

No Health Without Mental Health

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Introduction

My students come from populations with barriers to mental health care. Hispanics are less likely to access mental health services than other groups, but Hispanic women have a higher rate of depression than Black and White women. Black teenagers are more than 50% more likely to attempt suicide than White teens. Asian Americans are the demographic group least likely to seek mental health care. Overall, North Carolina ranks 42 in the U.S. for incidence of youth mental illness and access to mental health care.

In my school, 23.1% of students are White, 30.8% are Black and 37.1% are Hispanic. 5.5% of students are Asian. 2.8% of students identify with two or more races. 30.1% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

I will use the units in the Spanish II curriculum dealing with health care to explore mental health care and well-being. I will use activities from the NewGen curriculum for starting conversations in English and Spanish about human rights, mental health care and health care access. Students will learn the differences between a service project and a peace project. Students will follow the NewGen Peacebuilders protocol for ideating a peace project, seeking community input, prototyping, piloting, implementing, and finally seeking partnerships in a mental health care peace project with the Spanish language community.

Learning Objectives

We teach World Languages not merely to mold better workers, but better neighbors.

Students will clarify their understanding of human rights and the notion of healthcare and mental health care as a human right. Students will identify barriers to mental health care for Spanish language communities. Students will understand the process for implementation of peace projects. Students will articulate the difference between a service project and a peace project.

Every day as a teacher I see the pain inflicted by cultural violence. Students, their parents and families experience unrelieved suffering because people in their community with the capacity to aid them lack the linguistic and cultural competence to reach, listen to, and understand them.

We teach World Languages to prevent avoidable harm—to choose peace over violence.

Research/Data Collection

A 2018 report from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights sets out a data-rich argument for mental health care as a human right. Although one in four people globally will experience mental illness, only 7% of healthcare spending goes for mental health. In less wealthy countries, mental health care spending is as low as \$2 per person annually. The impact on health outcomes is enormous: mental illness leads to a 15 year drop in life expectancy for women, and a 20 year drop for men.

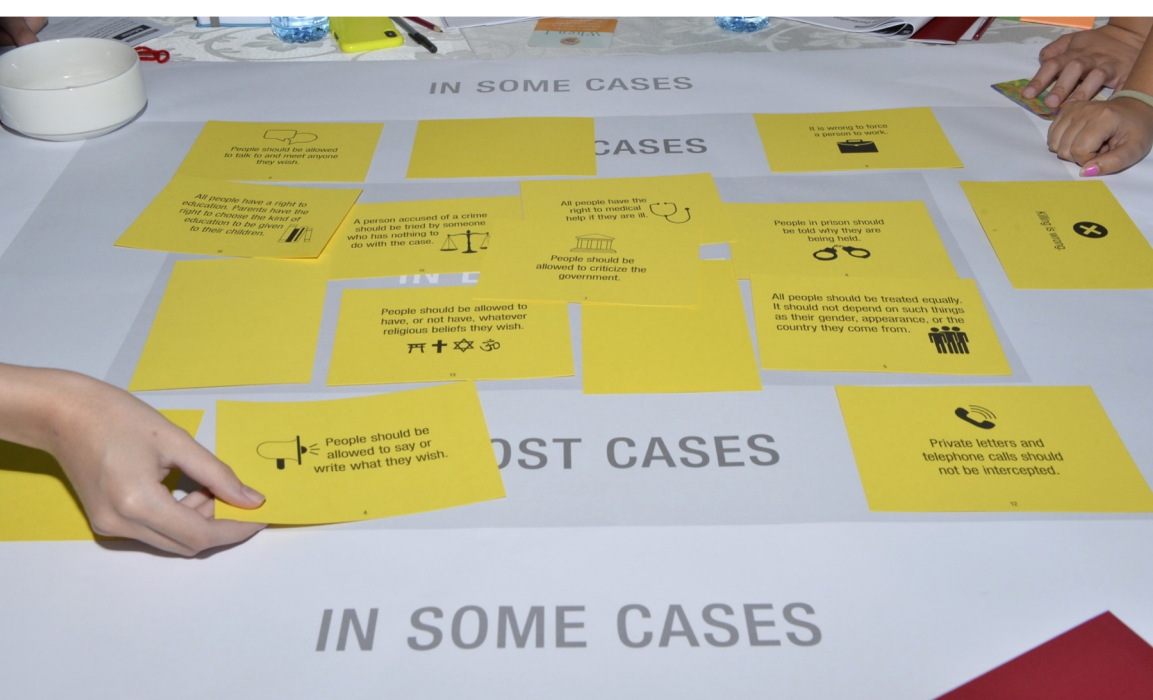
Resources from Mental Health America detail factors affecting mental health care for different communities. MHA provides briefs outlining disparities in mental health care access and outcomes for different groups. Briefs share information on cultural practices regarding mental health care. For example, Spanish-speakers in emotional distress are more apt to describe their physical symptoms to a physician rather than to seek counseling. From the American Psychological Association I learned that only 5.5% of U.S. psychologists can provide services in Spanish.

Nature of Student Inquiry

Students will use the “Where Do You Stand?” activity from NewGen Peacebuilders to construct consensus on rights to healthcare and mental healthcare. Students will use a PSA by Dr. Erendira López García, PSYD to start a conversation about access to mental health care in the Spanish language community. In the final project phase of the two thematic units on healthcare, students will also learn the methodology for conceptualizing and implementing a peace project. Students will evaluate the difference between a service project and a peace project and will brainstorm, seek input on, and prototype a project of their own. Successful projects will follow through to full implementation and community partnerships.



Classroom Implementation



Students will complete the “Where Do You Stand?” activity as a classroom icebreaker in English during the first week of school. This will familiarize students with the format of the activity and rules of play. The activity helps students negotiate the meaning of “human rights” and understand how the meaning of human “rights” can change over time. Students receive 16 cards with statements about rights. They must place the cards on a visual organizer according to whether they think the statement on each card applies in every case, in most cases, or in some cases. Students may dispute the placement of other students’ cards. When students have negotiated placement of all cards in one of the three categories, those that remain in “in every case” are the group’s list of rights.

There are two units in my curriculum dealing with health care in the Spanish-speaking world. Once students have learned vocabulary for states of health and feelings in the first health unit, we will use a Spanish-language PSA on mental health from the Dayton Human Relations Council and the Unitarian Fellowship of World Peace by Dr. Erendira López García, PSYD. The video will check student comprehension and will allow us to initiate a discussion about mental health access for Spanish speakers. Students will learn that Dr. López García is one of a very limited number of Spanish-proficient practitioners in this country. The next unit deals with more serious accidents, injuries and disasters, including those resulting in death. We will talk about trauma following a serious incident and students will discuss the challenges of finding care for acute and chronic traumatic stress when seeking care in Spanish.

At the conclusion of the second unit on health care, students will do “Where Do You Stand?” again with an organizer and prompts in Spanish related to rights to health care and mental health care. As a culminating discussion, students will list people who learn a language to help others. Discuss why we learn and teach Spanish in school. **The concept of building compassionate presence in our society is too often left out of the language classroom. Avoidable harm arises when we do not raise our society’s capacity to hear, understand, and help.**

Evaluation and Results



Students will discuss a hypothetical project: choose a mental health care resource in the community and prepare a PSA in Spanish to lower barriers to mental health care options in the community. Would this represent Awareness, Service, Advocacy, or Philanthropy? As presented, would this be a peace project or a service project? Why?

After discussing the hypothetical service project, students will brainstorm a peace project of their own. A peace project includes input from the community it serves. While a service project may be completed in a day, a peace project is an ongoing effort building community partnerships. Students should progress at least through brainstorming and seeking community input. Ideally, successful projects will proceed to implementation.

References

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