

Project Report: Implementing Holistic Education into the Classroom to Enhance Student
Well-Being, Sustainable Practices, and Happiness.

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Project Overview

The following paper is an evaluation of a classroom focused around holistic teachings. The project was implemented to show how through mindful and holistic practices children will build a sense of self-esteem and resilience when faced with increasing levels of stress, as a result of their lifestyles, poor diet, overuse of technology and an unfocused mind. A stressed brain can't hold information as effectively so it impacts their study, concentration levels and open mindedness to new experiences. Employing breathing concentration through meditation, movement, visual and tactile learning they can off-load stress. The intended impact of this project was to have children be more aware of their surroundings, the world they live in and the impact that they have on it. Being mindful of all living things and non-judgemental of themselves and others is an significant benefit. Also, to open up educators' minds to the importance and need for holistic practices in the classrooms is a key factor. The holistic lessons and activities that were the main focus of this project were, Meditation, Mindful Breathing, Indigenous Perspectives, Movement, Reiki/Tapping, Nutrition, and Sustainable Projects.

The Evaluation

Project Successes & Challenges

When I consider the ease and support with which I was able to conduct various lessons within my classroom I believe it was a success, I was not denied access to experts or limited in anyway. The Winnipeg School Division, along with Robertson School administration were very supportive. The successes of this project has not only made an impact on my students, but

myself as an educator. Being able to practice meditation on a daily basis alongside my students affected my well being in a positive way. A success for me was watching my students embrace the lessons and want to implement them as much as possible. The everyday use of specific language in the classroom became the norm, such as, “always be mindful of others,” and there was definitely a change in how we treated and spoke to each other. Watching students practice their breathing or finding a quiet place in the room when they needed to was a positive outcome. The students embraced all of the teachings and everyone participated, even though it took a few sessions for everyone to feel comfortable with closing their eyes and fully embracing meditation. That was one of the projects challenges, children understanding that in order for the practices to work they needed to be fully engaged and allow their minds to relax and to be uninhibited. The importance of creating an atmosphere of trust and non-judgement of others was imperative to the projects success.

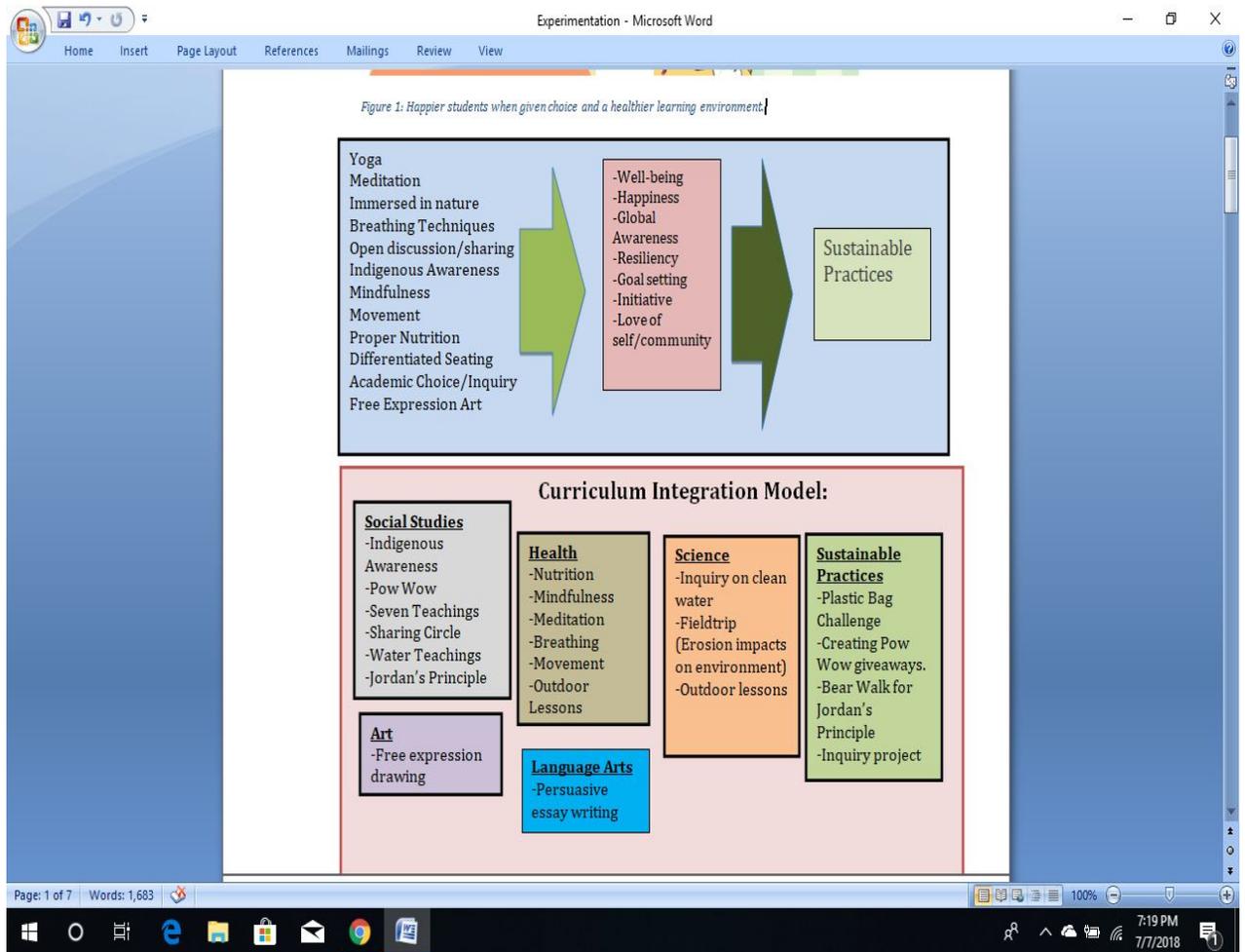
A small challenge that I was faced with during this project was time management. Even though I was able to incorporate the teachings into curricular areas, which allowed for the schedule to stay fairly consistent, there never seemed to be enough time to have daily hour long lessons, which I feel would have made a stronger and more lasting impact on the students. I was hoping to create a physical classroom environment that had more differentiated seating and space, but unfortunately the small classroom size and amount of pupils made it difficult to maneuver many changes. I was able to incorporate a few different chairs such as, rockers and rocking stools, cushions and a large carpet area, this gave a little more choice in regards to student seating. The heat did hinder us from spending too much time outside and I would have preferred to spend as much time outside as possible.

I was worried that the mandated *Units of Study* (2013) writing program, which is very structured and scripted would not allow for the type of writing that I wanted to incorporate into my project, but I was able to use the persuasive essay and research writing components to produce writing about the earth and sustainability issues. Students did various research on water pollution, nature, and the impacts of zebra mussels in our lakes. The product that my students were creating were above the standards I have seen with any writing program and their love of writing was evident. Through the skills of the program, mixed with being able to make it inquiry writing, the students were inspired, and I will continue to use this resource in that capacity in the future.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project was to show that holistic practices may educate children about how to strike a balance in all aspects of their lives: social, physical, spiritual, and mental. The objectives were to create an environment where children and educators feel calm, connected and safe. An important objective is helping children understand the interconnectedness between human and nature through mindfulness practices that develop empathy and spiritual well-being. Acquiring the tools that give all students the opportunity to achieve well-being is a focus for Well-Being. My hope was that holistic practices will be integrated into all classrooms as a natural part of daily teaching. It was also a goal of mine to implement the practices within the natural environment, by doing so I hoped to instill an appreciation of nature and their surroundings through mindfulness practices.

The goals and objectives were reached through the various curriculum areas being incorporated. If we consider the prototype model below, all the areas of curricular integration, and the progression through holistic practices toward sustainable practices was met.



We not only learned about different spiritual and historical Indigenous teachings, but spent a good amount of time understanding the Treaties and residential schools. The students obvious empathy and understanding of their countries history was a valuable lesson. Using the Medicine Wheel teaching had a positive effect on the students, as it helped them to begin to

understand the various aspects of themselves. I believe that there was definitely the beginnings of change and an embracing of the above goals in the classroom, but for the project to have a greater impact it needs to begin at the beginning of the school year and be used daily. Each child varies in their approach to wanting to learn and participate fully therefore, a full school year would be more impactful. The process of free expression art is having the students follow very vague and short instructional drawing instructions, where the outcome is an individual, imperfect product. It takes children awhile to let go of exact direction, and perfection tendencies. The idea of free expression art is to allow for letting go of the fear of making mistakes, especially in art. Although we studied the importance of making healthy eating choices, I did not bring in food products as much as I would have liked, due to the amount of allergies in the classroom. I would like to start a more healthy eating initiative with the lunch program in the near future.

Project Impacts

There was not a lot of input from the parents, but there was also no negative feedback. The students were asked to share what they learned with their parents and write their responses in their journals. Parents would write a short note about what their child has learned. One parent wrote, "I really like that you are taking time to calm your mind, not just academics." Not all parents were engaged. I think promoting a whole school *Healthy Minds Week* (2018) like some other schools in the division did this year, would bring in more community and family members. Also, the surveys that I sent to parents showed that they had little understanding about why Indigenous Perspectives would be important, most parents checked 1 or 2 as to its importance in schools. There is one student in the class that I was hoping the holistic teachings would affect because he has many anxiety issues. After the Medicine Wheel teaching he told me that his

emotional side is not strong and he needs to work on that more. In the beginning it was hard for him to admit that sometimes it is difficult to explain and control his feelings. To have a breakthrough with him, even small, was great!

The feedback from the the students and educators was the focus of who I wanted to engage predominantly in the feedback process. The student surveys (see Appendix A) had the most impact for me and helped me create a greater focus on specific areas. The student surveys ranked high in areas of fitness, meditation and outdoor education as being most important to them. Inquiry projects was low, but I was not surprised considering they don't receive enough or any exposure to that type of learning in the early years.

I chose an educator from each grade to survey, an administrator and the school social worker (see Appendix A). The feedback was consistent with a positive attitude toward implementing holistic teachings. It was no surprise that the school social worker was already experienced in this form of teaching and was excited to know that I would be using some of the tools that she supports. She also advocates for sustainable practices, "these skills need to be reinforced with repetition, the program should be school-wide and therefore continue from year to year as opposed to an 8 week program."

Some teacher comments were:

"I recommend mindfulness practices and teaching breathing techniques. The practices are helpful for most students and inclusive."

"These are valuable tools for their lives in all environments and as educators I feel that it is important to prepare students for the future and their lives in all areas."

Lessons Learned

This project taught me that there is more that I can do in regards to helping teachers incorporate Indigenous Perspectives with ease. I have created seven teachings, and Metis kits for teachers, but there is still not enough meaningful teaching being done in that area. When I began this project I had a long list of lessons that I wanted to implement, but I soon realized that it made more sense to do a few things well and with purpose instead of confusing the students with many things that weren't going to have longevity in their lives. Therefore, I focused on meditation, movement, Indigenous teachings and sustainability research and kept these as a main focus in the classroom. I have learned that consistent practices help the students become more engaged and they begin to see things as a natural part of their day. There is a great need and support for holistic teachings in the classroom and I have come to realize that it is possible because of the changing views amongst administrators, teachers and the division. The implementation of the lessons works better with in-depth planning and cannot be done on the spur of the moment, the lessons need to be just as important as math and language arts classes. I realized that students, even young students, are capable of learning about important issues. I hope to implement more inquiry next year around the Truth and Reconciliation Committees, 94 Calls to Action (2015). One of the calls to action speaks about Jordan's Principle (see Appendix A), and although I did not have time to touch on that this year, my administrator and I will be making it a whole school initiative next school year. Also, in the next school year I will be receiving a young student who suffers with PTSD, I hope to help her feel safe and comfortable in our classroom through the holistic teachings.

What Worked/What Didn't?

I believe this project was successful because of the support from my colleagues, and administration. Working with the school social workers showed me that there is a network of people trying to incorporate the same ideas into classrooms. The concept of holistic teachings in the classroom is not a new one, but the support has definitely advanced and the teachings are more appreciated and welcomed. The literature and programs available to educators around holistic teaching is plentiful. Audio and video on the internet supplies teachers with many tools to teach and learn from, such as, meditations on Youtube. As mentioned in successes and challenges, time was a factor. I believe that starting the project at the beginning of the school year and caring it out all year would make it a more natural part of the students learning, which is part of my plan for the next school year.

When looking at my Prototype in Phase 4; Experimentation (see Appendix A), I believe I reached many of the goals that I set out to incorporate. The depiction of a typical row by row classroom is definitely not the outcome that I created, but rather an area that is welcoming and accommodates the students needs. It may not be as differentiated and open as I would have liked, but that is one area that I hope to keep improving on.

Differences as a Result of the Project

When I first thought about implementing this project I was unsure of the support I would receive within my school, especially regarding some of the lessons around Reiki and Body Tapping. An important guest in our classroom was a holistic practitioner named Wendy Challis. She came in and worked with students on Reiki and Body Tapping methods and how our bodies energy sometimes requires re-energizing. The students really enjoyed her visit, as she has a very

calming and caring nature. The greatest difference I have seen at Robertson is the normality of introducing holistic practices into the school environment. There is a whole school acceptance of meditation, and other mindfulness practices that are being embraced and piloted in many classrooms. I believe this is partly due to the The Winnipeg School Division embracing the importance of mental health awareness and setting division wide mindfulness days. Also, when I introduced the goals of my project to my teaching team during Professional Learning Community meetings I received positive and interested feedback. A few of my colleagues are interested in implementing some of my lessons next school year. Although holistic practices was embraced school-wide, there needs to be consistent weekly or daily lessons in regards to mindfulness, not just a week of awareness. Children need to use techniques regularly in order for them to become natural tools that they utilize when feeling anxious or overwhelmed. I tried to teach my lessons as not only tools to be used when the children are feeling negatively, but also as a preventative and normal everyday way of life. For instance, daily meditation and breathing awareness became a natural way to start our day and if we missed a day it was noticed. As one student voiced, “When we do our meditation I feel more relaxed.”

Sustainability

I believe that this project is sustainable and that it will become a part of the daily school experience. I have had conversations with teachers that wish to start next year and participate in mindfulness practices within their classrooms. The importance of mental health awareness, and the need for children to learn about ways in which to disconnect from over stimulating activities is important. The students need to be more involved in the daily implementation of practice along with the discovery and sharing of ideas. Projects need to evolve from the classroom to

more student-led groups like Green Club and the Healthy Schools Club by incorporating more school-wide initiatives. I hope to become a part of these committees next year and help instill more well-being practices. The involvement of all grades will also help in creating more sustainable practices. We need to get away from thinking that only the older grades are capable of change. The support of healthy minds initiatives and programs such as, Mind-Up Curriculum (2011) and Project 11 (2016), are examples of the importance and acceptance of holistic practices.

Leading Change

There is still some work needed within the Manitoba health curriculum. The health curriculum is very vague in regards to mental health. The health curriculum is combined with physical education. The Winnipeg School Division (2018), claims that the health curriculum focuses on a holistic concept of health and well being, although the main focus seems to be around nutrition and safety. Therefore, a more updated and focus on holistic teachings should be implemented. I believe that this is an area that I could become involved in and offer my experience. I have sat on the committee supporting the new Language Arts Curriculum and feel that the division is open to teacher input.

In regards to Robertson School, there are specific Language Arts programs being put in place that are considered mandatory and must be taught. These programs were implemented because of student writing success rates and teacher opinion. Student success and engagement is the factor that leads to change within Robertson. If a positive student outcome can be presented and an ease of implementation can be proven, then new programs are embraced and supported. Being able to show positive change in my students and create lessons that can be incorporated

into, Health, Science and Social Studies supported my projects importance. The teachers at Robertson are more accepting of change when there is evidence of growth and well being in the students and the implementation can be incorporated with ease. The holistic practices that I implemented in my classroom are not new to educators, many teachers practice these things outside of school in their daily lives, therefore, being able to use them in a classroom setting seems natural. I found that communication and continued updates are important in order for educators to see the importance of change and the success taking place. In regards to incorporating more mental health and student well being initiatives into the classroom, the support for change was positive, it is obvious that students today are facing much more mental health issues than ever before. Understanding the facts and being able to present them knowledgeably and with suggested positive outcomes helps lead change among school colleagues. It's not enough to voice your beliefs, but suggestions for implementation and a solid plan of action are imperative. I am considering bringing a learning fair evening to Robertson, with the theme centered around Healthy Minds. In the past these fairs have been very successful at showcasing to parents and community important concepts and learning opportunities for their children.

Skills and Knowledge Developed

Personal knowledge that I developed would be the implementation of lessons into the curriculum and realizing that by changing the way we do things in the classroom doesn't necessarily require creating a lot more work for ourselves. In the past I was very curriculum focused and my classroom would be a place of continuous work. Through mindfulness practices I have become more focused and have learned how to maintain better balance during the day. I

have seen how this project could easily open up many more areas of learning for students, it relates to teachings that could include, acts of kindness, appreciating happy experiences and expressing gratitude. I have met with teaching partners that are willing to incorporate holistic teaching into their own classrooms and that there is a community of educators at my school willing to look at more sustainable projects. I have been able to recruit 5 of my teaching partners to create an Indigenous Perspectives Committee, which will help instill much needed programming into the school.

Future Learning Needs

I believe in order for me to understand the workings of the organization I work in I need to continue to educate myself in regards to how their leadership initiatives are created and implemented. Therefore, I have decided to take a ten day Personal Development Program through The Winnipeg School Division. This program helps to develop leadership skills and increase awareness of the operation of The Winnipeg School Division. The content of the program includes the following topics: Leadership Styles, Conflict Resolution, Interpersonal Communication, Operation of the Winnipeg School Division, and Decision Making. I believe this course will help me develop my leadership skills.

I will continue to perfect my lessons and practices in regards to holistic teachings. I hope to make bigger and better connections between holistic practices and sustainability issues with my students. Also, I need to create more varied, permanent lesson plans, that integrate more inquiry projects. A new Indigenous Perspectives Committee has begun plans for a sharing circle outdoor classroom, because there is a lack of green space for outside education. When I did take my students outside to work, it was unfortunately, mostly on cemented areas.

Final Reflection

As I reflect on this project I sometimes felt as though there was a lack of consistency, but as I write about what we have done in the classroom, I can see the great amount of work we have accomplished. The demands of specific programming and demanding mandatory meetings was becoming an overwhelming excuse to get away from some of my beliefs and ways of teaching that are important to me. This project has shown me that it is not only important, but possible to implement projects, and to make change in the classroom that will affect sustainable development and practices. In Peeples article, *Dare to go First* (2016) she says, “being a change agent means taking the leap before anyone else,” (p. 10). I think that may just be my new motto, I need to speak about the things that are important to me and education, and hope that others may feel the same way. Sustainable teaching practices is a priority for me and I need to show others that it is. This project has shown me what students need to not only reach academic success, but emotional and individual success, and how I can help them. “Children need to express emotions through speech, find empathy through imagination and wonder at the beauty of the natural world,” (Verde, 2017).

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Appendix A

Design Challenge Brief:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jZIKr0KhE2L4RLOQIzN7Lz8vWgnAwDg0/view?usp=sharing>

Phase 4 Experimentation:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1czWOTnmT7evTJ8sLOKN5abRGMfR0gha_/view?usp=sharing

Project Proposal:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M3hJrDwyS-9xWg0yEvW-lp-8NUHaGK9X/view?usp=sharing>

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Define the Challenge:

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Understand the Challenge:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vo1WbpHNoO6-mquEXdRv13RR3G6cSVm8/view?usp=sharing>

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Jordan's Principle: Retrieved from <https://fncaringsociety.com/BearWitness>