

GTIP Nugget

Successfully Integrating Education for Sustainability into Our School Culture through the Implementation of School Wide Action Projects

Kara Wickstrom-Street, Miles Macdonell Collegiate

Inquiry Project Goal

The goal of my project was to reflect on how we have been able to successfully integrate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into our school culture at Miles Macdonell Collegiate (MMC), and thus ultimately provide a model for other schools to be able to embark upon this journey. Through this process I also wanted to explore the challenges that we have faced, and how we could respond to these challenges.

Steps to Achieve This Goal

I undertook to explore my inquiry question by breaking down into steps what I wanted to accomplish in answering my initial goal. I determined that I first needed to reflect on why ESD is important to our school culture. Next, I wanted to consider what we have done to promote an ESD philosophy in the past, what we are currently doing, and what we would like to do in the future. This involved examining what worked well, and what did not, and identifying the challenges. In this process, I considered the vision that our staff ESD Priority Planning Team has developed: "Our vision for Canada is to create a more sustainable future through educating our youth." We have engaged in a variety of actions at our school to promote this vision:

- MMC made ESD a school priority in 2015-16, and the division made ESD a priority during the 2018-19 school year.
- We formed a staff ESD committee consisting of 13 staff members representing each department within the school. This committee meets throughout the year and reports regularly to the administration. We also have a student ESD committee with approximately 20 student members and 3 staff mentors.
- ESD initiatives have and will continue to be implemented throughout the whole school community in the areas of governance, curricular connections, human capacity building, and facilities and operations.
- We strive to promote ESD priorities in the classroom through a variety of courses such as Global Issues, Geography, and Topics in Science and Environmental Systems I.B.
- Our ESD committees are deeply interested in the relationship between human impacts, our lifestyles, and the environment around us. We strive to learn more about how to live greener, lighter, and more efficiently.
- Both staff and students attend conferences and workshops and execute action projects that aim to improve the overall well-being of our school community.

We have organized and implemented a school wide Peace Day Event and Earth Day Event for the past three years that have included speakers and workshops that encompass a variety of socio-cultural, environmental and economic factors. These factors, and the organizations that have supported our work, include human rights, peace and human security, justice, gender equity, poverty reduction, and community-culture-health through baking and cooking with local ingredients (Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, Canadian Food Grains Bank, Manitoba Eco-Network); cultural diversity and intercultural understanding through Indigenous games (Fort Whyte, Oak Hammock Marsh); governance (Green Party keynote speaker); natural resources (water, air, energy), agriculture, biodiversity and habitat conservation, fish, forests, and climate change (Prairie Climate Centre, Earth Observational Science, Lake Winnipeg Consortium); energy efficiency and conservation, sustainable urbanization (Kurt Hall).

Next, I reflected on all of the action projects that we have organized to try to integrate this philosophy into the school culture. These action projects include Peace Day and Earth Day events, the annual ESD TA Challenge and ESD Positive School Wide Behaviour campaigns, the installation of new staff and student bike racks and cages, a cigarette receptacle, refillable water bottle stations, the installation and maintenance of the school garden in conjunction with a composting program, Global Issues Take Action projects, a staff paper-use reduction campaign, and the participation of all grade 10 IB Geography students in the Caring For Our Watersheds competition. Throughout this process I considered how these initiatives contributed to developing this culture in the school and I reflected on what worked and what didn't with each of these projects.

The next part of the research project involved looking into what ideas we have planned for the future to ensure that we can build and grow the culture that has been created through the aforementioned projects and initiatives.

Learning

Through this process I have learned that enabling ESD to permeate the school culture requires time, energy and commitment from a variety of stakeholders.

- Administrative buy-in and support at the school and divisional levels (PD time, prioritize ESD).
- Staff buy-in and support (Staff ESD committee as a PLC- a place to collaborate, discuss and share).
- Student buy-in and support (need a committed ESD student committee that is able to effectively communicate these messages to the student body as a whole).
- Attend PD, conferences, workshops and network with other schools.
- It is essential to find partners in the community to assist with the planning and implementation of these events (we have partnered with Susan Lindsay from Climate Change Connection to assist in finding speakers and workshops for our Earth Day events, and Estelle Lamoureux from MARL and Linda Connor from the Department of Education for our Peace Day Event)

- Finding funding to implement projects takes time (e.g., grant writing); it is difficult to find time and balance priorities with all of the other commitments required of teachers and students.

Future Considerations

Our goal is to continue to build on what we have already done in order to ensure that ESD remains an integral part of the school culture at MMC. It is important to continually revitalize the work by finding new and creative ideas to implement in the school. We want to keep the interest and momentum going, and ultimately encourage our students and staff to be inquiring citizens that see promoting sustainability as a fundamental part of society.