**Teaching with Care and Community**

Case Study Response Plan (Example)

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EDUC 5202: Classroom Practice

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Date: January 27, 2022

*Scenario: Cassie is a Grade 6 student in your class. She is an energetic, outgoing, social, and engaged student. Starting in November you noticed a change. She becomes withdrawn, stops participating in class, and does not seem to be socializing nearly as much with her friends. Her grades have not changed significantly.*

The onset of adolescence is a period of rapid change and development, both in relation to the body and social relationships. Adolescent girls often face additional pressure, as they become judged simultaneously as a sexual object and model of femininity that involves perfectionism, obedience, and conformity (Nuamah, 2019). Cassie is exhibiting signs of a conflict or change in her life that could be internal or relating to her friends or family; it does not appear related to her academic learning. Since I am unclear on the root cause of her behaviour change but recognize that the challenges she may be experiencing may be shared among others in the class, I will apply a strategy emphasizing social-emotional learning, mental health literacy, and community, accompanied by sustained communication with Cassie, her parent, and other experts in the school.

***Prevention***

 The integration of social-emotional learning skills into daily classroom routines and lesson plans is a process that is recommended by Lianne Lee as a mechanism for supporting students to manage a wide range of relationship challenges (Tingle, n.d.-a). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is defined by CASEL (2022) as the process by which people “acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” This definition comprises five inter-related areas of SEL competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2022). Cassie seems to be struggling with most and possibly all of these areas of competence, given her behaviour change that is affecting both her individual expression as well as her social engagement in class and with her friends.

To prevent this situation, I could engage students in exercising SEL skill development as a key part of learning from the outset of our school year. This could involve assessments that prompt them to reflect on their own life stories and what makes them feel confident to strengthen their self-awareness, collaboration opportunities to build relationship skills, problem-solving conversations as a class to build social awareness and responsible decision-making, and holding monthly individual check-ins with each student to guide self-management (Ryan & Webster, 2019). In addition to student meetings, the last half hour of each Friday, I could have the students free write in journals. They will be encouraged but not required to write about how they are feeling about what happened during their week. I will read the journal entries but they will not be evaluated on them. This will enhance students’ writing skills while also providing them an outlet for regular private communication with me, potentially enabling me to identify issues like Cassie’s earlier in their development. As solid communications using a strengths-based approach can be pivotal for establishing a trusting relationship that helps navigate subsequent behavioural issues, including related to mental health (Tingle, n.d.-b), at the end of September, I will contact all my students’ parents to share some initial observations regarding their child’s strengths.

***Immediate Response***

 The first person I will speak with to better understand the situation is Cassie. I will schedule an individual meeting with her, express that I have noticed some changes in her behaviour, and ask if anything is going on and if I can help. My subsequent actions will be directly informed by her response, but I will be prepared that she may not choose to open up to me at this time. If not, I will express my care and concern for her and that I am available to speak to her whenever she likes. I will contact Cassie’s parents to express my concern and indicate that I have spoken to Cassie about it but not disclose any information that she shared with me. Recognizing that a teacher is a critical entry point for early identification of mental illness, given our familiarity with students’ patterns of behaviour (Tingle, n.d.-b), I will reach out to the school’s guidance counsellor, social worker or school nurse to inquire as to whether it seems like it could be a mental illness, warning signs to watch for, and how to proceed with connecting Cassie to relevant support services if deemed necessary.

***Intermediate Response***

 The following assumes that Cassie does not open up to me and I do not have further information as to the causes of the changes in her behaviour. I know, however, that issues likely to contribute to her behaviour changes, be they mental health-related or due to internal or social conflict, may also be relevant for other students. I will look ahead to the curriculum expectations I had planned to address across various subject areas in the next month and design an integrated curriculum, which draws on several subject areas to focus on a theme or concept (Parkay et al., 2018)—in this case, the concept of health and well-being. The integrated curriculum will include a ‘restorying’ project in their English class to meet the Language Writing expectations (Ministry of Education, 2006), where students will rewrite a fictional story about a character experiencing academic, behavioural, and/or interpersonal challenges, with an outcome that reframes the initial narrative about the character to be one of resilience (Worthy et al., 2012). In Art, students will work in small groups to develop one of their restorying stories into a skit to meet their Creating and Presenting expectations (Ministry of Education, 2009). In Health and Physical Education, we will respond to the Identification and Management of Emotions expectations (Ministry of Education, 2019) by beginning with individual and then whole class mapping of activities that make us feel good and bad about ourselves. Among the activities that make us feel good, we will identify the physical activities and vote on a physical activity to embark on together to meet the Physical Fitness expectations (Ministry of Education, 2019). In Math, we will start tracking how we are feeling on a daily basis on a scale of one to ten to try to identify patterns and make predictions about our feelings, responding to the Patterns and Relationships expectations (Ministry of Education, 2020).

I will announce to the students that Health and Well-Being will be a theme for our class during next month and we will begin with a launch where we will take the first Monday morning of the month to reflect on where we are at in terms of health and well-being and, in a sharing circle, set intentions for the coming month. After defining many things that could be included in health and well-being, each student will set a personal goal for an aspect of their health or well-being that they would like to work on improving. They may choose to share this goal with the class or keep it private. Together we will talk about possible strategies for different types of goals and each student will identify two skills they will practise over the month to meet their goal. We will start each of the following three Monday mornings with a sharing circle reflecting on how we are doing in meeting our goals. Based on the most common goal, I will invite a guest speaker from the community to come to speak to the class about that theme. I will connect with all students’ parents to explain our goals for the month and encourage them to take up these conversations at home as well. I will discuss progress on their goals with all students, including Cassie, through our monthly individual meetings.

***Long Term Response***

Social-emotional learning programs are most effective when situated within a coordinated and sustained school-wide approach (Greenberg et al., 2003). Once I have sketched my idea for my class-level intermediate response, I will speak to the school principal and guidance counsellor to see if there are opportunities to connect the work we are doing in my class throughout the school. Depending on their interest, this could be a theme that is taken up across the school. For example, we could apply for the OPHEA Healthy Schools Certification (2020-2021), set school-wide objectives for the month and the year, and include activities being undertaken in the different classes in the daily announcements. I will also ask if there are ways that my students could share their knowledge within the school. This could involve them presenting in other classes to ‘teach’ younger students some of what they have learned and read them their restorying stories or perform their skits. This will enable my students to establish themselves as leaders in the school, providing them with new connections to other students, demonstrate and apply their learning, and deepen their engagement with the subject matter.

***Reflexivity Strategy***

Reflexivity relates to personal reflection on the extent to which my teaching practices and outcomes are aligned with my teaching philosophy and objectives (Ryan & Webster, 2019). My teaching philosophy involves being accessible, responsive, and supportive to students, prioritizing relationships of care as a means of enhancing all forms of learning and development. Here, I have specific initiatives that relate to the class (enabling us all to feel stronger, healthier, and better able to support each other as a community), for Cassie (enabling her to access support from myself and other relevant sources), and myself (enhancing my pedagogical skills as related to social-emotional learning and community-building in my classroom). As a measure of accountability, I will begin by writing down my intentions and progress in a journal. I will share the class intentions with my students (without speaking to the situation of any individual student) and check in with them each week to get their feedback on my progress in meeting the goal of enabling us all to feel stronger, healthier, and more supportive of each other. I will disclose my intentions to an ally on the teaching staff and check in weekly with that person to share my progress and reflect on challenges. I will also identify a professional development opportunity for myself so that I can deepen my knowledge and understanding of pedagogical skills to enhance social-emotional learning. If the situation with Cassie does not appear to be improving, I will continue the whole class initiatives for the remainder of the month but consider whether a new strategy may be necessary to reach Cassie, connecting back again with Cassie, her parent(s), and the guidance counsellor, social worker, or school nurse I had initially approached.

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