This post is a summary of a pilot project that I've being working on for the past year. The project is designed to enable high school students to take a more active role as **positive mental health change agents** within their school.

I'm posting a description of the model so I can receive feedback and to possibly stir the interest of school boards or non-profit organizations.

In many respects, this project is a **school to work initiative**. Students working together on a difficult and complex problem learn from those affected by the problem and then share their learnings and recommendations with the larger school community. The skills learned and practiced in the project are the same skills necessary for the workplace and 21st century jobs. (PDF)
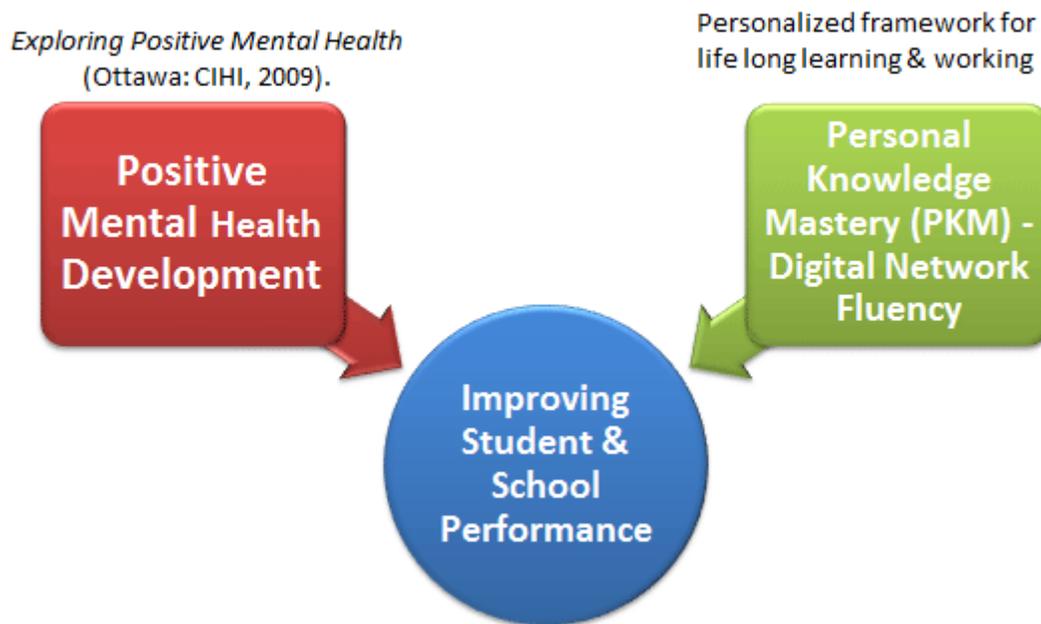
As I created the model, I consulted with quite a few local Executive Directors and Managers of community based organizations that serve young people, in and out of school. Their comments were very encouraging and helpful.

Excerpts from the 2010 Annual Children's Mental Health Ontario Conference - Leadership in Times of Challenge – Child and Youth Mental Health in Ontario
Mental health and substance abuse issues are critical for school systems. A paramount concern is that mental health disorders and difficulties are closely associated with declining academic performance and poor graduation rates.
"Are you waiting for things to return to normal in your organization? Sorry. Leadership will require new skills tailored to an environment of urgency, high stakes, and uncertainty"

A New Approach

Exploring Positive Mental Health (Ottawa: CIHI, 2009).

Personalized framework for life long learning & working

Positive Mental Health Development

Personal Knowledge Mastery (PKM) - Digital Network Fluency

Improving Student & School Performance

My Background:
For many years, I've been managing and designing youth and community development projects. Mental illness, has been a predominant factor affecting positive and healthy development of many of the individuals served by these projects. Also, I serve as a Director on two non-profit Boards that provide programming for youth with mental health concerns and I'm a founding member of

the Talking About Addiction & Mental Illness Coalition, a Regional cross sector Coalition that addresses youth mental health and addictions issues with students in our local school system.

Context:
Both the Catholic and the Public Board of Education in my area are slowly implementing new "material" into the high school curriculum to address the needs of students experiencing or affected by mental illness. It is estimated that between 15% and 25% of youth in Canada have a mental illness and 20% experience suicidal ideation. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in 15-24 year-olds in Canada.

After reviewing the Ontario Ministry of Education Comprehensive Mental Health and Addiction Strategy, I am not surprised they chose a shotgun approach. I believe a broad approach, utilizing multiple stakeholders was justified to fully address the high incidence of mental illness in young people in our school system.

However I believe their strategy is missing a key ingredient. What's missing is the opportunity to engage students in their natural role as learners and workers to influence the positive mental health practices of students and the school community.

Project Overview:
I believe that young people in schools should have more opportunities to learn critical collaboration and cooperation skills that grow out of tackling real problems that affect them. Collaboration and cooperation are skills that are crucial for working in an always on, digitally networked world. In one of Harold Jarche's posts he writes about the 21st Century Workplace.

How to solve problems together is becoming the real business imperative. Sharing and using knowledge is where business value lies. With computer systems that can handle more and more of our known knowledge, the 21st century worker has to move to the complex and chaotic edge to get the real (valued & paid) work done. In 50 years, this may not be an issue, but right now there are many people who need help with this challenge. This is the important work of leaders everywhere: enabling the current workforce to enter the 21st century.

The **Postive Mental Health Research Mapping Project** is designed to focus on sharing and using knowledge stemming from the student research mapping activities. The project is built on the premise that students, by using skills learned in the pilot project, will continue using the problem solving, sharing and knowledge application skills as they enter the digitally connected workforce of the 21st century.

Using a community based research (CBR) process, students with adult support, would conduct an in-school research mapping project and report on their findings at the conclusion of the project. Equally important, the pilot project is designed to address student achievement by introducing a well-researched Personal Knowledge Mastery (PKM) framework as a guide for planning and conducting their research mapping activities. As students personalize and practice their PKM skills, they will recognize the benefits of applying the PKM framework into their everyday school curriculum goals and post-secondary employment interests.

The pilot project will have a small team of high school students engage their school community to explore positive mental health and the qualities or behaviours that contribute to positive mental health attributes in students (enhancing resiliency).

I attempted to have the pilot project reviewed by school board officials but the process was taking far too long. There was polite interest, however I found the school bureaucracy to be massively difficult to engage in a review of the project. The simplest solution was to publish an overview of the project on my website. I reasoned that it would be the easiest and most expedient way to have the project looked at by Board officials, community organizations or anyone interested in positive mental health development and student achievement.

There were many professionals and service providers in the youth mental health sector that provided encouragement and suggestions to me as I developed the framework for this pilot project. This post acknowledges their input and sincere desire to support positive mental health in young people.

Pilot Project Premise:
*If a student led CBR group, trained in CBR principles and practices, is given the opportunity and support necessary to engage **their** school community in a dialogue about positive mental health, their research project will act as a catalyst for building awareness and the development of positive mental health behaviours of students and adults within the school community.*
The pilot project is designed to empower students to understand and practice positive mental health behaviours. A long term outcome will be a more resilient and tolerant school community where there is less stigmatizing behaviour and where students who are experiencing mental health concerns are able to seek help easily and without fear.

Core Pillars of the Pilot Project: (see Resources at the end of this post)

- **Student Research Team** (supported by Child & Youth Workers (CYW): I found numerous research reports that support the value of engaging students in real life issues where they have opportunity to learn and practice skills they will need in their future work and learning activities.
- **Wellness – Positive Mental Health**: This pillar is supported by the growing body of knowledge and research on Positive Mental Health. The focus for the student research mapping activities will be on attributes and behaviours that contribute to positive mental health. The positive mental health approach includes research supported practices related to resiliency, developmental assets and positive mental health. Please note: The pilot project **does not directly** engage students in activities related to mental illness, formal interventions, stigma etc.
- **Personal Knowledge Mastery (PKM) framework**: This pillar enables students to learn lifelong skills that will enable them to acquire and continuously develop the skills needed to succeed in our always on, globally connected world (in work or school). The student research team and CYW workers are trained in applying and building their PKM framework as an integral component of their research mapping activities. The CYW workers then provide coaching in the PKM skills throughout the project timeline.
- **Community Based Research** (CBR): A core principal of the CBR approach is that individuals experiencing or affected by mental illness, are the individuals involved in bringing about a positive change to the situation. In other words, students experiencing or affected by mental illness, are the key "players" involved in creating solutions. Using CBR principles, the student research team engages the school community using CBR tools that explore positive mental health behaviours and factors that promote positive mental health.
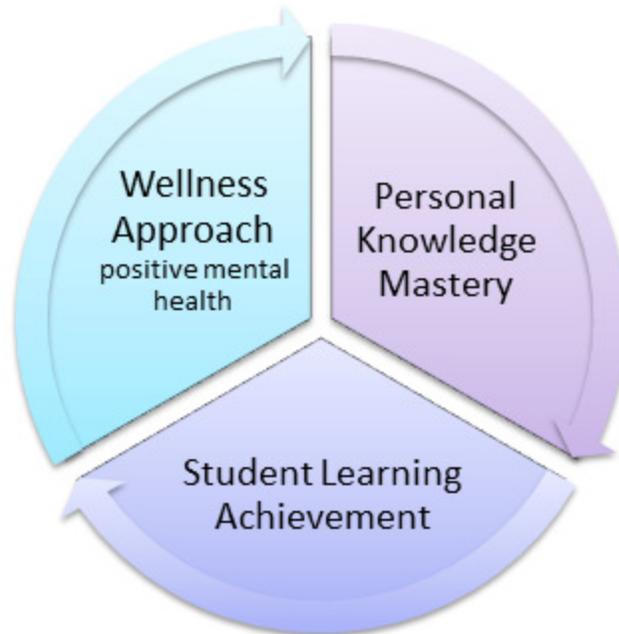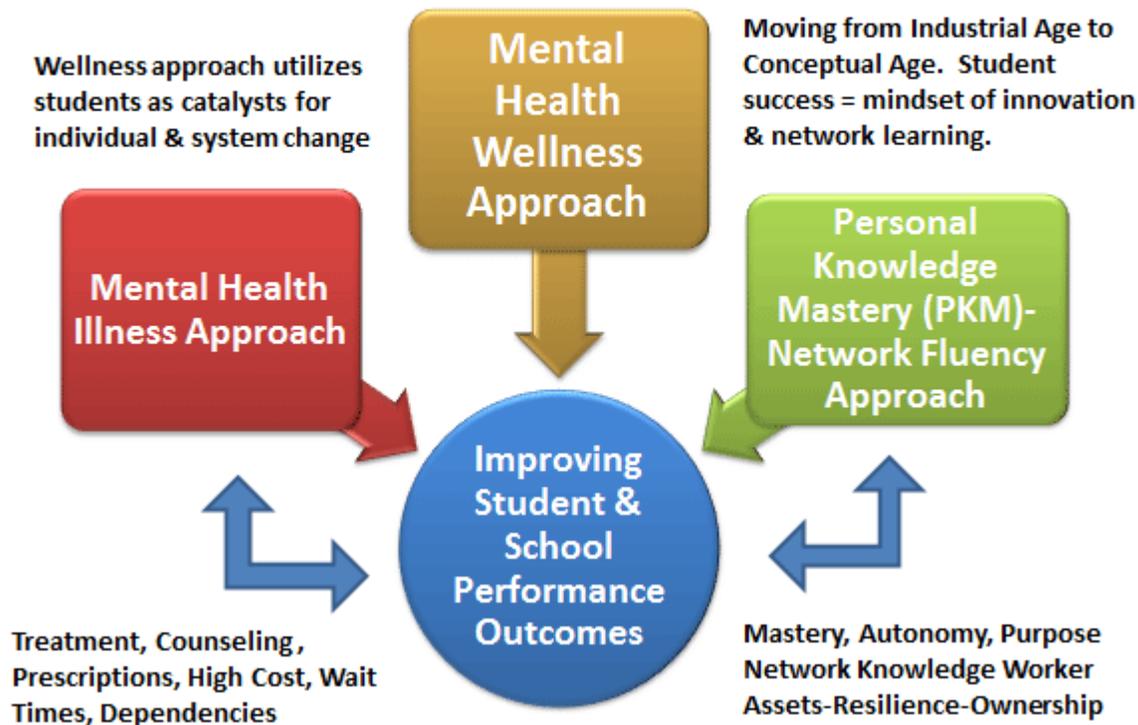
Personal Knowledge Mastery Framework:
The PKM framework is accepted by professionals world-wide, as a way for workers (or students) to innovate and learn with others and find solutions to business challenges (or social/health challenges) in our always on, digitally connected and networked workplace. Work is learning and learning is the work (Harold Jarche). This is the fundamental principle that permeates throughout the project.
The framework was developed by Harold Jarche from New Brunswick Canada. Harold Jarche writes extensively about workplace transformation, network learning and 21st century work skills.

His perspective on the changing role of workers and learners is supported by leading edge research. His website contains many articles and resources that discuss the radical shift in how workers and organizations are adapting (or not) to the always on, globally connected, networked workplace. The PKM framework is imminently suitable for the student research mappers as the skills they acquire using the PKM framework applies to their life as a student and as a worker.

In the PKM framework the students (a small team of 6-10) will conduct in-school research **(seek)** using a community based research approach. They will interpret their findings **(make sense of)** and then publish **(share)** their findings to the student body and possibly groups outside the school (School Board, Trustees, student families, Community groups).
Using the PKM framework, the student team conducts their research, curates and discerns what they learn and then share the findings of their research. As the student team completes their research (seek, sense, share) they are practicing and developing their own personally constructed PKM skills. Their personally constructed PKM framework will continue to help them perform in their learning and post-secondary work experiences.

A New Approach

Wellness approach utilizes students as catalysts for individual & system change

Mental Health Wellness Approach

Moving from Industrial Age to Conceptual Age. Student success = mindset of innovation & network learning.

Mental Health Illness Approach

Personal Knowledge Mastery (PKM)- Network Fluency Approach

Improving Student & School Performance Outcomes

Treatment, Counseling, Prescriptions, High Cost, Wait Times, Dependencies

Mastery, Autonomy, Purpose Network Knowledge Worker Assets-Resilience-Ownership

Goals: The Positive Mental Health Research Mapping Project:
» Increase awareness and knowledge of positive mental health in the school community;

» Increase the dialogue, learning and sharing knowledge related to positive mental health across all sectors in the school community, including teachers, support staff, parents and visiting agencies;

» Increase student (individual & project team) capacity for learning achievement in all areas of their curriculum, using the PKM framework; **Note:** The student researchers are supported by school based Child & Youth Workers who are also given "training/coaching" in the PKM framework;
» Increase student team member's capacity for personal & professional development by acquiring and utilizing PKM skills for current and post-secondary work and learning experiences.

» Increase levels of resilience, acceptance, tolerance and inclusiveness within the school community.

» Increase awareness of positive mental health concepts and behaviours in the school and the wider community (non-profit agencies, trustees, etc.) through the dissemination of findings stemming from the community based research process.

Below is a quote from Harold Jarche's website. I believe it is very pertinent and underscores the larger dilemma our community faces as students attempt to fill employment positions forthe 21st century workplace.

A significant change is needed in how we conduct instruction and support learning at school and at work. All people need to take ownership of their learning. But almost all of our practices and institutions work counter to this.

Professors, teachers, and instructors rule, while students and learners do as they are told. Professors may complain when asked, "will this be on the test?", but they are part of a system that reinforces a culture of dependence. The construct of dependent learning will not help any organization manage the constant skills gap that all organizations will be facing very soon.

My interest in developing this pilot project was strongly supported by colleagues interested in youth mental health. Thank you for your comments and suggestions. I am very appreciative for your help and concern for young people experiencing or affected by mental illness in the school system. I will continue to keep my informal committee of advisors informed about further developments of the pilot project.

Resources:

Improving the health of Canadians 2009 – Exploring Positive Mental Health, Canadian Population Health Initiative, Canadian Institute for Health Information

Future Work Skills 2020: Institute for the Future for the University of Phoenix Research Institute
The Roles and Values of Personal Knowledge Management - Kam Fai Cheong 2011; Southern Cross University

A Theoretical Model for PKM – Harold Jarche: Shining a Light on Workplace Transformation November 2012

Flourishing Youth – Flourishing Youth Work

Ready Set Engage – Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System: The New Mentality – a joint project of Children's Mental Health Ontario and The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO

Canadian Institute for Health Information: Improving the Health of Canadians – 2009: Exploring Positive Health (PDF)

Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being – Youth Engagement

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy Open Minds, Health Minds (PDF)

A Shared Responsibility – Ontario's Policy Framework for Child and Youth Mental Health

Investigating Positive Psychology Themes in School Health: Joint Consortium for School Health – Governments Working Across the Health and Education Sectors

Leadership in Times of Challenge – Child and Youth Mental Health in Ontario (2010 Annual Children's Mental Health Ontario Conference)