During my last practicum, I had a chance to plan and teach my own units on sustainability in two grade 9 geography classes as well as one grade 12 class. While there were many challenges throughout the experience, it was a great learning experience for myself, since I planned both units almost entirely on my own.

Not only did it allow me to work on my unit and lesson planning techniques as well as delivery of lessons, but I got to research and learn about a lot of diverse environmental issues that I had been interested in.

Learning Goals

At the beginning of the unit, I asked the grade 12 students to write down “three things they would like to learn about the environment and resource management”.

Some answers—Learn more about:

- “possible materials that could replace oil/ replacement sustainable fuels”
- “what businesses can be doing to be more green”
- “what I can do to influence decisions on important environmental issues”
- “more about the Idle No More Movement”
- “what I can do to help the environment”/“how to make a change”

Curriculum Learning Goals

Grade 9 classes (CGC1D1):
- To identify and discuss environmental issues and concerns facing Canadians today, and how this will impact the future of Canada and the world.
  • explain the relationship of Canada’s renewable and non-renewable resources to the Canadian economy;
  • analyse the ways in which natural systems interact with human systems and make predictions about the outcomes of these interactions;
  • evaluate various ways of ensuring resource sustainability in Canada.

Grade 12 (CGR4M) The Environment and Resource Management:
- explain significant short-term and long-term effects of human activity on the natural environment;
- analyse and evaluate interrelationships among the environment, the economy, and society;
- analyse patterns of resource availability and use.
- identify differences in the perceptions of nature and the views on environmental preservation of selected individuals and groups (e.g., indigenous people, corporations, government, recreationists);
- analyse ways in which selected human activities alter the natural environment (e.g., clear-cutting, pipeline construction, reforestation, wetland restoration)
**Highlights: Commodity Chain Assignment**

This assignment asked students to identify and research a commodity or product of their choice, and discuss the implications for its production, consumption, and disposal. This assignment was part of our discussions on our “material world” the overconsumption of consumer good, and the impacts they have on the environment.

Some student examples included Starbucks coffee, Canada Goose jackets, Ugg boots and a Gibson guitar.

Students were asked to produce a map or visual which identified all parts of the commodity chain for their product—including Extraction, Production, Distribution, Consumption and Disposal.

**Highlights: Grade 9 Landfill Debate**

The landfill debate was adapted from The Story Of Stuff project’s “Buy, Use, Toss” Unit

For this debate activity, which took two classes, students were divided into groups of 4-5. The debate was centered around a fictional town called “Ashville”, whose landfill was nearly full, leaving students with the decision of what to do next with the garbage. Each group of students was a concerned party—including waste to energy enthusiasts and citizens for environmental justice, among others.

This debate as followed by a discussion of Toronto’s future waste/disposal plans that are now being discussed.

**Highlights: Media Literacy and Alberta’s Oil Sands**

In both the grade 9 and 12 classes, I showed the same three commercials depicting the development of Alberta’s oil sands projects. In both classes I got some very interesting reactions. Students watched three commercials (which were played several times each) and were asked to reflect on the messages of these commercials, who produced them, whose voices were being heard, and whose were ignored.

Learning media literacy, especially in relation to ecoliteracy, can help students to better understand ecological issues from multiple perspectives. The term “greenwashing” was brought up by several students and we discussed its significance.

In terms of the oil sands, this was a great lesson since we had a chance to discuss how Aboriginal voices are often ignored in this context, and the major concerns in Fort Chipewyan, including the health and well being of its citizens.
Culminating Activity - GRASP Task

For the grade 12 unit on sustainability, I created the culminating activity based on a “GRASP” task, in which students had a choice of a goal, role, audience, scenario and product or performance. For this activity, I gave students a choice of scenarios surrounding the oil sands, peak oil, water issues, and protection of our oceans. I was pleasantly surprised by the outcomes I received from most students, as most students seemed to have worked very hard on their projects.

Many students chose to write and illustrate a children’s book on the dangers of the oil sands. I was very impressed at how they made this serious issue accessible and engaging for younger readers.

Examples of GRASP – Children’s Book about Oil Sands and Magazine article about Peak Oil

Monarch Park Summit on Sustainable Development

The culminating activity for the Grade 9 classes’ unit on sustainability consisted of two parts—a group presentation and an individual written report. For our simulated “Summit on Sustainable Development”, each group (5-6 students) was assigned one resource—coal, gold, oil, coffee, cocoa, or timber—and had to answer assigned questions about that resource’s (potential) sustainability. The roles and groups for this assignment were also borrowed from the Story of Stuff Project’s curriculum.

The presentations/research were centered upon several essential questions, including:

- What are the environmental, cultural, economic rights and human right concerns, if any, surrounding this resource?
- Is this resource sustainable? Why or why not?

As a whole, our “summit” was very successful, and I think it made the students think critically about our own consumption, and how we can change patterns of consumption and exploitation of humans and the environment.
Fortunately, my associate teacher seemed to really enjoy most of my lessons, and claimed that he will be using my culminating activities in the future. He also especially liked my inclusion of video clips to accompany discussions, as well as the debates in both classes, and use of the Smart Board for mapping activities.

I also had the chance to share my lessons with another geography teacher at the school, who seemed to really enjoy them, and used some of them with her classes.

Finally, I would love to share my lesson plan ideas and culminating activities with this class, and possibly through OISE’s ESE website.

In terms of learning IN, ABOUT, and FOR the environment, the units that I planned could have been improved in several ways. First, I would have brought students outside to learn. The challenges for me as a teacher candidate were

a. Convincing my AT and

b. Getting permission forms to take the students “off the property” beside the school

While I would have really enjoyed teaching a geography-related lesson outdoors (since there are many curriculum related links), logistically, it was difficult in such a short time-frame. If I had the chance to teach my own geography class, I would definitely take students outside for a geocaching or mapping activity.

As for learning “for” the environment, I would definitely like to try to incorporate more activism and conservation into my teaching, possibly starting more meaningful school projects like a school garden. During the units that I taught, students had a chance to learn “FOR” the environment by considering their impacts on the earth, through reflections on topics like consumerism and how we can minimize our impacts, or change the linear system of production to a more circular economy.

Overall, my practicum experience was very enjoyable because I was allowed to teach basically whatever I wanted, and so naturally I chose sustainability and environmental issues. I have learned that most students get easily discouraged when faced with environmental challenges. For this reason, it’s important to help them learn the positive impacts that they can have on our planet. As a teacher, it will be up to me to help them realize this potential.