

PDIG Final Report for IN13950
Wild School Project
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1. Project Description Describe/show to what degree the project was carried out as planned. Include what went well and what proved to be a challenge. Include a synthesis of your journal entries.

Our Wild School Project is dedicated to taking the elementary learning curriculum outside through place-based education. Specifically designed learning activities, using inquiry based, integrated and experiential frameworks, as well as integrated with technology and in-line with the Quebec Education Program (QEP). The goal twofold: One: to teach our students to become environmentally literate learners. Two: Provide teachers with the tools to plan lessons that encourage place-based learning outdoors as much as possible and be able to assess environmental literacy progress. This led to our PDIG team and creation of a Wild School Project.

Our project was carried out as planned, but with a slightly different path. The team began the project later than anticipated. Our project shifted slightly from initial goal – consulting other schools: We did contact outside schools, we discovered that many outdoor programs are just that, outdoor programs: hiking, canoeing, etc.; or Forest Schools which had curriculums truly dedicated to pre-school learning. Our goal was to focus on the elementary school curriculum integrated with opportunities to learn in the outdoors, in our community and learning be part of the QEP Progressions of Learning. Perhaps this setback is real a huge gain, in that we are the only ones creating such a project in Quebec. Therefore there is money remaining in the budget as it was not used for travel.

During our school year, we had consulted with the Canadian Wildlife Foundation who have been and continue to offer us support with information.

The PDIG team has as a goal to work towards making Morin Heights Elementary School a pilot school: Wild School Project. As a result, our discussions involved looking at our school's mission and vision statement, creating an inventory of the community, and discussed how to encourage other staff members to adopt this project. We will present this piece to our new principal and committees in September 2018.

During our meetings, we decided that we did not need to re-invent the wheel by creating lessons. Instead, we discussed the approaches of Understanding by Design, Wiggins and McTighe. Two participants in the team had been the LCEEQ conference on Critical Thinking and we found that this theme was what was going to guide us through the project. This part was a struggle for the group, in terms of looking at the Critical Thinking process and understanding its necessity to design the proper essential question. This in mind, not to build lessons, instead, we decided research the various lessons available on outdoor, environmental, eco, etc. topics.

Our group decided to look at Essential Questions for each of the elementary school cycles and Final Project, which would answer the essential question. From there, we looked for learning opportunities, which would support the learning students needed in order to embark on the critical thinking question. Critical Thinking questions addressed these themes: environmental, ecological, wilderness problems, and human interaction.

Students would commence learning the fundamentals of the Wild Project in Kindergarten through to Grade 6 and complete the Final Project each year by answering the Essential Question and displayed to the school community. The learning will scaffold on the previous year. At the end of Cycle 3, students would then call on all their prior knowledge to put together their Final Project using their critical thinking. It is at this point, educators and students can assess their learning achievements with respect to becoming an environmentally literate individual.

2. Project Goals Describe/show to what degree the goals of the approved project were met. If the goals were only partially met or not met at all, describe the reasons for this.

We believe the fundamental goals of this project were met. We are the experts in this Wild School Project. We are very eager to share our project with our colleagues and encourage its use throughout our school as of September 2018.

Although we shifted our ideas from creating lesson plans to looking at inspiring critical thinking in our project, we feel we have a much better project. With respect to the evaluation tools, we settled on a general rubric for the Final Project. As the group felt that by creating too many assessment tools it might drive away the enthusiasm to embark on the Wild School Project learning. As the learning is already part of the QEP, the teacher would already be using the progressions of learning and general tools such as a reading response rubric, math problem solving rubric, etc. The focus for the group was that at looking for the tools to assist the teacher deliver the background information to the student that they will need to understand the outdoor world they find themselves in.

It is at the Cycle 3, student evaluation would see the greatest impact. The student would be able to identify a problem in the community, learn about it, act upon it by communicating with an organization/individual to seek awareness and/or change. The rubric for the final project was created to help assess if the student has shifted their critical thinking to becoming environmentally literate: recognized a problem, learning about and offering recommendations.

The Wild School Project is a living document and as our teachers embark on the project we will no doubt need to ask for feedback and adjust accordingly. Even as we reviewed the final work, we noticed that we were not as complete with respect to attaching all of the QEP progressions of learning, a work in progress.

3. Project Outcomes Describe/show the gains that the participating teachers achieved through this project.

As the Lead Teacher of the team, I saw firsthand how our team shared the same goal of recognizing the importance of teaching students about their local environment, so, students can make reflective decisions on environmental questions in the future. Our team is very excited about embarking on this Wild School Project in September 2018.

Our Wild School Project provides teachers with framework to guide students to learn about their personal impact on their immediate environment: Kindergarten, Cycle 1 and 2, permits students to explore. Cycle 3 students engage in the deeper critical thinking required to look at a local problem, define it, research the complexity of the problem and try to offer an alternative solution or ask for change by the organization/individual in the community. This is what the Wild School Project is all about– encouraging students to become an environmentally literate student.

Human thinking needs to go beyond putting their applesauce container in the recycling bin and saying they are protecting animals in the wild or being environmentally conscientious. It begins with students who learn first where the apple comes from, how the soil, water, climate, production, distribution and manufacturing all play a role both positively and negatively. Permitting the student who when grown up might then choose between an apple or applesauce in a container. Leading to the student becoming a critical thinker of the future otherwise, environmentally literate!

We are eager to share our project with our staff members and new principal beginning in September 2018. We also look forward to becoming a pilot school within our Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. We are putting together workshop proposals.

4. Reinvestment Clearly describe how the resources created and/or the learning achieved by the participants can be of benefit to the educational community at large. If applicable, comment on whether or not this project should be carried out by other teams and if so, how it could be improved.

As previously stated, Wild School Project framework may be used by any elementary school, to guide student learning about their personal impact on their immediate environment: Kindergarten, Cycle 1 and 2, permits students to explore. Cycle 3 students to engage in the deeper critical thinking required to look at a local problem, define it, research the complexity of the problem and try to offer an alternative solution or ask for change by the organization/individual in the community. This is the Wild School Project: encouraging students to become *environmentally literate*.

This it would wonderful if other educators used this project, our human race needs more individuals who understand why we need to make ethical choices each day regarding our interactions here on the earth and how our decisions lead to the protection or the destruction. Teachers have the greatest opportunity to creating this change in society: with our students.

The Wild School Project's benefit to the education community is; that the framework has been triaged to provide unique learning opportunities, easily integrated in the regular course of study at the elementary level without burdening the teacher. The benefit: the Wild School Project is a guide to becoming environmentally literate through: learning opportunities, online resources and place based learning activities to engage students. The goal of Wild School Project is to sensitize students about their surroundings, encourage them to understand how humans interact with the environment, and how human choices can positively or negatively affect the world around them.

We are in the process of organizing our team to give workshops to our Community Learning Centre, we have one planned for May. We will be looking to share with Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board in the fall. We also have a Google Community page, which we share with our staff and we are looking at expanding access to other educators.

We will continue our work, as Bowers and Finders (1990) explain, "educators have a responsibility to pass on to the young a mental ecology (beliefs, values, and analogues of social practice) that will not exacerbate the environmental crisis". Our team feels we are doing this with the Wild School Project.