



# Healthy School = Healthy Students

In March 2011, Écolita was extremely proud and excited to announce it had been accepted to participate at the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the [EAT WELL & LIVING GREEN EXPO](#) which took place at le Palais des Congrès in Montréal from March 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>. Every year, this exposition features “well-chosen partners and exhibitors capable of responding to the constant and ever growing public interest regarding quality foods, ecological and therapeutic products and services.”

Éco-lita was the first school ever to exhibit at the Montréal or the Québec City fairs. At first glance, it may seem bizarre for a school to be present at such an exposition. Here are a few reasons why Éco-lita fit right in:

- **Principal’s Passion for Healthy Food.** About three years ago, I asked all parents if they would be interested in receiving weekly baskets of organic produce. At the time, my own mother asked me why I spent so much energy on the food my students ate. It is very simple. My students cannot learn if their bodies and brains are unhealthy! Unfortunately, only 2 people answered yes. I would still like Éco-lita to become a drop off center for organic produce for its students and the whole community. Côteau-du-Lac, Rigaud, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, and now St-Lazare have their own markets. I would really like Éco-lita to become a little market for its families and Vaudreuil-Dorion residents.
- **Pure Drinking Water.** Last year, we raised funds to have a water filter installed in the school. Drinking quality water is vital to good health. I encourage all students to drink as much water as they can. Most water, including municipal water, contains many elements which can be devastating especially to a young child’s health. In addition, parents do not have to buy water bottles which contribute more waste. I’m not even going to talk about the nasty effects of plastic on our bodies! For more info, see this article ["Clean Water is Crucial to a Child's Development"](#)
- **Brain Gym®.** All our students have been doing Brain Gym® twice a day since 2008. These simple movements are “used to enhance the capacity for whole brain learning. Educational Kinesthetics is a system for empowering learners of any age by using movement to enable reaching one’s maximum potential. The physical movements enable children and adults to become alert, focused and ready to learn.” A very good friend of mine, Lisa Marcovici, is the Québec pioneer for Brain Gym®. Although staff members had an introduction to Brain Gym last year, all of them will be getting more training. You can learn more about it on her [Québec BrainGym website](#).

- **Vegetation.** If you take a look around the school, you will see that through the years, Grandpa Toto and Grandma (my parents) have worked very hard with all the students at making our school greener. Éco-lita must have about 200 plants, trees, flowers, and shrubs. Parents have also donated trees and other plants from their own gardens. For the past few months, Ms. Piotrowski has been reading up on winter gardens and school gardens. Our fundraising committee is also working on getting funds and donations to start Éco-lita's own organic garden. In this garden, we will have fruit, vegetables, and herbs. Planting and maintaining a garden is an exciting learning experience which covers many objectives from the Ministry of Education at all grade levels.
- **Composting.** In November 2010, the environmental coordinator for Vaudreuil-Dorion was very surprised when we called to invite her to Éco-lita for a composting workshop. Once again, we were the first school ever to ask for these services. Mme Leroux, explained the benefits of composting to all students from pre-k 2 to grade 6. Each group planted a fir tree for their classrooms with compost which will be transplanted outside in the spring. You can read the newspaper article on the [web](#). In April 2011, one of our students built a huge compost bin for our school. Now we can compost every day!
- **Worm Farm.** For Earth Day 2011, students from grades 3 to 6 read up on and created our own worm composters. Now all students can simply feed our friendly worms with their left-over fruit and veggies, pieces of paper, plant clippings, etc in their own classrooms. The compost, of course, will be used in our flower gardens for extra beautiful plants!
- **Low V.O.C. Paint:** Although much more expensive, we use low [V.O.C.](#) paint on our walls. We also try to paint during longer breaks or summer vacations. Little lungs are very sensitive to any type of toxin. To make sure we do not overburden our students' respiratory systems, chemical products are severely restricted at Éco-lita.
- **Visual Imagery.** In January 2011, I started using visual imagery as part of our drama class with students from grade 2 to grade 6. I explained to students how the best athletes in the world use visual imagery to help them. Using visual imagery in class helps students learn easily, creatively, and without stress by allowing them to recognize what they already know, and therefore, accelerating learning. Students also increase concentration and memory skills. The use of positive, relaxing images helps all of us reduce stress. As a matter of fact, the number one comment I get from students after doing visual imagery is "I feel so relaxed!" This is great since we learn more when we are relaxed. Children naturally think in images all of the time. They know things with all of their senses. Since learning occurs throughout the entire brain, it is essential to be able to do this. Unfortunately, we lose this natural ability to learn with our sensory images unless we reinforce it.
- **Mind/Body Connection.** In 2010, I sent you information regarding [Dr. Daniel Amen's](#) "ANTs" or Automated Negative Thoughts. We teach our students that our thoughts are not always the truth. We are in charge of our own thoughts and we need to stamp out the "ANTs". Bad thoughts make us stressed, depressed, and sick. Good thoughts make

us happy and healthy. We need to talk back to our brains and tell them to think positively. Despite being very smart and outgoing, one of our students had major “ANTs”: She would say things such as: “I’m not good. I can’t do this. Nobody likes me, etc.” After working with her, she scored the highest mark of all student applicants for her private high school entrance exam!

- **Bully-free School.** To keep bullying under check, this is a recurring theme at the school. The students have fantastic ideas on making sure that our school is 100% bully-free. We constantly present projects to kids to keep reminding them how bullying can have a huge negative impact on anyone for many years. We continue to encourage all students and parents not to let one little incident go by. It is simply never tolerated!
- **Canadian Association for Stress-free schools.** I work closely with members of this [association](#) to make sure that we are doing everything we can to keep our school stress-free. This does not mean that we eliminate stressful situations such as oral presentations, exams, new situations. We provide tools for these so students can confront stressful situations throughout their lives. On the other hand, certain stressors such as bullying and being yelled at are unacceptable.
- **Meditation.** There is so much research confirming the benefits of meditation, I will not even attempt to discuss all of them here. Instead, I invite you to talk to people who meditate or visit this [website](#). During one of our pedagogical days in 2011, all teachers were initiated to meditation and we discussed how we can best use this to help our students. Teachers unanimously decided that meditation was definitely something to look into, and all of them were willing to do it with their students.
- **Whole Child Education.** A comprehensive approach to learning recognizes that in order for young people to thrive in our rapidly changing world, we need to nurture their development in a number of different but interrelated areas: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, artistic, and spiritual. Together, these elements support the development of a child who is: Intellectually active; physically, verbally, socially and academically competent; empathetic, kind, caring and fair; creative and curious; disciplined, self-directed and goal oriented; a critical thinker; confident; cared for and valued. How do we develop the whole child at Éco-lita? We focus on 4 integrated elements:
  - Whole Learning Approach: We create [learning environments](#) that foster academic excellence and develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (more on this later)– critical thinking and problem solving; communication and collaboration; creativity and innovation; digital-age literacy and emotional intelligence. We [personalize learning](#) to respond to each child’s gifts, needs, interests, and aspirations.
  - Whole Teacher Approach: We support and develop teachers in their role as facilitators of learning. Knowing that teachers make a significant difference in a child’s life, we create conditions that strengthen student-teacher relationships.
  - Whole Community Approach: We engage with parents as partners in whole child education on a personal level. We engage the resources and expertise of our local communities to enrich student learning and deepen community

- connections. We also expand partnerships with agencies and services and connect people of all ages.
- Whole World Perspective: We use technology and human connections to bring the world to the classroom and the classroom to the world.
  - Éco-lita is a member of the international [Holistic Education Network](#). Check us out in the school “tag”.
  - **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**: According to the research done by the Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (I am also part of this huge association), these are the skills our children will need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here is what the best international educators and specialists prone:
    - Our children deserve an education that emphasizes academic rigor as well as essential [21st Century Skills](#) (presentation done by National Middle School Association – Éco-lita is a member of NMSA) such as:
      - Life and Career Skills (leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, people skills, self-direction, social responsibility, initiative, cross-cultural skills, responsibility)
      - Learning and Innovation Skills (critical thinking, problem solving, communication, [creativity](#), collaboration)
      - Technology Skills (computer literacy, media awareness, information management)
    - We limit the potential of young people when we fail to create [communities of learning](#) in which students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.
    - Our children deserve to be prepared not solely to contribute to the global economy, but to participate as citizens, community members and leaders in our broad, interrelated society.
    - The success of each learner can only be achieved through a whole child approach to learning and teaching. Sir Ken Robinson on future education.
  - **Joint Consortium for School Health**: In collaboration with the World Health Organization, federal, provincial, and territorial governments from across Canada work together to promote the health of children and teenagers in the school setting. If you go to the website <http://www.jcsh-cces.ca>, you will see that Québec is not even part of this amazing consortium. Nevertheless, Éco-lita Trilingue is still part of this Consortium in developing a [Comprehensive School Health Program](#) by looking into and continually improving our social and physical environment, our teaching and learning, our healthy school policy, partnerships and services.

I could still go on and on, but I think that you understand why Écol-lita felt right at home at the Eat Well & Living Green Expo. We are truly responding to the present need to teach the whole child who will then become a global citizen in the future. We want to be more than an excellent school; we want to be a model school for all public and private schools. The visitors at the Expo are part of the rapidly increasing number of people who are concerned about leading a healthy lifestyle.