

Adult Education: The Need for Information on Mental Health Issues in the Classroom

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According to the literature, although teachers want to facilitate learning for students with mental health issues, they reveal minimal training and lack of knowledge related to mental health variables such as identification, assessment and social emotional development. Without proper identification training, it is unlikely that teachers will provide the necessary support for mental health issues interfering with learning.

The present study investigated the needs of adult education staff within a local school system in order to identify the most appropriate means of assisting the staff with dealing with mental health issues of adult students. This study utilized a mixed method design, using both a survey (quantitative measures) and an open-ended questionnaire (qualitative measures) to gather data. The study was divided into three separate studies, which have individual purposes and results. The studies build on the previous one and the general purpose of the three studies together is to assess the reported needs of adult education teachers when dealing with mental health issues in the classroom, and to implement workshops that address the identified needs to provide the teachers with the necessary information.

The concerns that were revealed by the focus group participants indicated that they wanted to know how to identify students with mental health issues and what they are permitted to do to help their students. Further, the results gathered from the focus group provided a direction for the content of the needs assessment survey that was administered during the first professional development workshop to the adult education teachers.

By analyzing the responses for each item in the needs assessment, it was found that the participants felt as though they had received very little mental health training throughout their careers. Additional analyses of the needs assessment surveys indicated that the participants felt that building a community and positive relationships within their classroom was highly valued, as well as the participants reported that they witness a significant amount of mental health issues in their classrooms.

After the needs of the adult education teachers were assessed through the evaluation of the surveys, two 2-hour workshops were designed based on the needs identified by the staff. The workshops were provided to staff during professional development sessions at one of the adult education centres within the school system.

The feedback regarding the specific content of the workshops was varied, indicating that the participants' unique experiences and opinions directed their opinion of the value of the content. However, the majority of the participants indicated that the overarching topic of mental health training was valuable and needed to be addressed.

This research will be beneficial for both educational instructors and students. By identifying the needs of instructors, we will be able to provide them with the necessary tools to do their jobs successfully and comfortably. By educating teachers about students who are learning in the context of mental health challenges, we can make a difference in academic engagement and success for learners, as well as increase the safety and teaching efficacy for educators.