International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2019, Volume 31, Number 2, 287-298
http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/ ISSN 1812-9129

Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Program

Lynn Corcoran
Athabasca University

Deinera Exner-Cortens and Lana Wells
University of Calgary

Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities is a four-course graduate certificate program collaboratively developed by an interdisciplinary team comprised of faculty from the fields of Social Work and Education at a Canadian university. The aim of this program is to facilitate systems-level change through enhancing the knowledge and skills of graduate students from disciplines such as social work, education, and nursing who work with youth in schools and communities. The ultimate goal of this systems-level change is promotion of healthy youth relationships and prevention of violence. The topics for the four courses in the program include the following: promoting healthy relationships and preventing interpersonal violence, recognizing and counteracting oppression and structural violence, addressing trauma and building resilience, and fostering advocacy and community in the context of social justice. The development and pedagogy of the certificate program are described, along with findings from a pilot study designed to examine the utility and feasibility of the initial certificate offering. Experiences with the program to date highlight the potential for improvements in graduate students' attitudes, beliefs, and confidence regarding what constitutes violence and their role in responding to it.

Intimate partner violence is a global public health problem with significant physical, social, emotional, and economic costs (García-Moreno et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2010). In Canada, intimate partner violence accounts for approximately 25% of all police-reported violent crime, and it is the most common form of violent crime committed against females (Beaupré, 2015; Sinha, 2013). Thus, prevention of intimate partner violence is a pressing public health task. To this end, the promotion of healthy relationships in youth[1] appears to be a key strategy for the prevention of intimate partner violence in adulthood (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, Bunge, & Rothman, 2017). In this promotion work, ecological models of violence prevention indicate the need to focus upstream with prevention efforts in order to target the systems and environments with which youth engage on a regular basis (Niolon et al., 2017). Upstream thinking and action involve focusing on prevention in the context of the systems and environments that influence the health of populations (Canadian Council on the Social Determinants on Health, 2015; Stamler & Yiu, 2012).

In this article, we introduce Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities (AHSJSC), a four-course graduate certificate program collaboratively developed by an interdisciplinary team comprised of faculty from the fields of Social Work and Education at a university in Canada. The aim of AHSJSC is to facilitate systems-level change by inviting graduate students in the professions of education, social work, and nursing to advance the knowledge and skills needed to promote healthy relationship skills and create healthy environments for all youth, regardless of race, creed, ancestry, ability, color, gender identification, or sexual orientation. Systems change is an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form, function, and/or structure of an identified system (e.g., the school system) with purposeful interventions, such as AHSJSC (Abercrombie et al., 2015; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Systems change is rooted in action, and it aims to bring about lasting change by altering underlying structures and supporting mechanisms which make a system operate in a particular way. These underlying structures and mechanisms include policies, routines, relationships, resources, power structures, values, and culture. The ultimate goal of systems change is an ongoing process of innovation, reflection, and learning in order to bring about social change that alters the structure and rules of a social system (Abercrombie et al, 2015).

The research problem in this pilot evaluation of AHSJSC involved the examination of the feasibility and utility of this certificate program in the context of evaluating graduate students' acquisition of content (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, confidence, and skills) and reaction to this content (e.g., learning, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, and individual rapport) over the course of the initial program year (Kistin & Silverstein, 2016). In essence, we were exploring changes in graduate students'

[1] Emerging from work on adolescent dating violence, the field of healthy youth relationships typically covers the age range of 10-17 (i.e., early and mid-adolescence or middle and high school; Exner-Cortens, 2014). In this article, the term healthy youth relationships thus refers to those in this age range. For a recent review of literature connecting teen dating violence with adult intimate partner violence, see Park, Mulford, & Blachman-Demner (2018).

capacity to promote healthy relationships in youth with the longer-term objective of preventing violence in adulthood. In this article, we outline the theoretical framework that served as the foundation for AHSJSC, as well as describe the methods and findings of our pilot evaluation. We conclude the article with a discussion of potential implications of this work for future research and practice.

Theoretical Framework

Increasing the knowledge and capabilities of teachers and those who work with youth, such as social workers and nurses, about how to help youth develop healthy relationships is a key lever for significantly reducing rates of bullying and dating violence, both of which are implicated in pathways to adult intimate partner violence (e.g., Exner-Cortens et al., 2017; Pepler, Craig, & Haner, 2012). In the case of healthy relationships promotion and dating violence prevention, a lot of work has been conducted within disciplinary silos, an approach which is limited given the multiple systems with a responsibility for violence prevention (Crooks et al., 2018); thus, our strategy of training the multiple professions that interface with youth in school buildings works toward creating multi-sectoral capacity and systems change for healthy relationships promotion. Evidence-based health promotion and risk behavior prevention programs that address positive youth development are associated with improvements in academic achievement, interpersonal skills, quality of adult and peer relationships, and reductions in risk behaviors such as alcohol and drug use, high risk sexual behavior, violence, and aggression (Greenberg et al., 2003). Positive relationships at school also have a protective effect: youth who are connected to school are more likely to stay in school, achieve academically, and enjoy better health, and they are also less likely to be involved in violent relationships or engage in risk behaviors (Joint Consortium on School Health, 2010; Pepler et al, 2012). Finally, teaching children and youth in school- and community-based settings about how to develop and sustain healthy relationships is critical to violence prevention generally (Allison, Edmonds, Wilson, Pope, & Farrell, 2011; Pepler et al, 2012; Wells, Campbell, & Dozois, 2014).

However, an approach to the development of healthy relationship skills will not be effective unless educators and other adults who have relationships with youth have the knowledge and skills required to ensure a safe, healthy, and just learning environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kallestad & Olweus 2003). A strategic, coordinated, and comprehensive whole school approach to violence prevention and building healthy relationships provides children and youth with opportunities to learn and practice social-emotional skills that contribute to forming and maintaining positive relationships, managing emotions, and resolving conflict peacefully (Crooks, Chiodo, Zwarych, Hughes, & Wolfe, 2013; Joint Consortium for School Health, 2010). By involving the community as well, this approach includes the multiple stakeholders (e.g., all school staff, students, families, and community partners) needed to promote safe, caring, and socially just environments for all youth.

Although the important role that schools and school systems play in promoting social justice, as well as in preventing and reducing bullying and dating violence, is recognized (Walker & Shinn, 2002), there is a significant gap between the ideal integrated prevention model and what currently exists in most schools and school systems (Greenberg et al., 2003). Particularly, due to time and resource constraints faced in the school setting, there can be difficulty implementing, coordinating, and sustaining programs that address social, emotional, and academic learning. A focus on programs alone – as opposed to general teaching practices or higher-level strategies – is also insufficient to ensure systems change for violence prevention. There has also been a predominant focus on providing professional development to educators as part of prevention initiatives; however, it is important to mobilize all adults in a school building, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, to work alongside children to create an environment where healthy relationships are encouraged as part of integrated prevention (Pepler & Craig, 2007). AHSJSC was designed with a focus on addressing some of these gaps. In particular, social-emotional learning in the context of violence prevention and healthy relationships promotion was explored pragmatically, at the level of the classroom and the school, as well as at a philosophical/theoretical level in the examination of relevant polices locally, provincially, and nationally.

For a comprehensive approach within a school environment, the first step is awareness of the importance of providing a safe, protected environment for all students and staff in schools (Jaffe, Crooks, & Watson, 2009). Moving beyond awareness, educators face the difficulty of how to help youth develop healthy relationship skills through creating curriculum opportunities, prosocial learning environments, and reasonable behavior policies, as well as home and community partnerships. Through a focus on awareness and skill-building, graduate level, interdisciplinary university courses designed for students working with youth are essential for developing the knowledge and capacities necessary for taking comprehensive action to build social justice awareness, social-emotional competence, and healthy relationships.

AHSJSC originated within Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence (2016), a research group within a

Figure 1
Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships (AHYR) strategy overview.

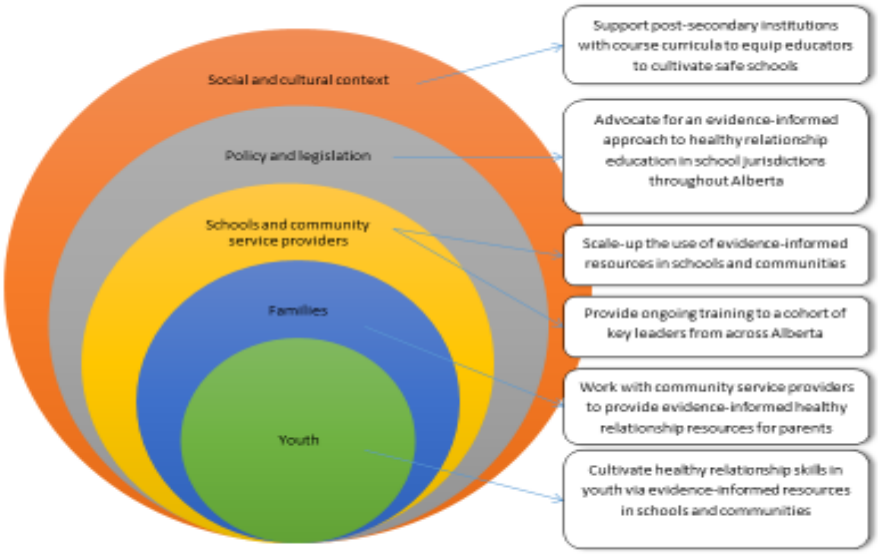


Figure 2
Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities course sequence.

faculty of social work at a Canadian university and directed by the third author. Shift was created to advance primary prevention (e.g., taking action to prevent problems before they occur) in the area of intimate partner violence. The purpose of Shift is to empower others to create the social conditions to stop violence before it starts. To this end, Shift conducts research that informs primary prevention practices, programs, policies and legislation. Shift also partners with researchers, academics, policy-makers, community-leaders, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and collectives to implement and evaluate effective primary prevention solutions (Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence, 2016).

In 2012, Shift initiated a project called the Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships strategy (AHYR). The AHYR focuses on the primary prevention of intimate partner violence through reducing dating violence and promoting healthy relationships with youth (Exner-Cortens, Wells, Lee & Spiric, 2018). The AHYR draws on both ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Cohen and Swift's (1999) spectrum of prevention by identifying key levers within ecological systems that need to be targeted to help youth achieve healthy relationships. At the social and cultural context level (Figure 1), Shift felt a key lever was targeting post-secondary curricula to empower educators and other professionals that work with youth, families, and systems to cultivate safe and socially just schools and communities. The AHSJSC program was thus designed to target this aspect of the larger initiative.

Description of Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities

AHSJSC is a four-course, year-long program. Graduate students successfully completing the AHSJSC program earn a post-baccalaureate certificate. These students have the option of continuing their studies and applying the courses in AHSJSC toward a Master of Education. Given that it is a certificate program, AHSJSC was designed for working professionals, such as teachers, counselors, school administrators, coaches, nurses, social workers, and others working in the human services sector. Potential students in AHSJSC also include those who are not yet working with youth, but who are interested in learning the theory and practice that underpin the development, promotion and building of healthy youth relationships in an anti-oppression and equity framework. To promote its interdisciplinary nature, professors teaching AHSJSC include those from the disciplines of social work, education, and nursing. Delivery of AHSJSC is blended and includes one week of on-campus, in-person classes followed by several weeks of online learning in Course 1 (Figure 2). Courses 2, 3, and 4 (Figure 2) are delivered exclusively online. See Figure 2 for the sequence of courses in the curriculum.

The topics for the four courses include promoting healthy relationships/preventing interpersonal violence (Course 1), recognizing and counteracting oppression and structural violence (Course 2), addressing trauma and building resilience (Course 3), and fostering student advocacy and community in the context of social justice (Course 4).

In the first course, Promoting Healthy Relationships, graduate students are invited to explore the promotion of healthy relationships in the context of evidence-based policies and practices that promote mental wellness. Strategies for building capacity related to cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that help to reduce bullying and other forms of violence among youth are explored. Students also engage in learning experiences to examine the theoretical roots of violence with the goal of increasing graduate students' abilities to facilitate the development of social-emotional learning for youth in the school and community settings in which they live and work.

The second course, Anti-Oppression Education, involves the examination of systems of oppression (including but not limited to racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and transphobia). The overall learning outcome of this course is for graduate students to develop strategies for recognizing and preventing oppression in all its manifestations. The readings, resources, and learning activities in this course are designed to facilitate graduate students' learning in the areas of recognizing the influence of power, control, and privilege, as well as creating safe learning environments.

Developing Resilient Youth, the next course in the sequence, focuses on challenging graduate students to understand the impact of trauma on healthy youth development. Graduate students in this course learn about recognizing the impact of toxic stress resulting from abuse, exposure to family violence, mental health, and addiction issues. In addition, graduate students are invited to consider effective supports for responding to family and community violence and other forms of trauma. School-based mental health strategies and approaches are also examined.

The final course, Student Advocacy and Community, invites graduate students to cultivate social justice through student advocacy by analyzing issues impacting students and communities from a critical pedagogical perspective. In this course, students are invited to consider diversity and inclusion, activism and advocacy, media literacy, social networking, and safe peer relationships. Graduate students explore these topics in the context of honoring student engagement and promoting student leadership in advocacy efforts. The importance of facilitating student participation in advocacy efforts as an essential component of promoting healthy and socially just schools and communities is emphasized.

It is important to consider not only the course topics and content, but also the process and pedagogy that were foundational in planning and implementing AHSJSC. Consideration of principles of adult learning influenced our processes in both the "bricks and mortar" and online classrooms. For example, instructors of AHSJSC consistently encourage the graduate students, who are working in a range of disciplines and unique settings with youth, to draw upon and share their lived experiences within the learning environment. There was also an acknowledgment by the team developing AHSJSC that learning is relational, circuitous, emotional, and often can be deeply personal and transformational (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). A critical theoretical perspective is embraced in all courses, including co-creating knowledge through dialogue (e.g., in-person in the classroom and online in the discussion forums) and critical consciousness for social change (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The learning activities, readings, and assignments are also designed to foster critical reflection and facilitate dialectal discussion in an atmosphere of transformative learning (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Mezirow, 2009).

The initial week of on-campus, in-person learning in the first course, Promoting Healthy Relationships, provides the opportunity for students to get to know one another while engaging in experiential learning activities individually and in groups. The learning activities in

class during the first week of this course capitalize on identification of, and reflection on, students' values, beliefs, and attitudes to facilitate an understanding of healthy relationship development in the broader context of violence prevention. These in-person experiential learning activities help establish an environment of trust and rapport among the students in the physical classroom which serves as a foundation for future learning in the virtual online classrooms in the subsequent courses. With this foundation established, the cohort of students' progress through the subsequent three courses in an online learning environment. Principles of adult learning and a critical theoretical perspective are carried through to the virtual learning space. The course curriculum includes individual and group learning activities and readings designed to access the affective domain, foster critical reflection, and draw on the life/work experience of students as adult learners.

In addition, instructors mindfully engage in instructional immediacy online by using behaviors to show emotional attachment between instructors and students (Melrose, Park, & Perry, 2013). For example, instructors demonstrate instructional immediacy by simply addressing students by name in individual emails and in forum group discussions. Other instructional immediacy strategies used in the online portion of the courses include providing timely, individual, substantive feedback on assignments and posing reflective questions (Melrose et al., 2013). Instructors also share personal and professional examples when appropriate and engage in gentle use of humor with students.

In summary, graduate students in AHSJSC are exposed to an interdisciplinary approach to professional education that incorporates evidence-based research from violence prevention to youth development, as well as critical pedagogy approaches toward holistic responses to trauma, oppression, and violence. The potentially sensitive topics of this curriculum are addressed in a safe and caring learning environment where graduate students are called to examine their own values, beliefs, and assumptions and, at times, those of their student colleagues. To build the foundation for this safe and caring environment, this program was planned over the span of several years, and the faculty involved in this planning mirrored the interdisciplinary nature of this program as their backgrounds included social work, education, and nursing.

Alongside the design of the overall program, the team that developed AHSJSC also focused from the start on an evaluation strategy in order to assess the feasibility and utility of the program in its current format, as well as to guide the revision process in subsequent offerings of the program. We now describe the findings from this pilot evaluation work, conducted as part of the first offering of the program (July 2015-June 2016).

Pilot Evaluation of Advancing Healthy and Socially Just Schools and Communities

Research Questions

The primary questions for this pilot study were:

1. Does the provision of the identified course content related to violence and the primary prevention of violence contribute to participants having a better understanding of the roots of violence in society and how these factors influence youth behavior, learning, and the learning environment?
2. Does the provision of the identified course content and engaging students in skill building exercises designed to respond to violence and bullying in the school context result in participants understanding their roles in reporting, preventing, and responding to violence and its impacts?
3. Does the provision of information regarding the scope and nature of family, school, and community violence and supports available to youth and families result in participants having a better understanding and knowledge of the resources and community supports available to them when they have to respond to violence and bullying in the school context?

Participants

All individuals participating in the initial course offering were invited to participate in the pilot evaluation of the AHSJSC. On the first day of the first course in July 2015, the second author presented on this pilot study and invited any interested individuals to participate. Course instructors were not in the room during recruitment, and the second author did not have an existing relationship with any of the students. In order to minimize any coercion to participate, consent forms for the project were stapled to the baseline survey, and students were instructed to complete the survey whether or not consent to use the data for research purposes was given; in this way, individuals in the room would not know who had consented to participate in the research and who had not (if students did not give consent, they were told their data would be used for internal program evaluation purposes only, as per the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2014). The consent rate was 100% (n=18), and thus data from all course participants are included. All 18 participants also completed the baseline survey assessment with a retention rate of 83% at the one-year follow-up assessment. This study was reviewed and approved by the university's Research Ethics Board.

Procedures

Pre- and post-test survey data were collected before and after each course over the first year of the implementation of AHSJSC. Questions on surveys were designed to measure changes in students' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and confidence on items pertaining to the course content across the curriculum. A within-groups research design was used to evaluate each of the four courses, with pre-testing occurring prior to each course offering, and post-testing occurring at the conclusion of each of the four courses. The baseline assessment (T0, July 2015) was completed on paper, and all subsequent surveys were completed electronically using SurveyMonkey. As this study was situated as a pilot evaluation of a course, participants were not provided any incentives for participating.

Measures

Evaluation focused on both reaction to course content (e.g., learning, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, and scope of content) and acquisition of course content (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, confidence, and skills). Response to course content was assessed on all post-tests (T1 – August 2015; T2 – December 2015; T3 – April 2016; T4 – July 2016). Acquisition of course content was assessed using the 18-item moral disengagement questions from the Western University Safe Schools (WU-SS) survey (Jaffe & Crooks, n.d., α=.81) and the Knowledge, Confidence, and Skills Healthy Relationships Questionnaire (KCS-HR) (Promoting Relationships & Preventing Violence Network, 2012). Items from the WU-SS tap violence prevention attitudes that indicate moral disengagement (e.g., "attitudes that can pose barriers for teachers in responding appropriately to situations of violence"; Crooks, Jaffe, & Rodriguez, 2016, p. 6). Example items from this scale include "If adults intervene in every incident of bullying, kids will never get the chance to practice conflict resolution on their own," "The word 'gay' is used inappropriately by youth so often that there is no point in intervening," and, "Because my main responsibility as a teacher is to teach numeracy and literacy, there is little time to teach violence prevention." This scale was developed to explore the impact of a safe schools course in a sample of Ontario pre-service educators (Crooks et al., 2016), where construct validity evidence supported a one-factor solution. The KCS-HR was developed by the Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet), a Canadian national center of excellence, as an evaluation tool for their Healthy Relationships Training Module. Items from this tool have been used previously to evaluate changes to healthy relationships knowledge, confidence and skills following training in healthy relationships content (Phipps, Cummings, Pepler, Craig, & Cardinal, 2016). Full versions of the WU-SS and the KCS-HR were administered at T0 and T4. For the other surveys (T1, T2, T3) course instructors were asked to choose the five questions that were most relevant to their course content, and only those questions were asked (e.g., for a total of 10 questions per survey – five questions from the outgoing instructor, and five questions from the incoming instructor). For simplicity, results presented in this paper focus on changes from T0 to T4 (e.g., across the program year).

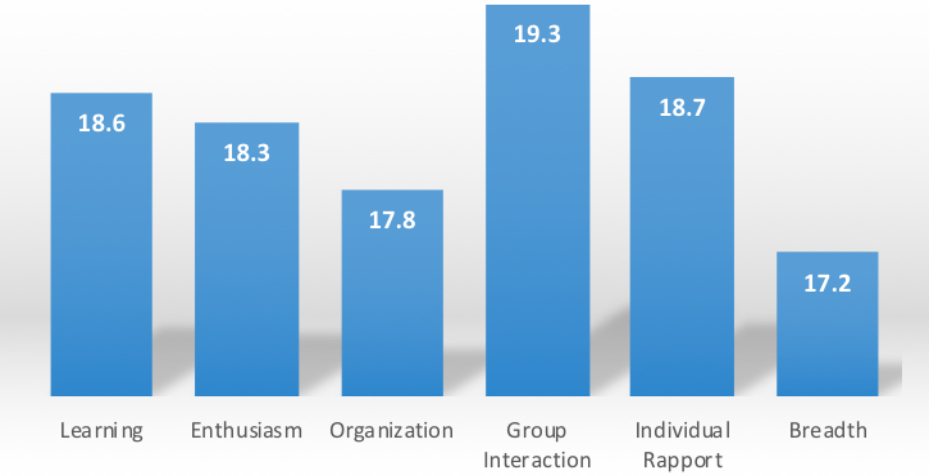
Findings

In the initial year-long offering of AHSJSC, most students came from the field of education (94%), with 83% of these students currently working as teachers. One student came from the field of social work, and two students were registered nurses. Respondents ranged in age from 23 to 58 years (mean age = 33.5 years) with most respondents identifying as female (78%) and White (78%). The majority of respondents (67%) had worked with children for 10 years or less, and approximately one-third of respondents had personal experience with violence when they were growing up. Also, one-quarter had previously attended a violence prevention program.

Students reacted positively to teaching and learning methods used throughout the AHSJSC program. Across the courses, the average instructor rating was 4.7 out of 5, and the average course rating was 4.8 out of 5. In addition to overall scores, data were collected on the following specific domains: learning (e.g., "I have learned something which I consider valuable"), enthusiasm (e.g., "Instructor was dynamic and energetic in conducting the course"), organization (e.g., "Course materials were well prepared and carefully explained"), group interaction (e.g., "Students were invited to share their ideas and knowledge"), individual rapport (e.g., "Instructor had a genuine individual interest in students"), and breadth (e.g., "Instructor adequately discussed current developments in the field"). All domains had four items, with possible scores ranging from 5 to 20. As shown in Figure 3, instructors were rated very highly on all domains.

As part of the teaching and learning assessment, participants also rated the quality of assignments (2 items; score range: 5-10; e.g., "Required readings/texts were valuable"); the average score on these items was 4.5 out of 5. Overall, the quantitative data related to teaching and learning demonstrated the effectiveness of instruction throughout the program. (Teaching and learning data summarized here include three of the four courses. There was an unanticipated issue with

Figure 3
Scores for domains of learning.



instruction in one course; this issue was addressed as part of the continuous quality improvement processes in response to evaluation data. Instructor scores in this course were extreme outliers, and as such, they were removed from the data presented here. Full data are available from the second author).

In addition to quantitative data, all surveys except the baseline contained a final, open-ended question to which students could respond and share any other thoughts or feedback on the course they had just completed. These qualitative data were reviewed thematically by the second author as part of the pilot evaluation, and they further reflected the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the AHSJSC. One participant remarked, "Great class! I thoroughly enjoyed the entire thing and I felt that I learned more in this one class than all of the Education classes as part of my undergraduate degree." Another shared, "The content was relevant, useful and meaningful. It should be mandatory for undergrads." Regarding both breadth and learning, one participant stated the following:

> This course provided me with insight and growth not only for my professional life but also my personal life. Since the course, I have begun to see social topics differently, and have noticed things that I did not notice before. I hope to take what I learned from this course and pass it on to my students at school, and eventually to children of my own.

Regarding enthusiasm, individual rapport, organization and group interaction, another reported thusly:

> [The professor] was truly an excellent prof – s/he did everything in [their] power to get the class chatting during synchronous sessions. S/He was warm, funny and willing to answer questions and tell stories about [their] experiences in the field. I also appreciated his/her style with allowing us free rein in choosing a research topic, [and] in encouraging us to use it towards our future projects or research.

Feedback overall was very positive, but some constructive feedback was also offered by students regarding potential course improvements. Constructive feedback from students across the courses primarily focused on strengthening grading rubrics. For example, one student stated, "I felt the expectations for learning task B were unclear…The rubric did not match instruction; overall, the rubric for this learning task needs to be re-evaluated," and another said, "[R]ubrics were included in the course outline; however, they were not marked and returned to students with assignments." One student also suggested reducing the amount of readings in the first course, given that the in-person portion is only one week in length, and two suggested reducing the volume of weekly discussion board postings in another course to increase quality. Several students also noted that the last course in the AHSJSC course sequence felt compressed, which was a result of the university timetable (spring semester courses are 7 weeks, compared to 12 weeks in the fall and winter semesters). This feedback, particularly around rubric improvements, was shared with faculty as part of a continuous quality improvement process.

We feel that the high scores for teaching and learning support preliminary changes in key outcomes across the course of the year. Particularly, in the one-year time period from T0 to T4, respondents demonstrated a significant decrease in moral disengagement attitudes. In addition to changes in moral disengagement, participants also showed preliminary improvements in their confidence to promote healthy relationships with youth (e.g., "I am confident I will coach or scaffold in the moment when the opportunity presents itself"). We did not find meaningful change in knowledge or skills, but this is likely due to the small sample size and fairly high level of pre-existing knowledge and skills of the participants in this sample.

Discussion

In this pilot evaluation, we evaluated a four-course graduate certificate program aimed at providing graduate students across the disciplines of education, social work, and nursing with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote healthy youth relationships, recognize oppression, understand trauma/resilience, and facilitate advocacy/community in the overall context of the prevention of intimate partner violence. In response to the first research question, graduate students gained a better understanding of the roots of violence and how these roots influence youth behavior and the learning and community environment. Prior work has demonstrated that teachers and adults working with youth benefit from training in the area of healthy relationship development (Blain-Arcaro, Smith, Cunningham, Vaillancourt, & Rimas, 2012; Pepler et al, 2012), and our pilot evaluation data extend this literature by demonstrating improvements over the span of a year related to attitudes and beliefs around the ability of educators to intervene on the root causes of bullying and violence. In particular, the moral disengagement finding in our sample highlights the increased understanding among program participants of the effectiveness of adult interventions to counteract bullying and violence both with youth and with the systems and contexts in which they live, suggesting the potential utility of this certificate program in achieving target outcomes. This finding also aligns with past work exploring factors predicting or impeding teacher responses to behaviors that detract from promoting a positive school climate. In a sample of over 400 pre-service teachers enrolled in a safe schools course, Crooks et al. (2016) also found a significant decline in moral disengagement from pre-test to post-test, and they noted that the decline in moral disengagement predicted an increase in bullying knowledge. While we did not find increases in knowledge in our sample, this may be due to the different experience levels between our samples (in-service, graduate-level teachers) and the Crooks et al. (2016) sample (pre-service, undergraduate students) and the subsequent need for more sensitive measures of knowledge change in our more experienced sample.

The second research question centered on skill building in response to violence vis-à-vis reporting, preventing, and responding to violence and its impacts. Although we did not find significant changes in this area, the small sample size in combination with the high level of pre-existing knowledge and skills in this sample may have influenced this outcome; this is an important area for future study of this program as it pertains to utility. It is also worth noting that although two-thirds of the sample had between 1 to 10 years of experience working with children and youth, one third of the sample had over 10 years of this experience. However, the tool we used (Knowledge, Confidence, and Skills Healthy Relationships Questionnaire) is typically administered to general population samples and thus may not have been sensitive to change in this population.

The third research question explored whether graduate students gained a better understanding of resources and community supports. We feel the qualitative teaching and learning data provide preliminary support for this question. In addition, we note that we observed increased confidence to use coaching or scaffolding in order to promote healthy relationships. We view this finding as related to this research question, as it demonstrates participants' understanding of their ability to serve as a resource in the moment. This finding lends support to studies linking teachers' knowledge, self-efficacy, and confidence in recognizing and effectively responding to school violence (Blain-Arcaro et al, 2012; Crooks et al, 2016). We also believe this change, while preliminary due to the small sample size and pilot nature of data collection, is important to acknowledge as it demonstrates self-awareness, self-regulation, and attention to use of personal power in particular when working with those in a less powerful position, such as youth. Modeling awareness of the use of personal power as a resource was also deliberately and mindfully modeled by faculty teaching in this program as part of our critical pedagogical approach.

While promotion of healthy youth relationships and prevention of violence was the overall goal of AHSJSC, Whitley, Smith, and Vaillancourt (2013) called for professional learning opportunities for educators in the area of mental health literacy with an eye to the prevention of bullying as it is a root cause of many mental health issues in children. Furthermore, Furman (2012) proposed a social justice leadership framework, rooted in practice, to develop the knowledge and skills of social justice leaders such as students, teachers, and administrators with a goal of

transformative action in schools. The pilot evaluation of AHSJSC adds to this body of literature by extending beyond suggestions of professional development or learning opportunities for teachers to a scaffolded, graduate program of one year in length for students working in a variety of human service professions across school and community settings aimed toward violence prevention and healthy relationship development for youth.

Overall, pilot evaluation data indicate that AHSJSC can play an important role in building capacity among adults who work with youth, as well as that the certificate program is a feasible and useful way to offer adult education focused on creating socially just schools and community environments. Specifically, over the span of a year, graduate students in the program were better able to identify the roots of violence and how these factors influence youth, as evidenced through significant changes to attitudes and beliefs; understand their roles in responding to violence, as evidenced through significant changes to attitudes, beliefs and confidence; and understand resources and community supports, as evidenced through both qualitative and quantitative feedback. With these positive changes as context, the authors believe that a program such as AHSJSC could be implemented and replicated within other disciplines. Identification of the roots of violence, acknowledging the impact of violence on youth, and responding effectively to this violence are not the sole purview of educators, nurses, and social workers. Potential for change is multiplied as adults across disciplines who work with youth, work in the systems connected with youth, and develop policy/laws affecting youth become broadly educated and acutely aware of the depth and breadth of this issue.

Limitations

This pilot evaluation makes an initial contribution to the body of literature on the role of graduate education in promoting violence prevention and healthy relationship development; however, it is important to acknowledge three limitations of this work. First, regarding the collection of quantitative survey data, the sample was small (n = 18). Second, the Knowledge, Confidence, and Skills Healthy Relationships Questionnaire is more commonly used with the general population. In future studies, other measures which may be more sensitive to change should be explored. Third, the evaluation of AHSJSC occurred in the initial offering of this four course program; the data in this study represents an initial data set. Multiple evaluations over time with subsequent cohorts of students are needed to build on these data. Data from future cohorts of graduate students will also hopefully increase the diversity of the sample (e.g., respondents identifying from a wider range of racial identities, increased number of male-identified respondents).

Implications for Practice and Research

The process of implementing a four course graduate certificate program designed to create systems-level change to prevent intimate partner violence in an interdisciplinary context was no small undertaking. One significant challenge included the planning phase, which took place over the course of several years as the AHSJSC team members grappled with decisions regarding pedagogy as well as course and program outcomes. To this end, even though the team was comprised of experienced post-secondary educators, they engaged in ongoing learning opportunities together at professional development seminars offered by the university in areas such as writing a teaching philosophy, developing learning outcomes, designing rubrics to enrich student learning, and creating an effective course outline. Another challenge was that administrative processes between faculties were complex at times; these processes needed to be navigated with open discussion and compromise.

Results from our pilot point to the feasibility of the initial offering of this interdisciplinary program, as well as to the utility of using a primary prevention perspective focusing on building and promoting healthy youth relationships within an ecological approach as a strategy toward building capacity for healthy relationships in adulthood. As such, this pilot study has several implications that might be considered related to practice and research. First, collecting evaluation data as part of the piloting of new curricular offerings is an important part of the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition to helping us understand feasibility and utility, we have subsequently used the evaluation data to inform the process of curriculum revision in preparation for the subsequent cohort of students enrolled in AHSJSC. While the data from student surveys is invaluable, it is equally important to consider informal data such as anecdotal feedback from students in class and via email, as well as personal observations (e.g., what learning activities seemed engaging or not, what assignments seemed to meet the learning needs of students or not, etc.) when making revisions. In the same vein, it is important to integrate recent and relevant research literature both directly (e.g., violence prevention, healthy relationship development) and peripherally (e.g., policy initiatives, bullying, social-emotional learning, brain development) related to topics in the program. The implications related to the process aspect of teaching the potentially sensitive and value-laden topics in AHSJSC warrant careful consideration regarding selection of faculty who are both qualified for, and interested in, facilitating this type of learning

with graduate students across disciplines. This type of teaching requires faculty to acknowledge the expertise of students in their respective disciplines, including the tacit knowledge they bring to class, as well as their practice expertise as teachers, social workers, and nurses across a variety of school, community, and workplace settings. In some respects, the collaborative process of developing the curriculum, launching, evaluating, reflecting, and continuously improving AHSJSC mirrors what faculty were striving toward in their courses with the graduate students.

Conclusion

The majority of the graduate students found that the courses in AHSJSC were intellectually challenging and invaluable to their learning related to promoting healthy relationships, recognizing oppression, understanding trauma and resilience, and cultivating social justice. The findings of this pilot study suggest that such an approach is feasible and useful in a higher learning environment. As cohorts of graduate students that work with youth - teachers, social workers, and nurses – successfully complete this program, we hope that the primary prevention of intimate partner violence will come closer to being realized.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research was supported in part by funding from a private philanthropic organization that focuses on youth development. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board and was performed in accordance with ethical standards as specified in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study.

References

Abercrombie, R., Harries, E., & Wharton, R. (2015, June). *Systems change: A guide to what it is and how to do it.* London, UK: New Philanthropy Capital. Retrieved from https://www.thinknpc.org/publications/systems-change/

Allison, K. W., Edmonds, T., Wilson, K., Pope, M., & Farrell, A. D. (2011). Connecting youth violence prevention, positive youth development, and community mobilization. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *48*(1-2), 8-20. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9407-9.

Beaupré, P. (2015). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile.* (85-002-X, Juristat). Section 2: Intimate partner violence. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.Ottawa, ON. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14114-eng.pdf

Blain-Arcaro, C., Smith, J. D., Cunningham, C. E., Vaillancourt, T., & Rimas, H. (2012). Contextual attributes of indirect bullying situations that influence teachers' decisions to intervene. *Journal of School Violence*, *11*(3), 226-245. doi: 10.1080/15388220.2012.682003

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, *32*(7), 513. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a857/783a2bfc8aef8c93c200b3c635549237b434.pdf

Brookfield, S.D. & Holst, J.D. (2011). Understanding adult learning. In *Radicalizing learning: Adult education for a just world* (pp. 23-42). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Canadian Council on the Social Determinants on Health. (2015). *A review of frameworks on the determinants of health.* Retrieved from http://ccsdh.ca/images/uploads/Frameworks_Report_English.pdf

Cohen, L., & Swift, S. (1999). The spectrum of prevention: Developing a comprehensive approach to injury prevention. *Injury prevention*, *5*(3), 203-207. Retrieved from http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/injuryprev/5/3/203.full.pdf

Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Zwarych, S., Hughes, R., & Wolfe, D. A. (2013). Predicting implementation success of an evidence-based program to promote healthy relationships among students two to eight years after teacher training. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, *32*(1), 125-138. doi:10.7870/cjcmh-2013-010

Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, D., Siebold, W., Moore, K., Grassgreen, L. Owen, P., Rausch, A., & Rosier, M. (2018). The role of relationships in collaborative partnership success: Lessons from the Alaska Fourth R project. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 67*, 97-104.

Crooks, C. V., Jaffe, P. G., & Rodriguez, A. (2016). Increasing knowledge and self-efficacy through a pre-service course on promoting positive school climate: The crucial role of reducing moral disengagement. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, *10*(1), 49-64. doi:10.1080/1754730X.2016.1249383

Exner-Cortens, D. (2014). Theory and teen dating violence victimization: Considering adolescent development. *Developmental Review, 34,* 168-188. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2014.03.001

Exner-Cortens, D., Eckenrode, J., Bunge, J., & Rothman, E. (2017). Revictimization after adolescent dating violence in a matched, national

sample of youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *60*(2), 176-183. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.015

Exner-Cortens, D., Wells, L., Lee, L., & Spiric, V. (2019). *Building a culture of intimate partner violence prevention in Alberta, Canada through the promotion of healthy youth relationships.* Prevention Science. doi: 10.1007/s11121-019-01011-7

Foster-Fishman, P., Nowell, B., & Yang, H. (2007). Putting the system back into systems change: A framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 39,* 197–215. doi: 10.1007/s10464-007-9109-0

Furman, G. (2012). Social justice leadership as praxis: Developing capacities through preparation programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(2), 191-229. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11427394

García-Moreno, C., Hegarty, K., d'Oliveira, A. F. L., Koziol-McLain, J., Colombini, M., & Feder, G. (2015). The health-systems response to violence against women. *The Lancet*, *385*(9977), 1567-1579. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61837-7

Greenberg, M. T., Weisberg, R. P., O'Brien, M.U., Zins, J.E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M.J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional and academic learning. *American Psychologist, 58*(6/7), 466-474. Retrieved from http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/

Groen, J., & Kawalilak, C. (2014). *Pathways of adult learning: Professional and education narratives.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Jaffe, P., & Crooks, C. (n.d.). *The impact of a safe schools course on pre-service teachers' attitudes and knowledge about preventing and responding to violence in schools.* London, ON: University of Western Ontario.

Jaffe, P., Crooks, C., & Watson, C. L. (2009). *Creating safe school environments: From small steps to sustainable change*. London, ON: Aylmer Press.

Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(1), 491-525. doi:10.3102/0034654308325693

Joint Consortium for School Health. (2010, January). *Schools as a setting for promoting positive mental health: Better practices and perspectives*. Summerside, PEI: JCSH. Retrieved from http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/upload/PMH%20July10%202011%20WebReady.pdf

Kallestad, J. H., & Olweus, D. (2003). Predicting teachers' and schools' implementation of the Olweus bullying prevention program: A multilevel study. *Prevention & Treatment*, *6*(1), Article 21. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1522-3736.6.1.621a

Kistin, C., & Silverstein, M. (2016). Pilot studies: A critical but potentially misused component of interventional research. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 314*(15), 1561-1562. doi:10.1001/jama.2015. 10962.

Melrose, S., Park, C., & Perry, B. (2013). *Teaching health professionals online: Frameworks and strategies.* Edmonton, AB: AU Press.

Mezirow, J. (2009). An overview on transformative learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning: Learning theorists in their own words* (pp. 90-105). London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge.

Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). *Preventing intimate partner violence across the lifespan: A technical package of programs, policies, and practices.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf

Park, Y., Mulford, C., & Blachman-Demner, D. (2018). The acute and chronic impact of adolescent dating violence: A public health perspective. In D. A. Wolfe & J. R. Temple (Eds.), *Adolescent dating violence: Theory, research, and prevention* (pp. 53-84). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

Pepler, D., & Craig, W. (2007). *Binoculars on bullying*: *A new solution to protect and connect children*. Retrieved from https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/Binoculars_on_Bullying_A_New_Solution_to_Protect_and_Connect_Children.pdf

Pepler, D., Craig, W., & Haner, D. (2012). *Healthy development depends on healthy relationships*. Retrieved from http://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/HealthyRelationshipsPaper.pdf

Phipps, D., Cummings, J., Pepler, D., Craig, W., & Cardinal, S. (2016). The co-produced pathway to impact describes knowledge mobilization processes. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, *9*(1), 31-40. Retrieved from http://jces.ua.edu/

Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research. (2014).Tri-Council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans. Retrieved from http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2012). *Is everybody really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. (2016). *Who we are.* Retrieved from https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/who-we-are/#background

Sinha, M. (2013). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical trends.* (85-002-X, Juristat). Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Retreived from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf

Stamler, L. L., & Yiu, L. (2012). *Community health nursing: A Canadian perspective* (3rd ed.). Toronto, ON: Pearson.

Walker, H. M., & Shinn, M.R. (2002). Structuring school-based interventions to achieve integrated primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention goals for safe and effective schools. In M. R. Shinn, G. Stoner, & H. M. Walker (Eds.), *Interventions for academic and problem behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches* (pp. 1-25). Bethesda, ML: National Association of School Psychologists.

Wells, L., Campbell, K., & Dozois. E. (2014). *A strategy to promote healthy youth relationships in Alberta to prevent domestic violence.* Calgary, AB: University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. Retrieved from http://preventdomesticviolence.ca/

Whitley, J., Smith, J. D., & Vaillancourt, T. (2013). Promoting mental health literacy among educators: Critical in school-based prevention and intervention. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *28*(1), 56-70. doi:10.1177/0829573512468852

World Health Organization. (2010). *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence.* Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/9789241564007_eng.pdf

---

LYNN CORCORAN is a registered nurse with 30 years of experience in the areas of nursing education, women's health, and community health. She is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Health Disciplines at Athabasca University and a sessional instructor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research and scholarly interests include understanding intimate partner violence, promoting healthy relationships, and exploring innovations in teaching and learning.

DEINERA EXNER-CORTENS holds a PhD in Developmental Psychology and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the implementation and evaluation of teen dating violence prevention and healthy relationships promotion programs, practices and strategies in school and community settings.

LANA WELLS, Associate Professor, Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Fellow, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary. Lana has over 20 years of experience working with non-profit organizations and government bodies as a planner, strategist, researcher, project manager, evaluator, facilitator, and trainer. Lana leads Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence where she is focusing on transformational change using a primary prevention approach to stop first time victimization/perpetration of domestic violence by enhancing the capacity of policy makers, systems leaders, clinicians, service providers, and the community.