

2014 - 2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study



School: Smithers Secondary **District:** #54 Bulkley Valley

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Our focus area: A Key to Success is Controlling the Stress (Emotions are central)

Scanning: Grade 8 students are interested in learning about themselves, so a study of the brain and self-regulation information is engaging and appropriate. Further, they come into the new learning situation quite stressed as they are no longer the oldest in the building and they need to find their way among senior students.

During the Grade 12 year, many students feel stress: graduation, courses, marks, post-secondary entrance, life choices.

We see students display anxiety, heightened emotions (tears, anger), and physical symptoms (headache, upset stomach).

Yes, we referred to the OECD during the scanning process. We know that *emotions are central to learning*.

Focus: *Emotions are central to learning.*

We realize that learning cannot happen if emotions are not recognized.

Hunch: Times of transition can be extremely difficult for many. This leads to stress. Our Grade 8 and 12 students experience recognizable and significant transitions.

As adults, we believe in the importance of healthy living in order to manage stress. Teachers can contribute in a positive way to the situation as, we pay close attention to the needs and emotions of our students and we want to do our best to intervene/support when necessary. Some transitions require additional attention and care.

Teachers do not always acknowledge student emotions and openly discuss transitions. We noticed there was a need to have those conversations and to provide tangible tools so that students can develop a deeper self-awareness and preparedness in dealing with stress.

New professional learning: We worked together to become more knowledgeable about stress in young people, including its effects, and ways to deal with it.

Contacts: Mental Health workers; school counselors; community experts

Readings: Mindset by Carol Dweck, Spark by J. Ratey, Brain Rules by J. Medina, Calm, alert and learning by Stuart Shanker

Gordon Neufeld Workshop –*Making Sense of Anxiety in Children and Youth*.

Taking action: Science 8: Design unit/lessons around brain physiology and self-regulation.
English 12: Design unit/lessons that provided readings, discussions and activities to empower students to be self-aware of their stress levels and to manage stress.
Had the two age groups teach one another about the areas that they become expert in.
Brought in guest speakers such as a yoga instructor and community mental health worker, school counselors, and a First Nations naturalist.

September – Grade 8 Math/Science

Students learned about their brain and how it is used for learning. Using the scientific method, they experimented with the effect of stress on their brains and the ability to successfully learn. Once aware of the effects of stress, Shirley and her class discussed and shared ways to help reduce and cope with stress.

January – Grade 12 English

In preparation for the busy January exam period, Mary and Teresa designed a lesson with the intention to enable students to have a variety of stress management tools available to them, and to encourage students to discuss their own stress in a safe environment.

February – Professional Development for Mary and Teresa

Attended a full day workshop around Gordon Neufeld's material: *Making Sense of Anxiety in Children and Youth* (DVD)

April 30 – Combined classes - "Stress" Lesson One

This is the first time we combined the grade 8 and grade 12 classes. We completed two activities - Part one (Icebreaker) and Part Two (Be More Successful) – see attached.



May 6 – Combined classes – "Stress" Lesson Two

Classes combined and worked through the handout - Be More Successful with video. The students engaged in a lot of discussion using the prior knowledge from Lesson One and the clips from YouTube. All students completed the 4 page handout.

May 12 – Combined classes – Nature Walk with David Dewitt (Lands and Resource Officer)

The two classes went on a nature outing to learn about stress reducing strategies in the context of First Peoples' connection with the natural world. David talked to the students about Yinta (interconnectedness to the land and everything around us) and Wagoose (respect for everything). Our actions impact the world around us.



May 21 – Combined classes – presentation from Servaas Mes



Based on the principles of Somatics, the presentation was about self-regulation and stress. Students learned a number of movement and breathing strategies that can be used to create calm and focus within themselves.

May 28/29 – Reflective Lesson

Looked at bookmarks regarding Study Tips and have students fill in 5 ways they are able to control stress. Students also completed the Reflections and the Stress Survey handouts.

Checking: A difference was noticed through observation of student behaviour. As well, we asked students to reflect and record their emotions/stress levels. We used the two handouts: Reflections and the Stress Survey as evidential assessments. Through these, we saw that students understood stress in a different way (as our bodies helping us), were able to articulate what created stress in their lives, and knew what they could do to manage stress. Because this was our first time through the unit, we are satisfied with the outcomes. As always, we recognise that we can create deeper meaning for our students. There is a great deal of potential to continue this work through teaching of the unit and asking students to demonstrate their connection to the topic in a variety of ways.

We surveyed the students in both grade 8 and grade 12 after the lessons on stress.

We noticed:

- most students felt that the lessons and activities were valuable. The most valuable activity /resource according to the students, was the TED Ed talk which addresses stress in a more positive connotation (Making Stress your friend, https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend) This talk was content rich and lead to deep discussion.
- When students were asked to identify and list strategies they can use to help them identify and cope with stress in a healthy manner, they were able to do this with ease.
- Students were able to articulate what made them feel stressed

Reflections/Advice:

- consider use of the word “stress” – negative connotations /overuse (Does the use of the word “stress” actually invoke stress?)
- begin work with the grade 8s and 12s earlier in the semester – build longer and stronger relationships
- spiral through more – for example – Science 8 is linear so they could also be part of “expert” presentations to grade 12s that are just beginning in the second semester

- Next school year, Mary will teach a vulnerable girls' 9/10 PE and will include a focus on lifelong health/wellness. Yoga is a fantastic way to manage stress, so she completed a Yoga Fitness teaching course in order to introduce students to this wellness tool.
- focus of preparing students to be citizens that can cope with stress in the community or post-secondary (life skills in relationships, parenting, workplace).
- role plays, literature (fiction/nonfiction)
- This can go a lot deeper!

Resources for Inquiry

Fox, Annie and Kirschner, Ruth. (2005). *Too Stressed to Think?* Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.

The MindUp Curriculum Grades 6-8. (2011). New York: The Hawn Foundation.

Neufeld, Gordon. *Making Sense of Anxiety in Children and Youth* (DVD).

YouTube

"Belly Breathe" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZbzDOpyIA>

"Managing Stress" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE>

"Sleep" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gedoSfZvBgE>

Ted Talk

"How to Make Stress Your Friend"

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

"Does stress cause pimples?" <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/does-stress-cause-pimples-claudia-aguirre>