

***Community, Peace and Sustainability: Leveraging Institutional Positionality to
Affect Local and System Change***

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Abstract

In October 2018, the IPCC published a predictable, but no less grim, report on where 'we' are situated vis a vis climate change and what is yet to unfold. Despite over a hundred years of scientific concern from scientists on the human effects of industrialization and globalization, we now face out of control wildfires, drought, desertification, intensity and frequency of hurricanes and catastrophic flooding. The report clearly outlines what experts have emphasized for years; there is no singular strategy that will stave off the impending planet-wide economic, social and environmental disaster resulting from climate change and environmental degradation. We need strategies that work with the institutionalized systems currently in place and organizations operating at the community level. International, national, or regional policy is not sufficient without community level buy in. Community level organizing is rarely sufficient to cement system-wide change. The bridge between institutional systems and community is education. Changing our educational institutions should be one of the primary strategies to tackle climate change. Post-secondary educational institutions are currently one of the best-placed bridges between governments and communities because they wield power with and within community and government systems while simultaneously balancing the tension between these two groups. Educational institutions are both firmly within and of the system and yet are firmly embedded in and creators of community. This presentation will introduce the work done in this vein at Dawson College and their network of institutional and community partners that aim to connect and model solutions based on interconnecting community, institutions and sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability, Community, Education

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Introduction

Growing across the world are Living Schools. A Living School “embraces well-being - individually and collectively, for all people and the “other than human” life on our planet. It is an inclusive vision that recognizes that our well-being is important both now, and in the future and that our well-being is intertwined with the lives of other people and the natural environment” (O’Brien, 2016, p.9). At Dawson College our Living School or as we have named it the Living Campus initiative focuses on re-connecting people, community and Nature. It is about defining sustainability as intimately connected to the health and welfare of people and Natural world. In North America we have embraced individualism and a growth-at-all-costs neoliberal capitalist extraction-based consumption model that has contributed to the dislocation from our human connection with the land and each other as well a profound world-wide environmental degradation and climate change (Elliot 2016; Jorgenson 2003; Menzies & Butler 2006; Shiva 2015; Simpson 2017). The Living Schools movement, manifested in a variety of forms all over the world, holds in common this idea of reconnecting our communities and ourselves with Nature as being fundamental to effecting environmental change. Connection to Nature in this context frames our collective and individual relationship with the land. Our species is dependent on healthy soil, water and air in order to thrive and yet in the global north we have designed and maintained systems, political, economic and social, which disrupt our relationship with the natural world (Elliot 2016; Homer-Dixon 1999; Klein 2014; Simpson 2017). The consequences of forgetting this relationship or perhaps more aptly sacrificing this relationship, means we are neglecting our responsibilities. There is no reciprocity in our relationship with the land currently because we have forgotten that we are interdependent. In addition, we have outsourced environmental degradation, pollution and the worst effects of climate change to the most vulnerable populations at home and abroad such that the minority can benefit from the luxuries of 21st century privileged living (Jorgenson 2006; Newell 2005; Shiva 2015; Waldron 2018). In order to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and environmental degradation we need to develop strategies that centre upon building equitable relationships and institutions our communities, from the local to the global, in conjunction with our reciprocal relationship with the natural environment and our responsibilities to it (IPCC 2018; Fourth National Climate Assessment 2018; O’Brien 2016; Shiva 2015).

Reconnection with the land and one another through the Living School Movement is an effective strategy for system change and in theory; it should be an easy ‘win’. We have the body of knowledge on how to do this as there are practical models available both in North America and around the world where educators frame their pedagogy through the lens of sustainability (O’Brien 2015; Frias & Hurtado 2014, 2019; Simpson 2017;). More specifically sustainability as an equitable ethical process that centres the well-being of people on par with the needs of the Natural world (O’Brien 2015; Simpson 2017;). With respect to climate change, environmental degradation, increasing political insecurity and the havoc wrought by neoliberal capitalist economics the Living School movement signifies one of a multiplicity of strategies that both grass roots level organizations and institutions within larger systems can deploy, in partnership and unilaterally, in order to make effective local and system change. Schools do not simply train our future CEOs, Prime Minister’s or Presidents, lawyers, doctors and plumbers. They are also reflections of socio-economic and

political priorities of our governments and the people who elect the government. Most importantly and often undervalued, the educational system is a bridge between those who work on the local level in communities and government institutions. In addition, schools are a community unto themselves; they also reside within a specific geographic community and are makers of community. In circumstances where the state has direct influence over the content, curriculum and governance of education (most notably in the primary and secondary levels in North America and Western Europe) there is even more opportunity to leverage local level work in sustainability into the institutionalized system. Without a fundamental change in our relationship with the land in everything we do, from our local to global policies, procedures, regulations, institutions and trade agreements the only future we will face will be even more dangerous and inequitable. The Living School model's focus on bringing Nature into the classroom while also moving students out of the classroom to work on environmental justice projects to meet community needs is a reasonable, relevant and achievable strategy that can be adapted, transferred and scaled up within educational systems.

I believe that educational institutions are places where community level action can be leveraged, scaled up and transformed into institutional and system change. I will explore this idea through presenting the case of my own institution, Dawson College. We are beginning to institutionalize peacebuilding and sustainability from the building envelope, into the classroom curriculum and extra-curricular projects. Furthermore, we are in the process of expanding our current Living Campuses network based on reciprocal relationships founded upon the principles of reconnecting people, Nature, research and community.

The CEGEP system & Dawson College

Dawson College is a degree granting post-secondary institution in Montréal, Québec, Canada. It is home to approximately 10,000 students, full time and continuing education. Dawson is the largest English language College in Québec with a student population that is reflective of the diversity of the city of Montreal. In 2018 Dawson's admissions reports indicated that 51% (4,338 students) of students spoke English as their first language, 21% (1,630 students) first language French and 28% (2,311 students) of admitted students identified their mother tongue as neither French nor English (2018-2019 Dawson College Admissions Report). Dawson College is part of the College d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) network which represents 48 post secondary education institutions (2018 Fédération des cégeps). CEGEPs came into being in 1969 in the province of Quebec (this particular institution is not found elsewhere in Canada) designed to facilitate the transition from highschool to university studies (2018 Fédération des cégeps). Students aspiring to attend university, who were educated in Quebec, must attend CEGEP and earn their Diplôme d'études collégial (D.E.C) to be eligible to apply into a university program. The Federation des CEGEPs is the body, which represents all 48 post-secondary institutions in the network (2018 Fédération des cégeps). It is the umbrella organization, which represents the 26,000 employees in all collective bargaining negotiations with the government and will use its advantage to push issues at the government level (2018 Fédération des cégeps). There are currently 175 000 students enrolled in day programs and another 51,000 adult students enrolled in continuing education or professional development programming offered at CEGEPs across the

province of Quebec (2018 Fédération des cégeps). In 2014 the auditing firm KPMG determined that the CEGEP system is responsible for contributing 9.8 billion dollars to the Québec economy, therefore there is little doubt of the financial, social and political importance of this system in Quebec (2014 KPMG).

While there are many unique features of the CEGEP system amongst the most important is that it is completely publicly funded. Students who are residents in the province of Québec do not pay tuition to attend the public French and English language CEGEPs (2018 Ministère de l'éducation et enseignement supérieur). The CEGEP system is currently one of the more equitable government institutions in terms of access to post-secondary education for the general population. Thus, the degree granting program's curriculum to College policies and finances are largely either determined by the government or subject to review and approval prior to enactment (2018 Ministère de l'éducation et enseignement supérieur). The Ministry of Education determines what programs will be on offer, program competencies and will undertake evaluation and revision of the programs based on marketplace and University needs (2018 Ministère de l'éducation et enseignement supérieur). CEGEP budgets are subject to the priorities of the government Québec and have in the past seen budgets slashed during times of government austerity measures. While the government determines program composition, faculty have a lot of freedom within the context of the classroom itself. That is to say, while all students enrolled in Social Sciences are required to take the History of West Civilization, the faculty have complete liberty on assigned readings and assessments insofar as they ensure their selections will facilitate the attainment of the program and course competencies (2015 – 2020 Dawson College Teachers Union Collective Agreement). This freedom is crucial because it allows for space for innovation in learning particularly for faculty who are engaged in experiential learning pedagogy as well as service learning projects in the context of the college community and the community beyond the campus. Critically, faculty freedom in the classroom is protected through their unions in their collective agreements (2015 – 2020 Dawson College Teachers Union Collective Agreement). The Living Campus initiative capitalizes on this freedom by working with, and support through grants and partnerships, faculty to bring in sustainability education into courses in and out of the science programs. In fact, this freedom on the part of faculty and the support of sustainability and peacebuilding champions at the college are in large part the reason why Dawson is now firmly engaged in the process of institutionalizing sustainability. Effectively, the CEGEP system combines the freedom of University professors concerning the content in the classroom with the government oversight and standardization typically seen in the primary and secondary levels of education.

Senior administrators also have a certain level of freedom when it comes to institutional priorities. Each CEGEP uses its budget to invest in the projects and initiatives seen as being in the best interests of its students and employees. This is not to say that the government would not intervene should a College be perceived as wasting taxpayer's dollars or pursuing investment in projects that are counter to its own agenda. The structure of the CEGEP system is extremely important because this creates opportunity for system change in a way that is absent in other systems. Firstly, the senior administration is in a position to negotiate with the government based on the needs the College community. Initiatives that derive from a singular CEGEP can be adapted to other College's within the network. Secondly, if a senior administrator

can demonstrate the effectiveness of a particular strategy or initiative, they are in a better place to negotiate broader institutional change by virtue of the fact that they are in regular and constant contact with the Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur (MEES). Thirdly, senior administration officials of each CEGEP have direct access to the minister and deputy minister of MEES throughout the course of the academic year. Lastly, the leveraging power of the Federation des CEGEPs representing all 48 cegeps cannot be underestimated should its representatives elect to push for a specific network-wide change. Senior administration at a CEGEP benefit from the power of the local interests of the College community as well as being able to sit in the same room on a regular basis as the people who make the final decisions on CEGEP policy for the network. In addition, this is nothing to say of the collective power of over 200,000 thousand of students who recent and past history forced policy or legislative reversal through very public boycotts, protests and demonstrations.

Origins of a Movement:

Dawson College & the Living Campus Initiative

Sustainability, social justice, community building and peacebuilding hold a very special place at Dawson College. In 2006 an armed young man entered the College and proceeded to kill one young woman and injury dozens more. The aftermath of this tragedy was surprisingly overwhelmingly positive. The senior management of the College in conjunction with the union representatives and student union executive immediately declared that they would take back the school and refuse any and all overtures to militarize the College. We added no additional security nor metal detectors nor armed security; this was not going to be *our* answer. The administration and student union worked together to ensure there was counselling and outreach efforts to all members of the community who were affected by that day. Before the language of safe spaces and well-being for all made it into common vernacular, our College was doing the work to ensure that every survivor could return to school and work knowing that we would keep them safe and supported. The major outcomes of this day that impacted our work and view of peace and sustainability were:

1) The creation of the 22 000 square foot Peace Garden, planted by students and employees. The soil used for the planting came from composting of the thousands of flowers left at the school entrance to the College in the aftermath of the shooting. It is from this incident that the evolution of the Living Campus movement was birthed. The garden still stands today, and is maintained by student volunteers;

2) The launch in 2014 of the Peace Centre and the Peace Studies Certificate. Foundational to Dawson College's current peace and sustainability initiatives was this first response of our administration who facilitated community building through Nature in the planting of the Peace Garden. This strategy of connecting the land or Nature with community building, peace-making and wellbeing eventually became the heart of much of the work done at the Dawson College.

Over the year's employees (faculty and administration alike) championing the need for an institutionalized Peace & Sustainability action plan worked to cultivate social capital to yield community collaboration on what we firmly believe are two interrelated and interdependent issues, peace & sustainability. In 2016 we finally saw the very beginning of this hard work manifest itself in the current Strategic Plan. The

Strategic Plan 2016-2021 (SP) redefined our Mission, Vision and values as well as identifies nine goals. The SP not only reflects the more than 10 years of hard work by faculty and staff to push the sustainability dossier as a priority, but also institutionalizes this priority by its inclusion in the Strategic Plan. Effectively, the inclusion of peace and sustainability explicitly in the Strategic Plan means that for at least five years it will have dedicated resources, funding and the institutional support.

Dawson College & the Sustainable Campuses Network

While the catalyst for the peace building and sustainability initiatives on campus were sparked by the 2006 shooting, it was the Sustainable Campuses Initiative (which later became a crucial piece of the Living Campus initiative), that built the partnerships and continued to motivate stakeholders overtime to get Dawson College to where we are now. This network is crucial to being able to demonstrate the effectiveness of broader change beyond our own community. Additionally, this initiative brought student research into the classroom both at Dawson College and at our partner institutions, which directly affected on-campus sustainability initiatives. The Sustainable Campuses initiative originates from research pursued by Dr. Gisela Frias, department of Geography at Dawson. She was initially awarded funding by the Canadian International Research Development Centre (IRDC) and then later by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to continue this project.

The Sustainable Campuses research project utilized a community based participatory action research methodology. The research project aimed to:

- 1) create a network of post secondary education institutions and community organizations in Mexico, including Universidad Pedagogica Nacional at Cuernavaca, Aylaya and Galiena Campuses, Univerisdad Autonoma del Estado Mexico, Universidad Politecnica del Estado de Morelos and Ciudades Verdes with Dawson College, to research the environmental and peace building sustainability work being done on each respective campus;
- 2) create the conditions for the sharing of best practices;
- 3) training of students through internships that facilitated service learning and the professional development of employees; and
- 4) contribute to the growing body of research that incorporates Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge systems as a part of sustainability research.

This project essentially created a network of living schools whose aim was to reconnect its students, community and Nature in an educational milieu while doing crucial research. Fundamental to this research project, as it relates to the work in which we are engaged as an institution, was firstly defining sustainability as a whole – not as environmental best practices that were dislocated from Traditional Ecological Knowledge, environmental justice, economics and politics. Secondly, Dr. Frias's intentional decentring of academic knowledge production as being the primary source of expertise was the other crucial bit that eventually framed our peace & sustainability work at the College. This carved out a space for students to become experts in their own right through their own sustainability projects and internship exchanges with our Mexican partners. This working definition of sustainability and engagement with other-than ivory tower knowledge holders and producers is central to our Living Campus work at Dawson.

Sustainability at Dawson College

What makes our path towards sustainability particularly exciting is that it is not confined to waste management or emissions reduction. We have purposefully centered our work on the twin principles of peace and sustainability to effect an institutional culture of wellbeing for our entire community. We ground sustainability through: 1) building relationships between employees and students; 2) students, employees and Nature; 3) projects, initiatives and activities in and out of the classroom; 4) as well as with the community beyond our doorstep.

(2018 -2019 mid-term Sustainability Report)

Sector	Metrics & Status
Academics	<p>43% of all departments at the college offer at least one sustainability focused course</p> <p>16% of all courses at Dawson are sustainability focused</p> <p>33% of College research is sustainability related (as defined by AASHE)</p> <p>84% increase in faculty using Dawson Campus for teaching and learning from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018 academic year</p> <p>20% of Sustainability Office budget used for sustainability focused course development</p>
Engagement	<p>Student orientation and new staff include sustainability components</p> <p>Monarch Butterfly Breeding and Tagging Program (staff & student developed and maintained)</p> <p>Projects for Peace: Urban Restoration Rooftop Microhabitat Biodiversity Zone (student & staff developed and maintained)</p> <p>Ahsen Nikontate'kén:'a Kaiénthon (Three Sisters Rooftop Garden) & Medicinal Plant Garden (staff & student service learning project)</p> <p>40,000 Honey Bees located on fourth floor green rooftop</p>

	<p>80 % increase in student participation in SustainabiliTEAM (2016-2018) – student volunteer program responsible for all rooftop garden maintenance & Peace Garden.</p> <p>Outreach development to local organizations to jump-start a Living Campus model into their organization</p>
Operations	<p>100% Carbon Neutral (starting 2017-18 academic year)</p> <p>70% reduction in Natural Gas (NG)& Refrigerants (R) since 1990</p> <p>51 % reduction in NG, R and Electricity (E) since 2010</p> <p>36% reduction in NG, R, E, Waste and Travel since 2010</p> <p>Decreased water consumption per user and/ per square meter</p> <p>85% of paper at College is recycled</p> <p>50% of all electronics purchases are energy efficient and end of life management (EPEAT) certified</p> <p>70% of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste is diverted from landfills</p> <p>71% of new waste sorting stations installed around campus (compost, recycling and landfill destined waste)</p> <p>Registrar's office reduced paper use by 3.4 million sheets</p> <p>7,500 light fixtures replaced with LED</p> <p>College-wide composting</p>
Planning & Administration	<p>6000 students participated in sustainability projects & initiatives in 2017-2018 academic year</p> <p>In progress, 60% of all Dawson</p>

	<p>Foundation funds are placed in sustainable investments</p> <p>Student & Staff wellness free initiatives (Yoga, daily meditation, reducing stress & anxiety workshops, Sustainable Happiness Certificate, reduced rates for staff taking fitness classes, free tuition for staff taking courses at the Dawson College Centre for Training and Development)</p> <p>All external contractors hired by the College pay a living wage to their employees</p>
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Conclusion

While the institutionalization process has only begun in the past two years at Dawson College since the approval of the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan we have been able to achieve an increase:

- 1) In employee and student engagement in extracurricular sustainability activities and projects;
- 2) Student volunteerism in sustainability initiatives around the College;
- 3) The number of courses and curricula with a sustainability focus or modules (in and outside of the science programs);
- 4) Community awareness that sustainability is not solely defined by the environmental sciences but includes social equity, economics and politics in order to frame useful strategies to mitigate the worst affects of climate change.

In my mind, the objectives of the Peace Centre and the Office of Sustainability over the next few years should be:

- 1) Document
 - a. All processes on how to turn a school into a living school.
- 2) Data Collection & Analysis,
 - a. Work with Quality Assurance and Planning Office to collect qualitative data, and HR to check for tracking on effects of Living School on employees, with admissions etc.
- 3) Work with current CEGEP partners to pilot at other colleges and track data.
- 4) Expand the Living Campus network
 - a. Start piloting projects at those schools/organizations, collect data, share best practices and work to make local, regional changes.
- 5) Develop a plan and proposal for adaptation within the CEGEP network

The outcome we desire, namely shifting the cegep network into a network of Living Campuses, is by no means guaranteed, there are many challenges to achieving this goal. However, it is a strategy that has great potential not only to shift the entire educational system but every other government run institution. Schools are the

foundation of our modern democratic systems, By leveraging the positionality of educational institutions to build bridges between communities and government systems this could be one of many different effective strategies to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation.

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