

Turning the Spotlight on Student Wellbeing:

Curricularly-Integrated Mental Health Support for Post-Secondary ESL Students

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Presentation Objective



To encourage ESL programs across Canada to adopt regular wellness lessons as a means of boosting student well-being.

Presentation Overview

1. Why Focus on Wellness?
2. Evolution of the Trent-ESL Wellness Modules
3. Student Reception
4. Teacher Reception
5. Considerations
6. Final Thoughts and Discussion



Why Focus on Wellness in the Language Classroom?



Health, Wellness, and Well-being

- **Health** is “...complete physical, mental and social well-being not merely the absence of disease...” (WHO, 1948).
- “**Well-being** is a state of positive feelings and being able to achieve one’s full potential in the world” (Simmons & Baldwin, 2021).
- “**Wellness** is constantly striving for holistic well-being throughout the many facets of one’s life” (McDaniel et al., 2021).



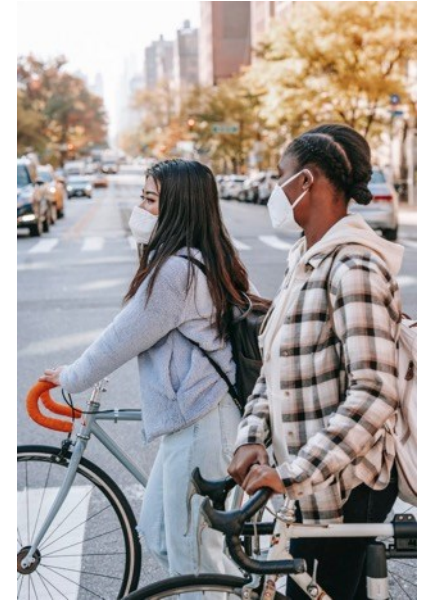
Pandemic Stressors

- Mental health needs of postsecondary students rising before the pandemic (Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2021)
- Worldwide experience of “collective trauma” (Satici et al., 2020) emerging from from feelings of “uncertainty” and “perceived loss of control” (p. 8)
- International students at Canadian universities experienced increased anxiety, stress, depressive and even suicidal thoughts, loneliness, eating disorders and sleep disturbances (Baghoori, 2021)



Ongoing Stressors

- Culture shock (Koo et al., 2021)
- Language barriers (Koo et al., 2021)
- Possible experiences of discrimination (McDaniel et al., 2021)
- New academic culture and pedagogical style (Sibley et al., 2015)
- Limited access to pre-existing social supports (McDaniel et al., 2021)



Stigma Reduction

- Integrating wellness in curriculum destigmatizes discussing mental health
- Many international students regard accessing mental health support as a “sign of weakness and failure” and are less likely to use mental health services (Baghoori, 2021, p. 3).
- Wellness lessons in class - low-stakes opportunity for students to reflect on all aspects of health
- Result in increased use of campus mental health supports



Language Learning and Academic Benefits

- Increased capacity to learn when not stressed, anxious or depressed (Krivitsky, 2017)
- Strong correlation between wellbeing and academic success (Stanton, 2019)
- Mirrored in SLA research
 - Ex. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis
- Prioritizing wellness → feelings of belonging → increased retention



Global Call for “Health Promoting” Educational Institutions



- “Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges” (Okanagan Charter, 2015)
- Global framework to promote health and wellbeing in higher ed
- Two central calls to action:
 1. “To embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates”
 2. “To lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally” (Okanagan Charter, 2015, p. 3)

Bridging the Gap: Bringing Wellness to Trent-ESL

- Increased wellness supports for students in response to rising mental health needs
- Personal counselling, peer support groups, “IM Well” app, “On Track” Wellness workshop
- Yet – needs of Trent-ESL students not directly met
- In response - wellness programming in Trent-ESL



Trent University (2022)

Evolution of the Trent-ESL Wellness Modules



Trent-ESL Program Overview

English for University Program

- Five levels
 - 3 Core English levels (CEFR A1-B1)
 - 2 Academic English Levels (CEFR B1-B2)
- Spring 2020 - Summer 2021: Synchronous online delivery
- Fall 2021: In-person and synchronous/asynchronous online delivery



Origin of the Wellness Modules



- 2019 – Decision to introduce wellness programming
- Collaborative effort - Trent-ESL, Trent International, and Student Wellness Centre
- Informed by “On Track” (Trent) and “Thrive RU” (Ryerson)
- Evidence-based practices in Positive Psychology

Models of wellbeing and resilience: Overview

Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model	Diana Brecher's (2017) 5-Factor Model of Resilience	Carol Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being
<p>Positive emotion</p> <p>Engagement</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Meaning</p> <p>Accomplishments</p>	<p>Mindfulness</p> <p>Gratitude</p> <p>Optimism</p> <p>Self-Compassion</p> <p>Grit</p>	<p>Self Acceptance</p> <p>Positive relations with others</p> <p>Autonomy</p> <p>Environmental mastery</p> <p>Purpose in Life</p> <p>Personal growth</p>

Academic English Wellness Modules

1. Building Healthy Habits
2. Understanding our Strengths
3. Goal Setting
4. Understanding Stress
5. Acts of Kindness and Gratitude
6. Building Boundaries
7. Practicing Self-compassion



Academic English Wellness Modules

- Designed to introduce and provide strategies for improving various aspects of student wellbeing
- Holistic approach to wellness
- Seven 30-minute modules
- Piloted at all 5 levels
- Ultimately – best for academic levels (B1-B2)

Core English Wellness Modules

- Developed out of a perceived need for more conceptually and linguistically accessible modules for lower-level students
- Targeted at pre-intermediate to intermediate (A2-B1) ESL students
- Ten 30-minute modules
- PowerPoint presentation and workbook
- Designed to introduce and provide strategies for improving various aspects of student health.

Core English Topics

1. What is Wellness?
2. Breathing
3. Sleep
4. Healthy Eating
5. Healthy Hydrating
6. Exercising
7. Social Wellness
8. Environmental Wellness
9. Spiritual Wellness
10. Emotional Wellness



Lesson Delivery

1. Introduce lesson objectives
2. Report and reflect on optional homework challenge from the previous week
3. Minds-on activity (e.g., a discussion or knowledge testing quiz)
4. Presentation (slides and/or videos)
5. Concept-checking activities (e.g., discussion questions, group activities)
6. Wrap-up and optional homework challenge

Lesson Excerpt: *Understanding our Strengths* (Academic)

1. In small groups or pairs share your top three (3) strengths.
2. How have these strengths helped you in the past? Give a specific example.
3. How will these strengths help you over the next few years (at school and in your life in Canada)?
4. Is there another strength that you would like to develop? How might you develop this strength?



Lesson Excerpt: *Sleep* (Core)



1. In small groups or pairs students discuss how much sleep they got the night before and how much sleep they need.
2. As a class, students complete a sleep quiz.
3. Students watch and discuss a videos on the effects of sleep deprivation and tips for falling asleep faster.
4. Students are asked to keep a sleep journal for the next week.

Student Reception



Population Profile



- Term: Fall 2021

- Respondents: 30

- English Level:

57% Core English	43% Academic English
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- Delivery Method:

31% Online	69% In-person
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- Gender:

36% Male	64% Female
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Describe your opinion of the wellness lessons in one sentence.



“...I have never thought about this before.”

“Wel[l]ness lessons help me to know more about myself.”

“[T]he wellness lessons...made me more aware and conscious of my well-being.”

“Learning wellness lessons bring[s] me some opportunity to look back at myself...”

“[I]t was very useful [to] understand some of the things that happen to us and how to cope with them.”

What did you like about the wellness lessons?



“I liked having a moment of respite in the middle or at the beginning of our class to think and reflect on our life and not just our homework.”

“Focusing on mental health made me relax, and I could learn new things.”

“I like that I was able to talk with other peers about the challenges that we have.”

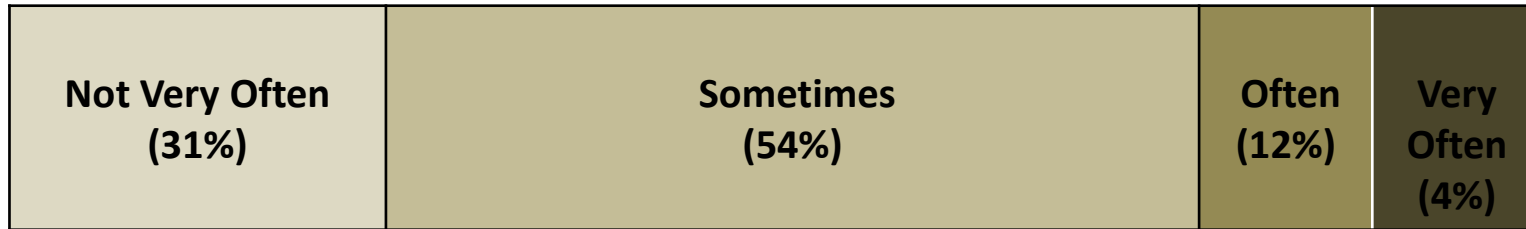
What did you dislike about the wellness lessons?

combined-classes
nothing
repetition
too-short

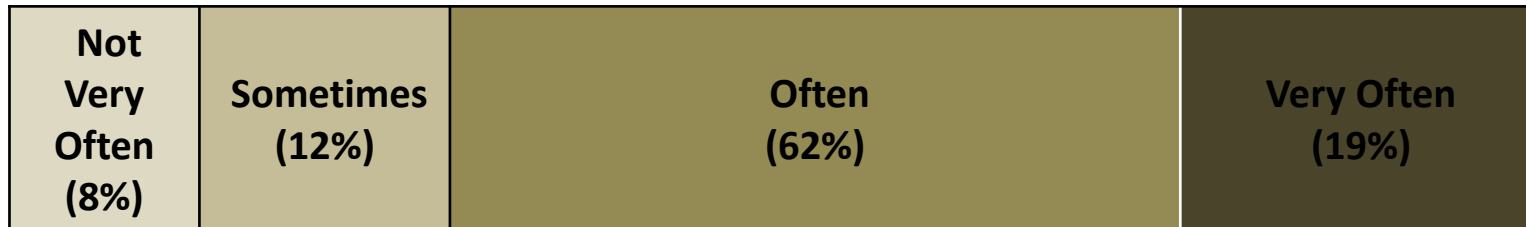
“...the wellness lessons were too short.”

“...I think the only problem was that the wellness topics were repeated in the three terms.”

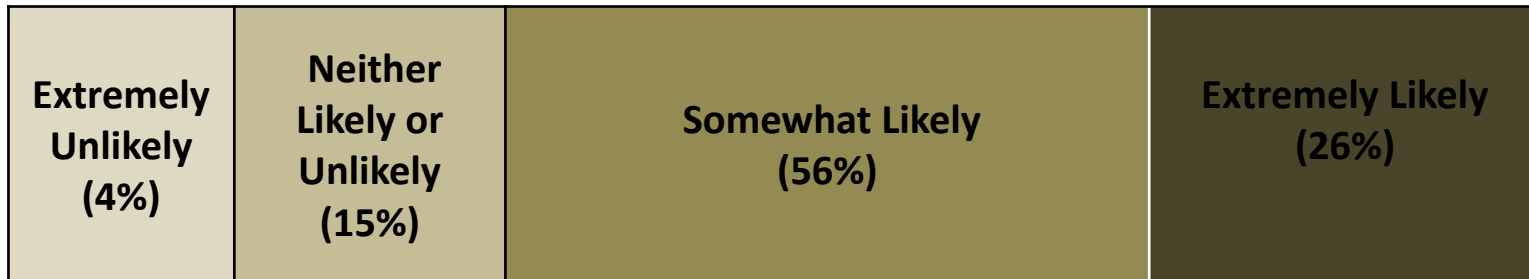
How often did you think about your wellness before this term?



How often do you think about your wellness now?



How likely are you to use what you learned from these lessons in the future?



What's a skill or strategy from the wellness lessons that you are using or plan to use in the future?



“I am going to use the self-compassion skills in the future.”

“I will begin to sleep...enough hours.”

“I will drink a lot of water, and I will clean my room.”

“I learned to consult with others.”

What could we do to make these wellness lessons better?

more-tips
 frequency
 length
 more-exercises
 better-videos
 variety

“You could improve the length...because some lessons are short.”

“...it would be better if there [were] more wellness lessons.”

“I think we should take more time with the lesson[s].”

“...more wellness [exercises] should be [done] during lessons.”

Reflections

Students generally...

1. had positive opinions of the lessons,
2. were inspired to think about wellness by the lessons,
3. intended to use skills and strategies from the lessons in the future, but
4. wanted longer, more frequent, and more varied lessons.

Teacher Reception



Commitment to Student Wellness



Perceived Benefits



dedicated time to discuss their lives and feelings

good **break** from the academic focus

fun to teach

increased **self-awareness**

closer relationships with classmates

topics generated **good discussions** and lifted **mood** and **focus**

increased **engagement, energy, participation, smiling**



Challenges and Concerns

modelling vulnerability vs. maintaining professional boundaries

ethnocentric content

student anxiety

feeling underqualified to teach subject matter

Considerations



Who should be teaching wellness lessons?



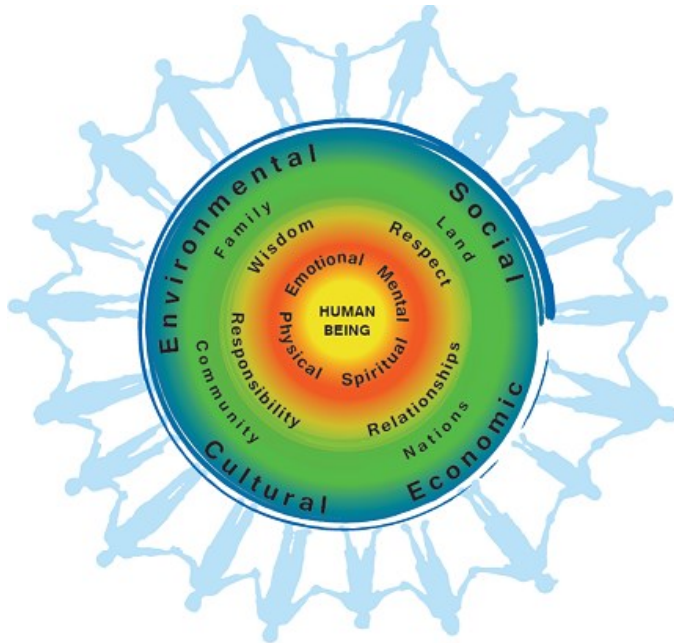
- Do wellness instructors need to have special training?
- Do instructors need to be comfortable sharing personal stories during lessons?
- Should instructors be assigned these lessons?

How many wellness modules need to be created?

- What are the linguistic abilities of your students?
- How many times are students likely to see the same set of modules?
- Is there potential to make an alternate set with the same themes?



To what extent is ethnocentrism a concern?



- Could any of the topics or strategies covered in the lessons be considered inappropriate for particular groups?
- Should modules attempt to address wellness from multiple cultural perspectives?
- Can First Nations perspectives on wellness be incorporated into future modules?

How can reluctant students be encouraged to participate?



- Has a safe classroom environment been created?
- Are students given the “right to pass”?
- Are there are opportunities for low-risk contributions? (anonymous, small group, etc.)

How can instructors keep discussions light and conducive to learning?

“I appreciate that you want to share this story. Although now isn’t the right time, it sounds like it was a really impactful experience.”

(K. Maclsaac, personal communication, March 15, 2022)



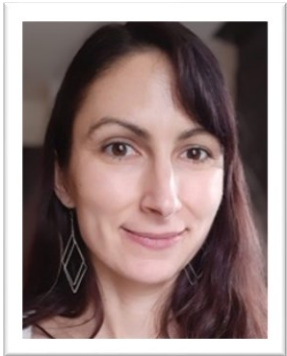
Final Thoughts and Discussion



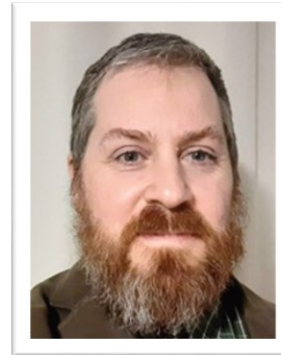
Final Thoughts



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CHALLENGE THE WAY YOU THINK