Growing Environmental Literacy:

*Identifying Strategies and Supports for Successful School-University Partnerships in Environmental & Sustainability Education*

**Overview:**
This inquiry will investigate how school-university partnerships can support teaching and learning in Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE). By exploring how the TDSB’s Associate teachers and OISE teacher candidates co-develop and implement curricular initiatives in ESE in TDSB schools during practica and internships, we aim to identify how these partnerships support pre-service and inservice professional development, and what strategies can be implemented by all of the partners (teachers, teacher candidates and OISE faculty) to maximize the learning involved. This supports both OISE’s program and the TDSB’s Sustainability Office by investigating teaching practice in ESE; better understanding the nature of school-field-university partnerships in ESE; and by deepening environmental literacy work, an important part of social and eco-justice learning in the ITE program and in our partner schools.

**Importance of the Study:**
The TDSB struggles to provide professional development in ESE to all of the teachers involved in their Ecoschools program; OISE has similar challenges providing learning in ESE to all of its Teacher Candidates. A multipronged approach is needed by these organizations to have a wider impact on the professional development of both students and teachers; this project offers the potential to develop and investigate one of these approaches. This inquiry would have a direct impact on the Associate Teachers and Teacher Candidates involved in terms of their experience with collaborative professional development in ESE; this will have an impact on the elementary and secondary students with whom they work, hopefully deepening the nature of their learning experiences about local and global environmental issues. By sharing what is learned about strategies and supports for ESE through articles and conference presentations, this project could also have an impact on environmental learning in other Teacher Education programs or school boards across the province.

**Inquiry Questions:**
*Key question: how can school-university partnerships support teaching and learning about ESE?*

**Sub-questions:**
- What are the needs and expectations of school/university partnerships in terms of environmental learning?
- What are the satisfaction levels of the partners at the end of the partnership experience?
- What approaches, strategies and practices support co-learning in ESE between Associate Teachers, Teacher Candidates, university faculty, and board instructional leaders?
- What types of curriculum and instructional practices are being used in school/university partnerships focused on ESE?
- What particular environmental issues were covered or addressed? (local or global?)
- How do school/university partnerships effect curriculum content and instructional practices in ESE?
- Do Teacher Candidates feel prepared to tackle ESE learning in classrooms based on their OISE experiences? Do Associate Teachers feel prepared to tackle ESE learning with Teacher Candidates?
- What do Associate Teachers learn from the experience of co-learning in ESE with their Teacher Candidates?
- Were any school-based supports in place to encourage ESE? School board supports? University supports?
- What has resulted from the partnerships?

**Research Design:**

This study will use a mixed methods approach to better understand professional learning in ESE from both the perspectives of the Associate Teachers and Teacher Candidates involved in the study. The aim is to work with 3-5 pairs of Associate Teachers and Teacher Candidates in each round of the study (taking place in two internship periods in the spring of 2012 and 2013, as well as one practicum period in the fall of 2012).

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies will be used. To ascertain the needs, expectations and attitudes of practicing teachers and teacher candidates about professional learning in ESE, a digital survey will be made available to these groups for optional participation. Initial meeting/interviews with the pairs of Associate Teachers and Teacher Candidates who agree to participate in the study will be conducted; these individuals will be asked to keep individual research journals of their partnership experiences. Focus group interviews with small groups of Associate Teachers and Teacher Candidates will be conducted at the end of the partnerships.

As a mixed methods study, data analysis and interpretation will be done using methods appropriate to the type of data collected. Quantitative data from the digital surveys will be analyzed with quantitative data analysis software, while qualitative data will be transcribed, coded, concept-mapped and thematically analyzed. Member-checking will help to ensure that the perspectives of both groups has been accurately recorded and analyzed.

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