

Collaborating for Youth Suicide Prevention: An In-Depth Case Study

Suicide claimed the lives of 256 Canadian youth, aged 19 and under in 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2009) and continues to be the second leading cause of death (after traffic fatalities) among youth aged 15 to 19 in this county. Many more young people engage in non-fatal suicidal behaviours each year. Since youth who are in emotional distress most often communicate their concerns to peers, school-based programs have been designed to improve recognition of potentially suicidal youth and promote responsible helping among peer responders.

For the past year (2008-2009) Dr. Jennifer White and MA student Jonathan Morris from the School of Child and Youth Care have been closely studying one such school-based suicide prevention program as it has been planned and implemented within one secondary school in Vancouver, British Columbia. To our knowledge, an in-depth investigation of a classroom-based suicide prevention education program that makes space for multiple realities, includes diverse voices and perspectives, and combines multiple data sources has not been undertaken to date.

Though analysis is ongoing, some early findings are worth noting. First, far from being a straightforward technical enterprise where the facts about suicide are neutrally conveyed to a passive audience, suicide prevention education programs are complex social processes where ambiguity, surprise, uncertainty, and negotiated meanings are the defining aspects of this work. Second, students often know more than what is traditionally measured and they clearly have relevant ideas about suicide and its prevention. Taken together, these preliminary findings suggest the need for a more

critically engaged pedagogy; one that invites students and educators to consider the multiple meanings that might be available for thinking about suicide, prevention, ethics, care, community and justice.

For more information about this study contact Dr. Jennifer White at jhwhite@uvic.ca

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