

An evaluative study of the pilot program: Let's talk: finding reliable mental health information and resources (Grades 7-8)

Dr. Montgomery, Christine Potra
The University of Ottawa



uOttawa

INTRODUCTION

Roughly one in six young people has a mental health challenge severe enough to cause them significant distress and to negatively affect how they function at home, at school, with friends or in the community (Waddell & Shepherd, 2002). Furthermore, there are a number of myths associated with mental illness such as it is the “fault” of the affected person, and that nothing can be done to treat mental illness. This is significant given that mental illness is a significant risk factor for suicide (Weir, 2001). There is also a stigma associated with mental illness that has been identified as having as much of a negative effect on youth with mental illness as the illnesses themselves (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2010). This can cause people to deal with it alone and may make mental illness invisible (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2008). “The goal of the *Let's Talk: finding reliable mental health information and resources* program is to help young people recognize, locate and evaluate trustworthy mental health information and resources and to increase their general knowledge about mental health and mental illnesses.” This study aims to evaluate the efficacy of the program through both teacher and student responses/feedback, and to determine any improvements that can be made to the program before it's national expansion in 2015.

Research Questions:

Students:

1. To what extent has students' ability to understand media's influence on their understanding of, and attitude towards, mental health increased?
2. To what extent has the program enabled students to identify support networks available to them in the community and to cultivate help-seeking behaviours for mental health issues?
3. To what extent has the program increased student's knowledge of mental health issues?

Teachers:

1. To what extent were the self-directed tutorials and classroom materials adequate in preparing teachers to teach the "Let's Talk: Finding Reliable Mental Health Information and Resources" lessons? How could the training be improved?
2. To what extent were students engaged with the learning modules? What did they like most and least?



METHODOLOGY

The pilot program Let's talk: Finding reliable mental health resources was implemented across four boards in Ontario and Quebec in the fall and winter terms of the 2013-2014 school year. School board requests for research were submitted to school boards in the late spring of 2013. Overall, there were 22 teachers and 669 grade 7 and 8 students that participated. However, data analysis was only done for 325 students who completed all three tests and had parental consent. Data collection included a Likert-scale type teacher survey, follow-up in-person teacher interviews, student questionnaires before the delivery of the lesson, immediately after, as well as two months after. The program consists of three teacher-taught lessons developed for grade 7/8 classes. Each of the boards was evaluated based on one of the lessons taught.

School boards and Lessons:

- ◆ Conseil scolaire catholique de l'est de l'Ontario (CSDCEO), (Ontario)
Lesson 1: “Setting the Record Straight: Public Service Announcements on Mental Illness” (107 students)
- ◆ Ottawa Carleton district school board (OCDSB), (Ontario)
Lesson 2: “Setting the Record Straight: Authenticating Mental Health Information Online” (99 students)
- ◆ Toronto district school board (TDSB), (Ontario)
Lesson 3: “Social Support Networks and Help Seeking” (91 students)
- ◆ Externat St. Jean Eudes (Quebec)
Lesson: “Social Support Networks and Help Seeking” (28 students)

RESULTS: STUDENTS

OCDSB

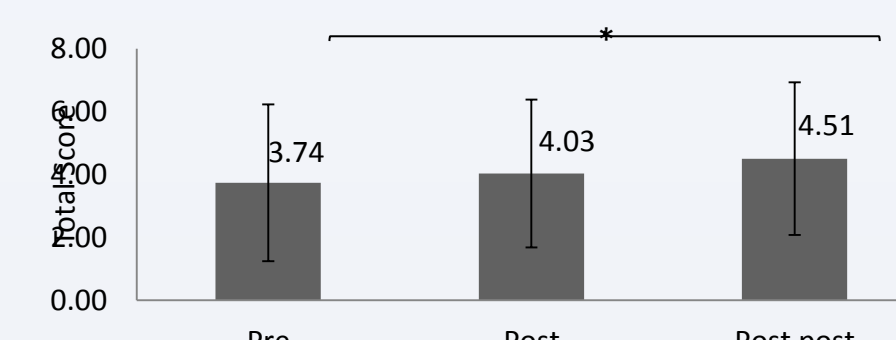


Fig. 1. Student's understanding of the Internet as a research tool in the OCDSB was found to have significant differences ($P < 0.05$) between the pre-test, post-test, and post-post-test by a repeated measures analysis. The paired samples t-test showed these differences to be significant only between the pre-test and the post-post-test. This was determined by responses to questions 1 and 2 of the student's questionnaires.

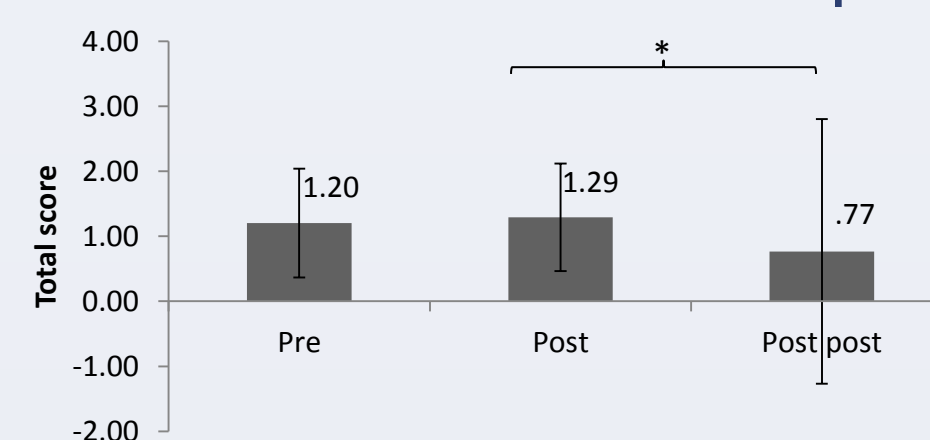


Fig 2. A repeated measures analysis also showed significant differences ($P < 0.05$) regarding student's online search skills. The t-test determined that these significant differences were between the post-test and the post-post-test. This compared the scores for questions 3-6 of the pre-test and post-test, and question 6 of the post-post test.

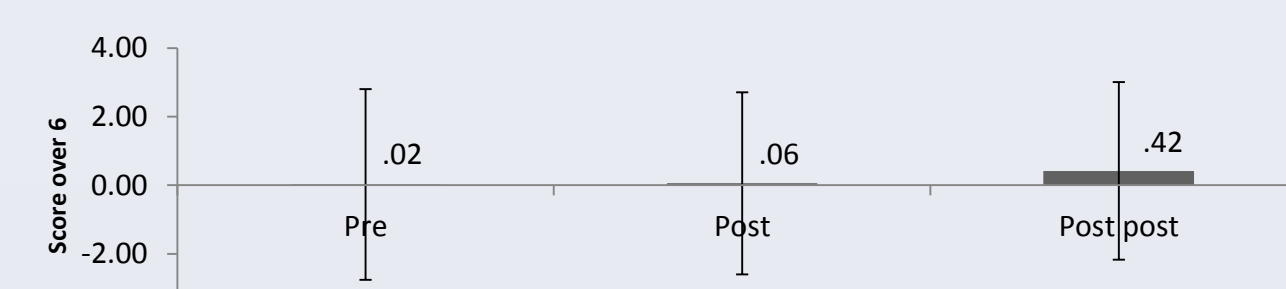


Fig. 3. Statistical analysis found no significant differences between the pre-test, post-test, and post-post-test for students being able to gauge the reliability of informational websites in the OCDSB.

TDSB and Externat Saint Jean Eudes

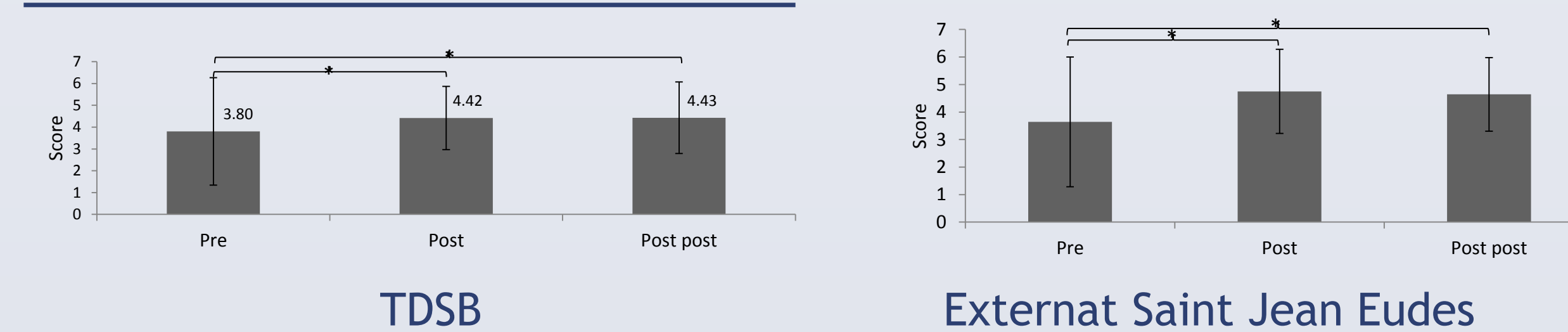


Fig. 4. and Fig. 5. Students' understanding of mental illness in the TDSB and Externat Saint Jean Eudes significantly increased from the pre-test to the post-test, and from the pre-test to the post-post-test as determined by a repeated measures analysis followed by the t-test (< 0.05). These results were compared from student scores of question 1 on the questionnaires.

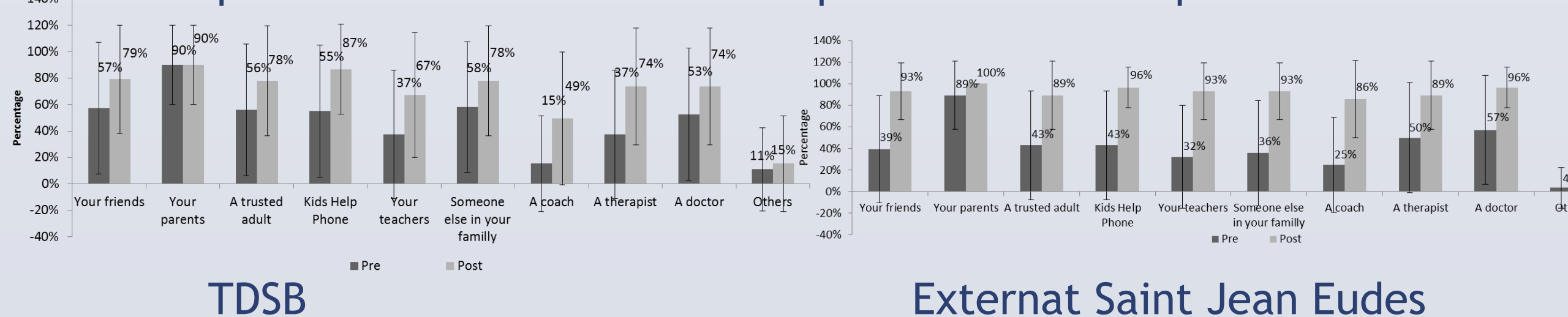


Fig. 6. and Fig. 7. Students in the TDSB and Externat Saint Jean Eudes were asked that if they were worried about a mental health issue, who could they approach for help. This graph represents answers given during the pre-test and the post-test. Student's responses demonstrated increases in the types of support they would seek.

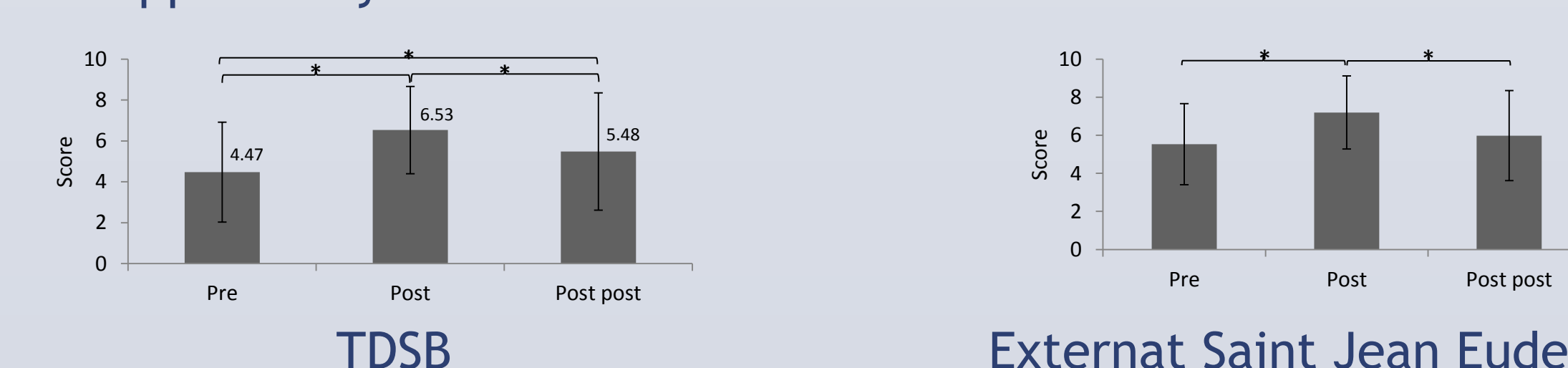


Fig. 8 and Fig. 9. Knowledge of Kids Help Phone was measured in the TDSB and in Externat Saint Jean Eudes. In the TDSB, a repeated measures analysis followed by the t-test showed significant differences between the pre-test and post-test, pre-test and post-post-test, and post-test and post-post-test ($P < 0.005$). In the Externat Saint Jean Eudes school board, the t-test only showed significant differences between the pre-test and post-test, and the post-test and post-post-test ($P < 0.05$).

CSDCEO

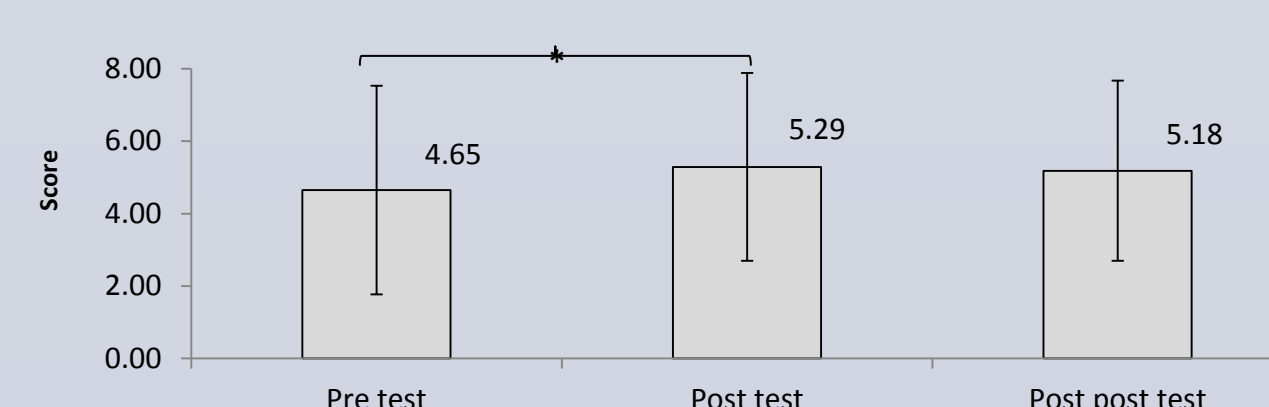


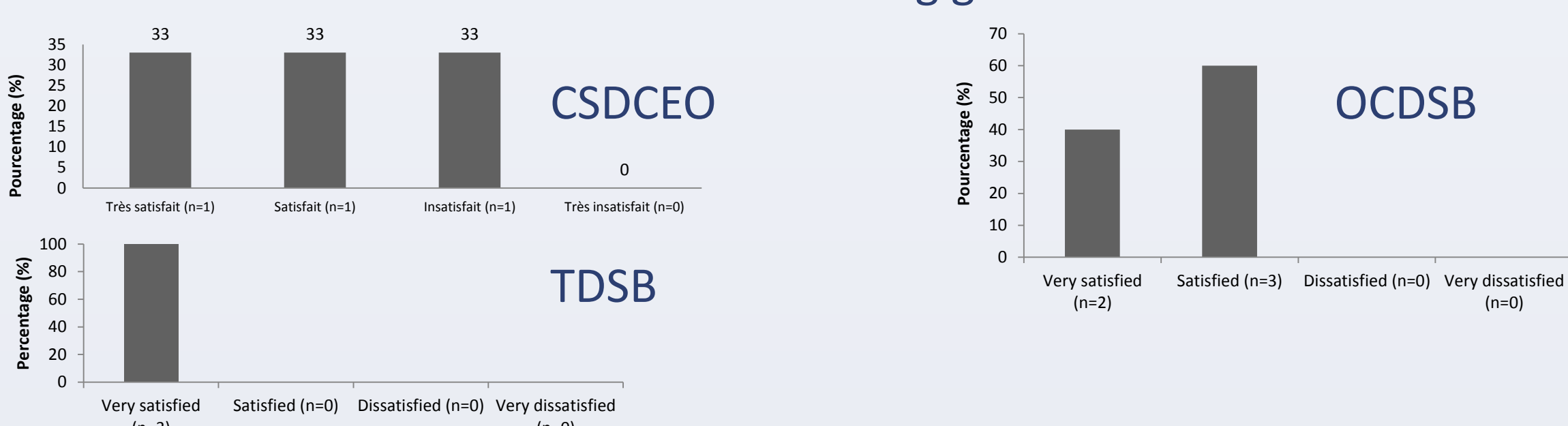
Fig. 10. Students' understanding of differences between advertisements and public service announcements showed did not show significant differences by a repeated measures analysis ($P < 0.05$). The t-test was further done, however, and revealed a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test in the CSDCEO ($P < 0.01$).

RESULTS: TEACHERS

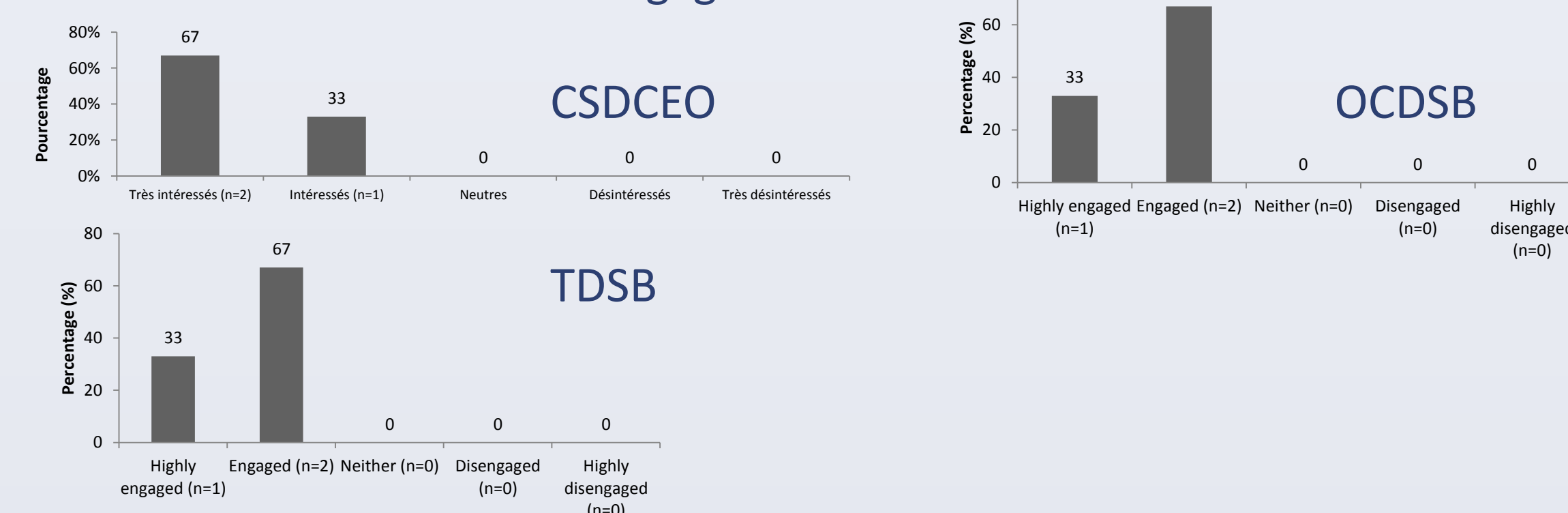
Teacher's Satisfaction with the online teacher training presentation:



Teacher's Satisfaction with the teacher training guide:



Teacher's measure of student engagement:



CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation has found the Pilot program Let's Talk to be effective at increasing students' awareness of mental health issues. This is important for overcoming the stigma associated with mental health, as well as encouraging those who need help to seek it. It has shown significant improvements in students' abilities to recognize the media as a way of obtaining information and understanding it's influence on mental health. At a grade 7/8 level this promotes awareness, and a better judgement of where to find accurate information and helpful resources. A follow up with students over the school year in the use of Kids Help Phone is further recommended.

Teachers were overall satisfied with the training material although some mentioned that they could have benefitted from more in-depth training on mental health scenarios, mental health vocabulary, and media literacy. Furthermore, some teachers believed that health care professionals may be better equipped to teach these lessons. They did find that students were very engaged in the program and interested in the topic of mental health. This as well as the increase in student's knowledge of mental health suggests that the national expansion of this program will be beneficial for many students.

REFERENCES

Waddell, C., and Shepherd, C. (2002). Prevalence of mental disorders in children and youth. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia.

Weir E. Suicide: The hidden epidemic. (2001), Canadian Medical Association Journal, 165(5):634-636.

Mental Health Commission of Canada (2010, July). Evergreen: A Child and Youth Mental Health Framework for Canada.

Canadian Mental Health Association (2008, August). Stigma and Mental Illness: A Framework for Action. Retrieved on February 8, 2013 from http://www.cmha.ca/public_policy/stigma-and-mental-illness-a-framework-for-action/#.ULUGWu8U1rY.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The program Let's Talk: was sponsored by Bell Canada and developed in partnership with MediaSmarts, Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy, and Kids Help Phone.

Thank you to Dr. Montgomery, UROP, and to the students and teachers who participated in this study.

Contact Info:

Christine Potra: cpotr074@uottawa.ca
http://mediasmarts.ca/lets_talk_pilot

