This version of the article has been accepted for publication after peer/editorial review and is subject to *The McGill Journal of Education*'s terms of use. It has not yet undergone final copyediting and is not the Version of Record.

BOOK REVIEW / COMPTE-RENDU

LINDSAY JABER (ED.). (2024). *Understanding mental health across educational contexts: Promoting wellness in classrooms.* Canadian Scholars. 306pp. $59.95 (paperback). (ISBN 9781773384412).

The mental health of Canadian youth is at risk, asserts Lindsay Jaber. This is how an edited book focused on mental health in educational contexts opens. Schools are critical sites for early intervention, Jaber further argues, given that about 70% of mental health issues originate in childhood and adolescence, and youth aged 15 to 24 are more at risk for mental health challenges than other age groups. Various provinces in Canada have established policies and strategies on mental health and youth well-being in schools; for example, British Columbia has committed to establishing a "whole-school system ... where mental health promotion is embedded in all aspects of the education system, including culture, leadership, curriculum and learning environments" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 4). In Nova Scotia, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (2020) *Inclusive Education Policy* supports students through culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and inclusive and supportive learning environments. Jaber, along with other researchers contributing book chapters, enters the conversation with this new book. Featuring chapters from a wide range of Canadian scholars and practitioners in the fields of psychology and education, the edited volume harnesses theory and practice to bring forward theoretical and practical frameworks by its inclusion of concrete, actionable tools for educators to create change within an inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy framework.

In her introductory chapter, Jaber argues that schools have a crucial role to play in addressing and supporting youth mental health. Further, mental health literacy and social justice are foundational to addressing mental health outcomes for students. As I read through the book, I came to understand mental health literacy as developing within interrelated mental, emotional, and physical spaces that can support students' capacity to learn, develop, and feel safe. Mental spaces can be understood as the attitudes adopted by educators and institutions; inclusive language, for example, can reduce some of the stress students experience in an educational setting (Chapter 14). Emotional spaces acknowledge student affect and whether students feel respected, accepted, and heard at school and in the classroom. Physical spaces include the arrangement and accessibility of the places in which students meet and learn; Jaber asks in Chapter 14 whether classroom materials such as seating options and sensory

options support all learners, including neurodiverse learners. The chapters that follow invite readers to reflect on these different spaces and how they work together to support the well-being and inclusion of learners.

The book is formulated in two parts. Part 1 offers an overview of key mental health concepts with an emphasis on intersectionality, providing a critical foundation for understanding how the ongoing effects of colonialism, stigma, and discrimination affect youth mental health. Contributors illustrate frameworks based in Indigenous knowledges (Henry & Shawanda), queer practices (Prada & de Moissac), antiracist praxis (Tolson-Murtty), and neurodevelopmental insights (Saunders & Jaber). Also featured are systems that can support educators' mental health (Cordeiro & Jaber). Part 1 suggests that schools are places "that can harm or help" (p. 4), and that have the potential to provide "powerful counter spaces" (p. 42), promoting healthy student development and growth through safety. The chapters also point to the importance of developing educators' awareness of the systemic and personal issues that affect students' well-being. To support this process, the chapters provide a comprehensive historical and social contextualization of the barriers and challenges shaping student mental health. Additionally, the chapters elaborate a praxis framework that links critical theory to everyday classroom practice by encouraging teachers to reflect on their own positionality, engage in ongoing professional learning, use dialogue and reflection to better understand the issues and their role in addressing them, and build relationships that create safe learning environments where difficult conversations with youth can take place.

Part 2 exemplifies Jaber's position that mental health literacy and social critique should translate to practical, applicable concepts for daily classroom experiences and school cultures. Concrete examples of strategies and frameworks are provided for educators and schools to engage with to encourage better student mental health. The notion of an ethics of care, first introduced to the field of education by Nel Noddings, infuses these chapters, which emphasize the importance of empathetic understanding and care, respect for individual needs, and creation of a safe environment through concrete action. Part 2 gives voice to "the expressed needs of the cared-for" (Noddings, 2012, p. 772), which Jaber and the contributors hope institutions and educators will meet with attentive listening. For example, Chapter 9 (Wilcox) shows how an educator's negative attitude towards a student with a learning disability can affect the student's self-perception. Early identification and support of the learning disability, though, can change a student's personal and academic trajectories and result in positive school experiences. Chapter 10 (Cordeiro), on trauma-informed pedagogy, invites educators to "attune" to their students' use of coping mechanisms, instead of "mistakenly attributing intentionality" (p. 188). In this context, coping mechanisms include the self-protective

behaviours that students develop in response to stress or past trauma. The author of the chapter, Cordeiro, suggests that when teachers recognize these responses as adaptive rather than willful resistance, they can facilitate learning environments that build a feeling of belonging and safety so students may create new, more helpful coping mechanisms. Other chapters highlight the importance of recognizing mental health challenges among educators and their resilience and emotional readiness to face the challenges of the profession. Care permeates the practical advice in the book, making a case for how knowledge of care can transform pedagogy.

If there is a key takeaway from the book, it is Jaber's contention that educators are key players in supporting the mental health of young people. Educators can create a safer, more inclusive environment for all students by addressing inequality, creating safe spaces for minoritized students (and for all students), and understanding the needs of students with mental health challenges. In the current Canadian, indeed global, conversation about the importance of attending to mental health, Jaber's book is timely, offering knowledge not only about the issues youth face, but also about how teachers can better address mental health challenges so as to create a positive mental health environment for young people.

REFERENCES

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2019). *Inclusive Education Policy*. Government of Nova Scotia. https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/inclusiveeducationpolicyen.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2020). *Mental health in schools strategy*. Government of British Columbia. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/mental-health-wellness/mhis-strategy.pdf

Noddings N. (2012). The caring relation in teaching. *Oxford Review of Education*, *38*(6), 771–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745047

School Mental Health Ontario. (2024, March 12). *Prevention and early intervention (tier 2)*. https://smho-smso.ca/school-administrators/prevention-and-early-interv

AUGUSTA VALEVICIUS, *McGill University*

Publication History: Submitted 17 Nov 2025 | Accepted 17 Jan 2026 | Online first 10 Nov 2026 | Published xx Dec 2026