

ATTACHMENT C

Personal Stories of the impact of the eco-kids program

Eco-kids Program... Sharing the Vision, a teacher's perspective

Mario Cueto, a teacher at Strathcona Elementary, has a sign by his classroom door stating, "Through This Door Everyday Pass Great Learners," as a teacher, a supporter, and now as a liaison with the University of Winnipeg Innovative Learning Centre's "Eco-kids" Program. Being the science coordinator at this inner city school, Mr. Cueto was more than happy to have Strathcona School "share the vision" in this unique program.

Mario believes that the goals of Eco-kids in promoting environmental science, educating both children and staff with the idea of "Thinking Green," exposing children and staff with indigenous science and bringing post-secondary education as an achievable goal for inner city kids are the same with the goals of Strathcona School. In addition to this, being part of the Eco-kids program opens a bank of resources for children and staff to access.

Kids from Strathcona participated in activities and fieldtrips which have curriculum connections. For example, the fieldtrip to the Electrical Museum extended the Electricity Unit in Grade 6. Creating bio-domes touched on the unit on Diversity of Living Things. Students and staff also went to the Turtle Lodge at Sagkeeng First Nation's Community to learn about indigenous science which also met one of Winnipeg School Division's priorities of Aboriginal Education.

Aside from academics, a more pressing issue that the Eco-kids Program answers is the social benefits that each child enjoys. The program starts at 3:30, right as school ends and finishes at 6:30 in the evening. Not only do the kids get fed and participate in educational and recreational activities, the program also becomes an alternative to the streets. The program is like an extension of the school where the children become engaged and mentored by positive and dynamic leaders.

Mr. Cueto refers to his students as his "Precious Gems" not to give them false pride for he truly believes that each child is a gem, a great potential that needs to be nurtured and provided with opportunities to grow like a fragile sampling. It has been witnessed by the staff and children at Strathcona Elementary how these "gems" shine as they participate in Eco-kids.

They saw it in children's eyes as they experienced the "wow" effect during their field trips. They saw it in their smiles as they enjoyed doing the activities with their friends. They saw it in their bodies as they were engaged in the science experiments and group discussions given to them. Most of all, they saw it in how they carried themselves as they threw tobacco with their personal wishes into the sacred fire while at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation.

Eco-kids Program... Making a difference for Sky and Renee

Sky and Renee came to Strathcona Community School in the middle of the 2006-2007 school year from a small community outside of Winnipeg. Sky came to Grade 6 and Renee to Grade 4 with attendance issues from the previous school they attended.

Not long after their arrival, Child & Family Services (CFS) took the children and placed them in care since one parent was in stony Mountain Institution and the other was in a court directed substance abuse rehabilitation program. Both children had a difficult time when they were put in care.

There were also other concerns by CFS regarding the two kids that prompted the school to maintain constant supervision of them. This involved supervised indoor recesses, escorts to and from classes and absolutely no contact with their family. As expected, it was a very trying and emotional time for the two sisters.

Getting the kids involved in the Eco-kids Program was a crucial strategy the school took to help these children. It is the idea of letting the sisters be with other kids, be involved in a positive setting to counter the very serious issues they had which even adults would have difficulty in dealing with. It was almost a perfect fit for the girls since both have strong untapped academic abilities.

The number of activities involved in hands-on science captured their attention and interest. The impromptu activities such as singing at the Manitoba Metis Centre created bonding opportunities for the sisters with other children in the program. Most of all, the trip to Sagkeeng First Nation's Community brought a sense of understanding, life lessons and even "healing" among those who attended. Mr. David Courchane, a First Nation elder, talked about the universal values of the Seven Sacred Teachings and the Circle of Life. It was a very powerful experience which culminated with two other Cree sisters from Strathcona School getting up and singing a song as the drum beat.

Even before the program finished in Strathcona, there was a noticeable change among Sky and Renee. They became more jovial, participated in other activities in the school, never missed school, gave greater effort in all subject areas, and most importantly, became kids again. Sky even received an Outstanding Student Award during the awards ceremony at the end of the school year.

Sky and Renee's story is a success because the school, CFS, UWinnipeg and more importantly, the sisters worked together with a "shared vision." The sisters were not mere statistics that one sees at program review but are the purpose of the Eco-kids Program at Strathcona School. In order to have a healthy environment, it has to start with healthy mind, body and spirit. It is safe to say in monetary terms, the money invested to this program for these kids went a very long way.