# Healthy Schools: Some Foundational Theory

Health and education are interdependent. Studies worldwide have demonstrated that the health of students and teachers, as well as the environment in which they operate, impact academic performance, teacher morale and absenteeism. This led to the concept of the health-promoting school as "one that constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working" (WHO).

In our society, we tend to think of health as relating to individuals and meaning the absence of disease or psychological illness. But health is much more. The World Health Organization has defined health as a state of comprehensive physical, mental and social well-being and as a resource for living, not just a goal. And the well-being of individuals is vitally connected to the environment or ecosystem in which they live, work and play.

While most of the research on health initiatives in schools has focused on single components such as curriculum, a growing body of evidence suggests that combined strategies produce better results (Stewart-Brown, 2006; Vince Whitman, 2005). A large US study found that the most important factors in reducing risk behaviours were students feeling connected to their school community and to caring adults within it (McNeeley et al., 2002). In particular, ecological, or whole-school, approaches emerged as being among the most promising school-based programs to reduce the harms related to substance use (Peters et al., 2009).

For individuals, mental health
normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her

us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social

construct of *flourishing* in contrast to *languishing* as a distinct axis or continuum of mental health that transcends the issue of whether or not a mental illness factors in. Flourishing involves characteristic maintenance of positive emotions along with typical ability to function in a positive manner both psychologically (self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations) and socially (social acceptance, actualization, contribution, coherence, integration).

Mental health for individuals is not separate or isolated from the other dimensions of their overall personal well-being nor insulated and shielded from political, economic, material and social conditions around them. Multiple factors across those dimensions (as well as features present in the more intrapersonal biological and psychological domains) will have a bearing on mental health. A healthy community is one in which such influences are predominantly positive for all subgroups within the population, so that increasing numbers of people can enjoy a healthy life.

to the pursuit are concepts of participation, empowerment and equity. This can be summed up in terms of building connectedness and literacy. A strong degree of connectedness will see shared assumption of responsibility and engagement of members in mutual efforts to enhance public well-being. Health literacy will