

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in critical theory and progressivism, centering education as a relational, humanizing, and political act rather than a neutral system.

Indigenous Métissage and Relational Accountability:

- Utilizing Donald's (2009) concept of Indigenous Métissage to metaphorically and practically "weave" diverse historical and cultural narratives. This is deeply linked to Schnellert et al.'s (2022) relational accountability, which frames educators as active "weavers" of support networks rather than isolated practitioners, ensuring you remain "in right relation" with students, community, and land.

Critical Theory and Social Justice:

- Drawing on Freire (1970/2018), educators are positioned as facilitators of critical consciousness. The framework interrogates "Nice Counsellor Syndrome," advocating for moral courage to move from individual professional comfort toward collective responsibility and systemic critique.

Progressivism and Constructivism:

- Influenced by Dewey (1897/2022), grounds practice in the belief that education is a profoundly relational, humanizing, and political act that centers students' lived experiences as the foundation for learning.

Integrative and Ecological Models:

- Requires the move away from single-theory "grab-bags" toward a principled synthesis (O'Brien & Charura, 2025). This ecological framework recognizes that student well-being is dynamically co-produced by the environment, shifting the focus from individual "grit" or "symptom reduction" to relational safety, agency, and structural conditions.



Image of Relational Accountability in Action: This sash symbolizes the 'weavers' of support: a principled synthesis of integrative counselling theories designed to foster ecological safety within secondary schools. (Image generated by AI via Gemini, 2026).

Research Topic and Question

Research Question

- How can integrative counselling approaches within secondary school settings support the mental health, resilience, and well-being of diverse students in School District #73?

The Growing Urgency: Student Well-being in SD#73

- Post-Pandemic Shift:** Post-pandemic disengagement in SD#73 has outpaced traditional, siloed support models, creating an urgent need for systemic responsiveness (School District No. 73, 2022a) .

Thesis Statement

- In SD#73, we must move beyond siloed, deficit-based counselling. My research shows that by weaving together cultural safety, systemic advocacy, and student agency, we can create school ecosystems where belonging and resilience are collectively produced, not just individually expected

Key Terminology

- **Systemic Responsiveness:** SD#73 administrative directives require moving beyond simple compliance toward structural humility and authentic cultural safety (School District No. 73, 2022b).
- **Integrative Counselling:** Unlike a technique-driven "grab-bag," this represents a principled synthesis of theories designed to foster ecological understanding (O'Brien & Charura, 2025).
- **Belonging:** Research indicates that this is not an individual trait, but a dynamic capacity produced by relational safety and sustained adult–student trust (Karadaş et al., 2026; Stewart, 2019)

Literature Review

My research consistently demonstrates that student well-being is not an individual trait, but a dynamically co-produced capacity rooted in the interaction of relational safety, ecological support, and systemic commitment within secondary schools. Five major themes emerged:

Integrative Practice and Relational Stewardship

- Adolescent well-being emerges from relational safety and adult–student trust, rather than through isolated clinical interventions (Archibald, 1999; Karadaş et al., 2026).
- Indigenous frameworks like *Mino-pimataciwin* emphasize relational interconnectedness through the 4Rs: responsibility, respect, relationality, and reciprocity (Hart, 1999; Roy, 2022).
- Counsellor support is a significant predictor of student mattering, resilience, and overall academic functioning (Bilodeau & Meissner, 2018; Karadaş et al., 2026).

Cultivating Belonging & Relational Agency

- Transformative practices shift from individual competence to collective growth by creating dialogic spaces for cross-cultural empathy (Ball & Skrzypek, 2025).
- Resilience is dynamically co-produced by supportive school environments rather than individual "grit" alone (Clark et al., 2020; Karadaş et al., 2026).
- True belonging requires positioning students and families as primary experts and knowledge holders of their own well-being (Clark et al., 2020; Goodwill & McCormick, 2012)

Decolonization and Cultural Safety as Structural Preconditions

- Cultural safety requires dismantling Eurocentric, meritocratic biases that pathologize marginalized students and obscure systemic power (Bemak & Chung, 2011).
- Institutional design, including rigid scheduling and lack of confidentiality, acts as a physical barrier that breeds student mistrust (Cooper et al., 2025).
- SD#73 administrative directives demand structural humility and authentic cultural safety over superficial "box-checking" compliance (School District No. 73, 2022).

Systemic Roots of Resilience for Mental Health

- Comprehensive school psychological services function as structural determinants that link mental health support to academic success (Adomako-Gyasi et al., 2025; Bilodeau & Meissner, 2018).
- Resilience is a context-driven adaptability rather than a fixed individual trait, relying on protective environment-level conditions (Colón, 2024; Moran et al., 2024).
- Effective practice requires place-attentive professional development that responds to the unique geographic and social realities of diverse districts like SD#73 (Elliott et al., 2024).

Unlocking Transformation Through Professional Development

- Professional development must transition from "place-agnostic" training toward competency-based, context-responsive capacity-building (Elliott et al., 2024).
- Practitioners must disrupt "Nice Counsellor Syndrome" to confront uncomfortable inequities rather than prioritizing institutional harmony (Bemak & Chung, 2011).
- When counsellors function as integrated members of school ecosystems, overall staff perceptions of counselling effectiveness increase (O'Donnell et al., 2025).



Image for Integrative Frameworks: These six themes represent the necessary structural and pedagogical shifts required to move from isolated, deficit-based counselling to an integrative, ecosystemic model of student support. (Image generated by AI via Gemini, 2026).

Recommendations

The literature suggests that addressing the complex mental health needs of secondary students requires moving beyond isolated, deficit-oriented models toward a relational, integrative, and systemically responsive approach (Donald, 2009; Schnellert et al., 2022).

Re-conceptualizing Practice

- ★ Shift from isolated, deficit-based interventions to pluralistic, systemic models (Donald, 2009; Schnellert et al., 2022).
- ★ Integrate diverse modalities: CBT, Narrative, and Family Systems, while honouring Indigenous ways of knowing (Cooper & McLeod, 2019; Roy, 2022).
- ★ Privileged relational accountability: healing is found in family, community, and land, not just the individual (Donald, 2009; Roy, 2022).

Enhancing Accessibility

- ★ Create culturally safe, low-visibility spaces to alleviate confidentiality concerns (Geroski & Radin, 2009).
- ★ Replace rigid scheduling with flexible, drop-in models to increase student engagement (Del Toro et al., 2026).

Building Professional Capacity

- ★ Transition from "place-agnostic" training to place-attentive, competency-based development (Elliott et al., 2024).
- ★ Replace "Nice Counsellor Syndrome" with structural humility and moral courage to confront systemic inequities (Bemak & Chung, 2011; Del Toro et al., 2026).
- ★ Align practice with institutional policies, such as the SD73 Indigenous Cultural Safety, Humility, and Competency Guide (School District No. 73, 2022).

Image for Weaving Resilience: A representation of relational accountability, where counsellors and students act as co-weavers of a support network, prioritizing structural humility and authentic trust over individual symptom reduction. (Image generated by AI via Gemini, 2026).



Closing

- **Systemic Re-conceptualization:** Moving beyond isolated, deficit-based interventions, school counselling must be re-envisioned as a relational ecosystem that is deeply embedded within the structural, cultural, and land-based environments of SD#73.
- **Relational Accountability as Praxis:** By weaving together Indigenous Métissage and integrative counselling frameworks, practice is transformed into a collaborative partnership, grounded in responsibility and place, that prioritizes student agency over individual symptom reduction.
- **Commitment to Structural Humility:** Supporting sustainable student well-being requires an ongoing collective commitment to structural humility and place-attentive practice, ensuring that diverse relational threads are intentionally woven to foster genuine belonging, resilience, and safety.

References

