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Teachers, wellness and work

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The wellness of teachers may be described as their capacity for optimal functioning in and out of the classroom, and encompasses physical health, joy, self-efficacy and the motivation and energy to persist in the face of challenges. The framework of Trauma-and-Violence-Informed-Care is employed in this presentation to review research from a number of projects with both Teacher Candidates and Experienced Teachers, what they are asking for to support their mental health, the effect of supports, and how we can encourage systems to participate. Despite the work intensification and expansion of teachers' roles to actively care for their students' wellbeing and safety, the research focus has been on mental illness and risks for teachers, the negative effect on students when they have teachers experiencing high levels of stress, and the cost of teachers' missed work on healthcare and productivity measures. Casting teachers who are struggling as 'burned-out' and not able to achieve 'work-life balance' centres the deficit with the teachers, not where it could be addressed – the system. Starting in initial teacher education, our research has demonstrated that through strength-based, capacity building and support-oriented strategies and knowledge, we can shift the conversation from, "What's wrong with them?" (students or colleagues) to, "What has happened, and what might still be happening, to them?" This shift in perspectives promotes a new way of examining both our own and others' contexts, and leads to demonstrated differences in self-efficacy in supporting students, planning for the well-being of themselves and students, and noticing more, and more often, how students, self and colleagues are doing. Strategies, resources and results are shared in the references.

Biography

Susan Rodger is a psychologist and Professor at Western University in London, ON. Her research and practice areas converge in interpersonal, systemic, historical and community violence, building on strengths and the lived experiences of those with whom she works. Committed to advocacy, social justice and anti-oppressive practice, her research centres community partnerships and the voices of the people with whom she works. She has worked extensively with agencies serving visible and minoritized women, women experiencing violence, schools and teachers' associations. She teaches and studies the influence of teaching about supporting and sustaining mental health with both Bachelor of Education and graduate students.

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