



"I learn at the same time that I teach..."

Teachers perspectives on creating a multicultural environmental curriculum

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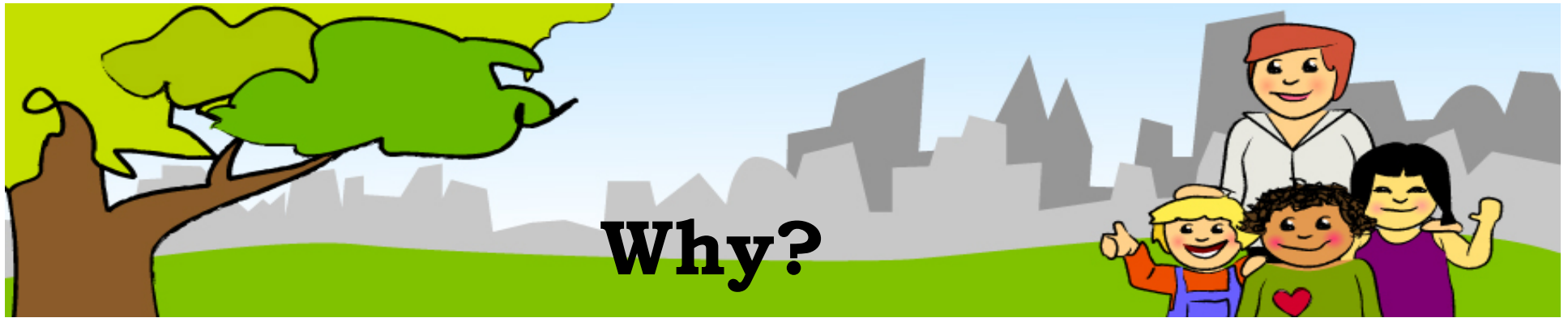
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- Multicultural environmental education (MEE) is conceptualized as taking a holistic and interdisciplinary approach aimed at problem-solving and addressing community issues and needs, emphasizing environmental rights for all and utilizing indigenous knowledge and perspectives (UNESCO, 1977; Sauv e & Garnier, 2000).
- Teachers and multiculturalism (Nieto, 2003): humanizing alternative to “business as usual” and a framework for challenging inequality rather than lessons in self-esteem, ethnic heroes, or quaint customs.
- Added-value of reaching out to culturally diverse populations and of utilizing their indigenous knowledge and perspectives in EE curriculum development. Environmental education opens the door to enhancing immigrant young people’s own development and integration.
- Culturally responsive EE should involve many voices yet classroom teachers’ voices are largely absent (Akkari & Gohard-Radenkovic, 2002; Lewis & James, 1995; Sauv e, 2003).



- Teachers work in extremely diverse classrooms: 60% are from foreign-born parents. They also mainly reside in Montreal (86.9%) and tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods.
- Since 1977, immigrants are required to attend French school and Quebec's intercultural policy strives to be democratic but also to protect and revitalize French language and culture (Allen, 2007). This has shown to translate into assimilation and an intolerance for difference (Breton-Carbonneau & Cleghorn, 2010).
- EE not a core subject in the Quebec primary curriculum. Its inclusion depends largely on individual teachers and schools.



- What are the challenges for teachers in conducting multicultural EE?
- What are effective strategies for implementing multicultural EE?



- Study conducted in three elementary schools with high cultural diversity (children had connections with over 20 countries as indicated by the parent's country of origin)
- Schools were located in a district in Montreal where immigrants and nonpermanent residents comprise 67.6% of the population
- Three teacher focus groups (17 participants)
- Participant profile: Grade 3-6 teachers; 85% white francophone (*de souche* / "old stock"); 95% female






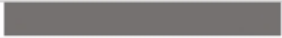























Focus groups: Collective wisdom is enhanced when groups of teachers engage in reflective dialogue and critical questioning about their teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995)

- scheduled either during a pedagogical day or a free afternoon arranged with the school principal
- experienced moderator facilitated the focus group while an assistant recorded suggestions on flip chart paper
- Questions:

What were some of the most successful environmental educational activities you've used in the classroom? What made them successful?

What are some of the things you have observed in the classroom about multicultural influences on environmental education? What are the challenges in creating a culturally sensitive curriculum about the environment? What has worked for you?

Data Analysis- First Cycle

Code	Total	Min	Max	Mean	Std Dev	Bar Graph
Strategy: transcending the classroom walls	105	3	20	10.5	5.233	
Obstacles: Different values	91	6	14	9.1	2.514	
Obstacles: challenges in implementation	83	1	16	8.3	4.832	
strategies: promoting behaviour change	81	1	15	8.1	5.466	
Strategies: experiential	75	1	20	7.5	6.311	
Charactersitics of the multicultural context	66	3	10	6.6	2.171	
Obstacles: language	59	3	10	5.9	2.644	
Strategies: administrative support	38	0	8	3.8	2.7	
Strategies: transdisciplinary	38	1	15	3.8	4.566	
Youth as bridge general	37	2	9	3.7	2.452	
Obstacles: lack of adequate training or curriculum	36	0	14	3.6	4.195	
Strategies: create a common language	32	0	12	3.2	3.967	
Strategies: making developmentally appropriate	31	0	8	3.1	2.424	
Obstacle: Urban	27	0	9	2.7	2.946	
Obstacle MC and ERE teaching: delicate	24	0	8	2.4	2.951	
Obstacle: ignorance of where they are coming from	24	0	18	2.4	5.621	
Obstacle: lack of parental involvement	25	0	6	2.5	1.716	
Strategies: encouraging critical thinking	24	0	8	2.4	2.797	
Strategies: respond to opportunity	26	0	7	2.6	2.503	
Strategy: bringing student and teacher preferences	22	0	8	2.2	2.486	
Youth as bridge: educator	23	1	3	2.3	0.823	
Obstacle ERE and MC: teacher belief/attitude	19	0	7	1.9	2.726	
Benefits: behaviors more environmentally-friendly	15	0	7	1.5	2.415	
Obstacles: Perception that cannot afford to be	15	0	10	1.5	3.136	
Strategy: be open and flexible	16	0	7	1.6	2.319	

Data Analysis- Second cycle

Code	Total	Min	Max	Mean	Std Dev	Bar Graph
strategies: promoting behaviour change	98	2	16	9.8	4.94	
Obstacles: Different values	91	6	14	9.1	2.514	
Obstacles: challenges in implementation	83	1	16	8.3	4.832	
Strategies: experiential	75	1	20	7.5	6.311	
Charactersitics of the multicultural context	66	3	10	6.6	2.171	
Obstacles: language	59	3	10	5.9	2.644	
Strategy: transcending the classroom walls comm	45	1	9	4.5	2.273	
Strategies: transdisciplinary	40	1	15	4	4.57	
Strategies: administrative support	38	0	8	3.8	2.7	
Strategies: encouraging critical thinking	37	0	12	3.7	4.191	
Youth as bridge general	37	2	9	3.7	2.452	
Obstacles: lack of adequate training or curriculu	36	0	14	3.6	4.195	
Strategy: transcending the classroom walls scho	36	0	11	3.6	3.098	
Strategies: create a common language	34	0	12	3.4	3.836	
Strategy: transcending the classroom walls home	31	0	12	3.1	4.04	
Strategies: teachers respond to opportunity	30	0	7	3	2.749	
Strategy: bringing student and teacher experier	28	0	9	2.8	2.658	
Obstacle: Urban	27	0	9	2.7	2.946	
Obstacle MC and ERE teaching: delicate	25	0	8	2.5	3.064	
Obstacle: ignorance of where they are coming f	25	0	18	2.5	5.603	
Obstacle: lack of parental involvement	25	0	6	2.5	1.716	
Youth as bridge: educator	24	1	4	2.4	0.966	
Obstacle ERE and MC: teacher belief/attitude	19	0	7	1.9	2.726	
Youth as bridge negative	17	0	6	1.7	2.058	
Benefits: behaviors more environmentally-frien	15	0	7	1.5	2.415	
Obstacles: Perception that cannot afford to be	15	0	10	1.5	3.136	
Benefits: feel valued	14	0	6	1.4	2.221	
Youth as bridge: interpreter	14	0	4	1.4	1.506	
Strategies: diversify	13	0	6	1.3	2.214	
Benefits: strong value of school	8	0	2	0.8	0.919	
Benefits: dual- learning	6	0	4	0.6	1.265	



Major Code Categories

Challenges (in order of strength) to enacting MEE were related to factors that emerged from

- the *school context*
- *different values and teacher beliefs / attitudes*
- teachers' *professional context*
- the *teacher's own reality*

Effective strategies for enacting MEE were identified at the

- *class level*
- *school level*
- *community level*



Emerge from the school context: Teachers identified several factors that were linked to the school context. These included:

- a highly diverse student population whose parents are newly arrived in Canada

L'immigration dans [le quartier] est plus ou moins par choix. C'est un mode de survit, c'est une meilleure vie pour leur enfant souvent c'est un sacrifice, ils donnent tout pour leur enfant. Ça par exemple, ils veulent énormément pour leur enfant.

- being situated in an urban locale without much connection to nature

l'importance de la nature sur nos vies, parce qu'ici ils sont complètement coupé de ça...

Since we are in the city, it is difficult for children to have direct contact with nature and develop an emotional link with nature. Very often they have never left their cemented neighbourhood



Emerge from the school context: Additional subcategories:

- language barriers: Vocabulary and representation of concepts were difficult with children as well as with parents because of language barriers or a resistance to learn French

Le manque de vocabulaire, les enfants ont de la difficulté à comprendre les idées

- lack of parental involvement: Parents were extremely stressed and overburdened working long hours-- in “survival mode”

Parce que les parents quand ils viennent ici, une réalité c'est qu'ils travaillent douze heures avec des salaires de peut-être 7 ou 8 dollars.



Challenges

Emerge from different values and teachers' attitude/ beliefs: Teachers perceived clashes between various value positions (rural-urban, Canadian-culture of origin, consumer culture-conserver culture). They also perceived that EE is new to these children and families and, with economic constraints, not a priority.

Les valeurs, pas nécessairement important pour tout le monde, la valeur de l'environnement est pas nécessairement dans tous les milieux, des fois ils sont en survit alors l'environnement et le recyclage... ils ont d'autre chose à penser avant ça

ils arrivent ici, la consommation devient une marque de d'intégration, de réussite. Et là finalement, moi je viens leur dire que la sur consommation dans le fond ça nuit à la planète et que... je suis comme un peu... Je pars pas de la même place, c'est pas la même chose



Obstacles

Emerge from the professional context: Teachers were not prepared to teach MEE since they had little (to no) preparation in their pre-service education or in-service training. Teachers also thought they did not have the skills to address “delicate” topics, finding a balance between respect and dominant values.

surtout les profs on pense tout le temps qu'on a la science exacte, tu sais parce que les matières que l'on enseigne sont toujours préparées

Mais d'un autre côté, c'est parfois très délicat parce que, en tout cas je ne veux pas non plus généraliser, mais il y a certains milieux qui sont plus extrémistes que d'autres et puis tracer les limites aussi ce n'est pas toujours évident. Tu sais comme aller à la piscine, j'en ai une qui est voilée, sa mère porte le hijab...



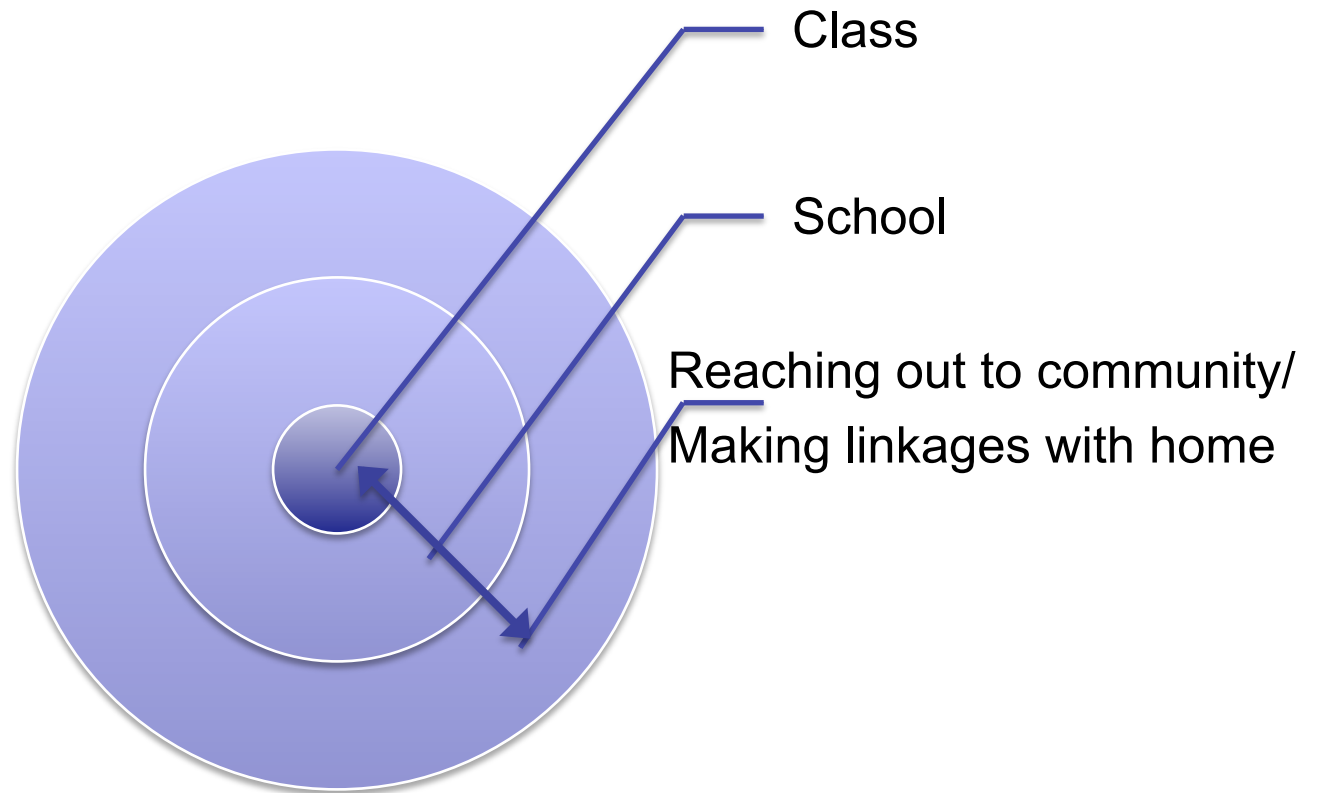
Emerge from teacher's own reality: Teachers spoke about their own ignorance of different cultural contexts or ignorance of what happens at home due to culture/ value clash.

Les références culturelles, l'expérience en commun qu'on a pas. Quand je fais référence à ma jeunesse: Ah moi, quand j'étais petite... bien souvent je les regarde et ça les rejoint pas eux, ils ne vivent pas ça

Moi je suis dans un milieu québécois, c'est plus facile pour moi d'imaginer c'est quoi la relation entre parent et l'enfant et de faire des inférences: et dire ah mon dieu oui ça doit être comme ça la dynamique. Des fois ici je trouve ça plus difficile des fois il y en a que j'ai l'impression qu'ils ne communiquent pas beaucoup entre eux, sauf pour des choses vraiment de base: habille-toi, mange, brosse tes dents à la limite.

Strategies

Transcend
the
classroom
walls



Strategies

Classroom: It is understandable that teachers most often identified strategies that are bounded by the classroom since this is the context where they have the most control and influence. There were a variety of different instructional approaches identified. The highest priority for teachers was to ***promote behavior change.***

Dans la cours de récréation aussi on a commencé à mettre des bacs de recyclages pas juste la poubelle. Il y a beaucoup de choses qui se retrouve au sol ça va pas nécessairement dans la poubelle ou le bac de recyclage c'est un travail de tous les jours

These tended to be small but integrated, developmentally-appropriate actions that applied to children, teachers, and parents, and involved role-modeling. Teachers reported that these strategies also nurtured their own behavior change.

Strategies

Classroom: Teachers also reported that transcending core subjects (***transdisciplinary approach***) not only allowed them to integrate EE more fully into the curriculum but also saved time.

Moi c'est intégrées, surtout dans un milieu multiculturel parce que les gens auront pas nécessairement le temps. Il y a les sciences, les sciences qui permettent l'intégration et il y a aussi le français

Taking a transdisciplinary approach, teachers were able to recognize/***respond to opportunities*** to promote the environment.

Ça va vraiment passer par un besoin... ou par des oiseaux dans la cours de récréation qui sont attirés par les déchets

Creating a ***common language*** (facilitating the acquisition of language and promoting shared meaning) was fundamental in implementing EE.

Expliciter beaucoup beaucoup le vocabulaire, avec un lexique, ça prend des idées de grands dans un vocabulaire de petits

Strategies

Classroom: Bringing *student and teacher experiences into the classroom* and connecting to what the teacher liked created more satisfying learning experiences.

Je vais aller chercher ce que j'ai besoin, je vais chercher ce que j'aime

Using *experiential strategies* to engage children in more concrete and meaningful EE allowed teachers to make EE more interesting and relevant to themselves and the students.

Par exemple la compostière, j'ai fait des activités en classe pour montrer ce qui va dans la compostière

Teachers found that learning was most effectively done through manipulation and action. This sometimes required teachers to transcend the boundaries of the classroom.

Je prenais le métro avec les enfants pour aller dans le quartier Saint-Michel sur la rue Loupin il y avait un site de récupération pour montrer aux enfants la Tohue...

Strategies

School: Though teachers recognized the importance of a classroom focus, many believed that effectiveness lay in ***transcending the classroom walls to the school level***, promoting a more systemic instructional approach. This included initiating school-wide or school board environmental initiatives, projects such as green committees and exchanges and sharing between teachers.

Je ne sais pas s'il y avait des élèves qui faisaient partie de la brigade verte, était responsable du compostage, de ramasser, d'aller porter ça à l'extérieur, une petite brigade verte. Puis me semble Martine fait partie du comité environnement là.

Teachers underlined the importance of ***administrative support*** to encourage and reinforce school-wide activities and green committees

la directrice est très impliquée.

Strategies

Community: Teachers realized that in order to have a real impact, they needed to ***transcend the classroom walls to the community*** and to bring in programs to support EE (e.g. Éco-quartier). This included actively creating relationships outside of the classroom. The teacher's role morphed into helping children become active and participative members of society.

Ou est-ce que c'est vraiment autonome? On collabore avec Éco-Quartier

Home: Teachers reach out in order to ***transcend the classroom walls to the home*** creating linkages with parents.

donc la mission du potager c'est vraiment de venir en aide aux parents du quartier. Donc les enseignants chaque année s'occupent des semis et de la plantation au printemps. Ça permet d'aborder tout ce qui concerne les parties des plantes de quoi les plantes ont besoin pour pousser. Et pendant l'été c'est les parents qui sont approcher par l'intervenant socio-communautaire ici qui vont au potager pour prendre soin prennent soin désherbage, arrosage ce sont eux qui ont les légumes aussi du jardin et ils peuvent prendre les légumes à la fin de la saison. Ça leur permet d'avoir des légumes de qualité. C'est vraiment la mission qu'on a donné.



- One cannot dissociate MEE from the Quebec political context of education and local concern for the Québécoise language and culture. This may be one reason why teachers found it difficult to bridge multiculturalism with EE.
- However, integration of multicultural perspectives into EE is key to reducing the dangers of teachers being 'patronizing'. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and practices can promote more sustained behavior change, reconnect culturally diverse and newly arrived people to their school and neighbourhood environment, and connect people to each other through the enactment of these familiar/new practices, creating community and a sense of belonging.
- Teachers need to be supported (i.e. diversity training and external support and resources) with a view that education requires transcending the classroom walls and involving multiple partners. This calls for nurturing a different skill set than traditional instructional practices.



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