design-course-design-resources/alternative>

1. National Cereal Day (3/7) or Middle Name Pride Day (3/10) (15 minutes)
 - a. Have everyone go around the room and argue why their favorite cereal is the best or share a story about your middle name
2. Journal: (10 minutes)
 - a. What are your thoughts on tests? Do you get test-anxiety, and how does that affect you?
3. Discussion: Thoughts on Tests? (10 minutes)
4. Breakout Rooms: Come up with ways to support students on tests (5 minutes)
5. Discussion (10 minutes)
 - a. Share what was said in break out rooms
6. BREAK (10 minutes)
7. Alternate Assessments Discussion: (15 minutes)
 - a. What are other types of assessments?
 - b. Should these replace tests always, sometimes, never?
8. Activity: Given a test, make it into an alternate assessment (15 minutes)
9. Work on Group Projects (20 minutes)

Day 8: Group Presentations and Wrap Up

1. Group Presentations
2. Course Wrap Up
3. Possible Topics on Syllabus

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ACADEMIC VITA

SaraGrace Kimball

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

August 2017 – Present

- Schreyer Honors College Scholar, Expected Graduation: May 2021
- B.S. in Secondary Education: Mathematics, Minor in English

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Students Teaching Students Course Instructor: “Supporting Students’ Mental Health”

August 2020 – Present

- Designed an original 1-credit course to be taught in the Spring to 15 students in the College of Education
- Collecting data from course for honors thesis on importance of mental health-informed education for teachers

Penn State Club Tennis Secretary, Captain, and Tournament Director

August 2018 – December 2020

- As Secretary: designed, ordered, and distributed \$8,000 worth of apparel to 150 members as well as organized 1,500 hours of meaningful community service
- As Captain: planned four weekly practices, ran an in-house tournament, led the team to qualifying for Nationals, led advanced drills for members with high UTR ratings
- As Tournament Director: planned transportation, housing, supplies, food, t-shirts, and fees to create a registered tournament with nine schools in attendance

Penn State Residence Life Resident Assistant and RA Course Facilitator

June 2019 – December 2020

- Built community among a floor of 30 girls, provided resources, and enforced building policies
- Facilitated the 3-credit course “The Role of the Resident Assistant: Theory and Practice” to 17 future RAs
- Lesson planned for the course as well as graded all papers, quizzes, and discussion posts

College of Education Mentor for First Year Students

August 2020 – Present

- Supported a first-year student by helping them with classes, scheduling, and getting to know Penn State

WORK EXPERIENCE

Penn State Learning Peer Writing Tutor and Workshop Presenter

August 2018 – December 2020

- Collaborate with students to work on their writing abilities
- Present workshops for about an hour to PSU classes on specific topics such as business writing and citations
- Mentored a future tutor who watched me tutor as well as gave feedback to them on their

tutorials

Bucks County Tennis Association Head Tennis Coach

May 2018 – Present

- Create lesson plans for 5 week sessions of tennis classes with 3-20 athletes per class
- Work with athletes ranging from ages 4 to adult

Penn State English and Math Department Grader

September 2020 – December 2020

- Technical Writing (two sections): provide extensive feedback on five assignments to a junior level English course
- Algebra I, Algebra II, and Honors Calculus II: grade weekly homework, quizzes, and three exams a semester

STUDENT TEACHING

Young Scholars of Central Pennsylvania Pre-Student Teacher

September 2020 – November 2020

- 7th and 8th Grade Math: Special Education sections

Mastery Charter School: Pickett Campus Pre-Student Teacher

May 2018 – June 2018

- 8th Grade Composition and 7th Grade Literature

CONFERENCES

Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association Group Presenter

March 2019

- Lafayette College: “Speaking and Writing Home: Rural Identities, Writing Centers, and Invisible Difference”

International Writing Center Association Writing Individual Presenter

October 2019

- Presented research at Ohio State University: "Religion in the Writing Center: What Role Does It Play?"