

# Who are the People in Your Neighbourhood?

by Amanda O'Regan-Marchand, Executive Staff Officer,  
Professional Learning

Happy Spring!

In this season of renewal and new opportunities, the *Well Teacher* would like to support you in making connections to those who can support your wellness goals.

This month, there is a focus on our mental health and well-being with Mental Health Awareness Week in Canada (May 2 to 8, <https://www.mentalhealthweek.ca/>) and Mental Health Awareness Month in North America (<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Health-Awareness-Month>). A major piece of building and maintaining our wellness is through our connections with others. In so doing, we reach out to help ourselves but we also help one another to offer support and encouragement. Including and making room for another voice can have far-reaching and positive impacts for our wellness.

Feeling welcomed and included is one of the most powerful feelings we can experience. Whether we are the giver or the receiver of this inclusion, we know first hand how this can help to bolster our sense of self and how feeling heard can truly be what is needed in the moment. Although it seems like a simple gesture, creating that space or having that space created for us sends a powerful message that your experience and voice are valid.

In our work lives, we strive to meet the needs of all of our students and to help them feel included by listening to their experiences, responding to their questions and to their needs. By giving voice to our students, who may not always have an opportunity to share, opens doors for them to have the opportunity to become comfortable in sharing their perspective, thoughts, and ways of knowing.

Outside of our work world, we also have the opportunity to include—whether we are at a hockey rink, outside a dance class, in a classroom as a student ourselves, or at another social event.

If we notice someone who is unsure, we can invite them in to the conversation and/or to our space.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, we recognize the The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. This day was created to draw the attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. In so doing, we invite the conversation, and the acceptance for those who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQA!+ community and their allies into a space to feel accepted, validated and heard. The statistics around days of awareness tell us, unequivocally, how truly meaningful that inviting and welcoming an individual can be to supporting their mental health. Offering this space for others can also have similar effects for us and can truly be a celebration of how our differences also bring us together.

If we think about extending our welcoming to other people in our neighbourhoods, think of how enriched our connections will be. Learning from and sharing with each other can build strong, lasting bonds that we can bring forth into our ways of being and knowing as we continue to invite others in.

Whether we are reaching out to our students, our colleagues, our school community and/or within our own neighbourhoods, the invitation to our space can only help us to deepen our sense of understanding and appreciation for what each of us brings to those connections, and what we can learn from one another.

The challenge for this month is to connect with someone new—perhaps someone who has not previously participated, or felt invited to—to create space for someone new. If you have an experience of being invited or inviting that you would like to share, please feel free to do so at [amarchand@staff.nstu.ca](mailto:amarchand@staff.nstu.ca).

Please take care of yourselves and one another.

