

Case-Study: Exploring the Early Stages of an Alternative School in Montréal, Québec

Frédéric Farmer, McGill University, Canada

Abstract: The present qualitative case-study features the voices of the three educators-founders of a small alternative school in Québec, CA. Firstly, the paper explores the underlying factors that pushed the trio to leave the traditional system to create an alternative school and, secondly, presents some of the challenges encountered during the inaugural year. The most salient theme to emerge was a critique of the teachers' previous working conditions in state-sponsored education system. They reported incongruences between individual and organizational goals; low level of collegiality and stimulating professional interactions; a lack of support for professional risk-taking and experimentation; and the inability to influence school decisions. In the second part of the paper, challenges of the inaugural year highlighted the absence of well-defined educational aims and goals; development of collegiality among the staff; and relationships with the families/households. All these aspects will need to be addressed moving forward to ensure the sustainability of the school.

Keywords: Alternative Education, Teacher Working Conditions, Alternative School, Professional Autonomy

Introduction

In September 2019, a small alternative school launched its inaugural year in Montréal, Québec, Canada. The school was co-founded by a trio of teachers with various professional backgrounds who shared a sense of dissatisfaction with the 'traditional' form of schooling. The school creates a learning environment that reflects the founders' values, beliefs, and vision for education and for society. This paper presents a single holistic case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that aims to provide a deeper understanding of the individual reality of three teachers, their experiences, and the underlying factors that led these teachers to leave the traditional school system to create an alternative school rather than working from within to create changes to traditional schooling. Additionally, the paper also presents some of the challenges and tensions encountered by the teachers during the inaugural year of the alternative school.

Prior studies have documented the links between teachers' working conditions and their overall dissatisfaction with the traditional form of schooling around the world. More specifically, the teachers' feelings of disconnect between the realities in the classrooms and the needs of the students and accountability policies in state-sponsored education systems is a significant factor leading to teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Harmond, 2017; Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020; Ladd, 2011; Loeb et al., 2005; Renzulli et al., 2011; Torres, 2016). That is, teachers' working conditions are connected to their emotions, sense of self-efficacy, and whether they decide to look for other employment opportunities (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). Individuals looking to improve their working conditions may be attracted to alternative schools, which operate at the outer-edges of state-sponsored education systems, allowing for more flexibility.

This case study extends the prior literature by outlining the underlying working conditions that have motivated three teachers to leave the traditional schooling system and establish an alternative one. Accordingly, the results from this study describe how the working conditions of three teachers have shaped and influenced their decisions to create an educational change by opening an alternative school. The findings of this study inform educational policy and literature on teacher working conditions, and teacher retention in mass public school systems. Further, the experiences and challenges of these teachers in an alternative school provide insights for administrators and policymakers with teacher-founders' vision on how to better apply the educational program through an alternative mode of delivery. Therefore, this case study serves as an example and a reminder of the capacity of teachers to create educational change when empowered, in this case through professional autonomy.

Teacher Working Conditions

Teacher working conditions is an umbrella term for a multitude of factors reported by teachers as paramount to the quality of their work. Basica and Rottmann (2011, p. 789) defined teacher working conditions through the following list of factors: "class size and manageable workload; time available for professional, non-teaching work; resource adequacy; collegiality and stimulating professional interactions; opportunities to learn and improve; support for

professional risk-taking and experimentation; ability to influence school decisions; and congruence between individual and organizational goals.”

Teacher working conditions and dissatisfaction with the school leadership have been documented among the main reasons teachers move to different schools or quit the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Harmond, 2017). Additionally, studies have shown that teacher dissatisfaction is more affected by characteristics such as teacher autonomy and quality of the administration than metrics such as salary and physical conditions of the school and classroom (Ladd, 2011; Loeb et al., 2005; Renzulli et al., 2011; Torres, 2016). Moreover, Stearns et al. (2014, 2015) showed that a professional culture based on a shared vision supporting collegiality is of utmost importance for teachers. Teachers have been speaking up about the various elements making up their working conditions since the creation of the state-sponsored mass education system (King & Peart 1992; Larson 1977; Murphy 1990; Smaller 1991; Tyack 1974; Urban 1982). These elements are often neglected by administrators and policy makers (Basica & Rottmann, 2011). Instead, the focus is placed on teachers’ abilities, which pays little to no attention to the context in which they carry on their duties. The assumption that quality teaching, and therefore quality learning by the students, does not depend on the environmental context is seen by Bailey (2000) as paramount to the reason why policy and administrative decisions fail or set unintended consequences, frequently affecting the professional context of teachers (Priestley et al., 2015).

More recently, neoliberal policies have fundamentally affected the role of teachers in their classrooms (Strong-Wilson, 2021). In particular, the ongoing erosion of teachers’ agentic power resulting from accountability policies characterized by standardization and bureaucratization has been well documented in Canada (Beck, 2017; Sharma & Sanford, 2018; Wiebe & Macdonald, 2014) and other Western countries (Au, 2011; Hardy, 2018; Ingersoll & Collins, 2017; Kilderry, 2015; Spector, 2018; Winter, 2017). Standardization leading to uniformity reduces teachers’ ability to affect the content and type of learning that takes place in their own classrooms, penalizes innovative practices, and reduces teachers’ capacity to address individuals’ needs, limiting them to the role of classroom managers (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017). Further reinforcing these working conditions, teachers are held accountable for their students’ performance on standardized examinations (Winter, 2017) leading to a performance-based culture in schools (Keddie et al., 2011; Sahlberg, 2010; Wilkins, 2011).

Additionally, multiple studies have connected the quality of teachers’ working conditions to teacher retention (e.g., Ingersoll 2007; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; McLaughlin & Yee 1988; Quartz et al., 2005). Similarly, working conditions are connected to the overall professional satisfaction which “arises from the extent to which they believe they can successfully meet students’ academic, social, and emotional needs” (Basica & Rottmann, 2011, p. 795).

In its current state, mass-public education systems “seem impermeable to change” (Farrell, 2007, p. 200), thus leaving teachers with little hope to see their working conditions improve. However, Farrell (2007) presents several successful alternative educational systems where student learning has been significantly improved, and accordingly where teachers’ roles, responsibilities and expectations have been redefined leading to significantly different working conditions. The present study is aiming to contribute to the intersection of teachers’ working conditions and alternative education.

Alternative Education

Alternative schools co-exist with systems of mass public education offering diverse approaches to the rigid state-sponsored education system. These schools constantly evolve and adapt to the needs of students, making it difficult to develop an all-encompassing definition of alternative education (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Farrell (2007) makes a similar point: “the programs discussed here are somewhat anarchic, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and constantly changing” (p. 220). Acknowledging the diversity in alternative education, Raywid (1999) describes an alternative school as an “empty glass to be filled with any sort of liquid” (p. 47). Alternative school leaders through continuous formative administrative decisions shape the programs; consequently, the trajectories of alternative schools can evolve drastically over time. Raywid (1999) proposes three areas that can help in understanding an alternative school: the student profile, the purpose of the school, and the level of autonomy with respect to accountability. The student profile is a celebration of the commonalities in the student body. These commonalities feature as central tenets in the purpose of an alternative school. In other words, what are the needs and realities of the student body and how can the school

support them? The level of autonomy is crucial in understanding the capacity the alternative school commits to its students, rather than to the state's requirements.

Lange & Sletten (2002) synthesized the shift from the 1970s progressive approach to alternative education to a conservative approach in the 1980s and began to serve students characterized as *misfits*. These students often came from disadvantaged backgrounds (Arnové & Strout, 1978). Arnove and Strout (1978) warned that this practice would lead to the stigmatization of alternative education as a service offered to “abnormal” students incapable of successfully operating in the mainstream. McNulty and Roseboro (2009) have shown this stigmatization to be real for students: “students perceived this alternative school as inherently identifying them as abnormal and, in this identification, forced students to adopt a stigmatized identity” (p. 424).

At its origins, alternative education was focused on finding alternatives to improve student learning. As Farrell (2007) reminded us, “Whatever else schools are, they are places where learning is expected to occur. Everything else, such as management, administration, policy work and teacher development, is presumably in support of that fundamental goal of learning” (p. 208). Farrell (2007) reported on the commonalities among alternative education programs based on over 200 case-studies: child-centered pedagogies, active learning, multi-graded classrooms, involved communities and parents, co-constructed learning material, and a combination of experienced/inexperienced staff and community members. Moreover, these programs have been shown to “produce remarkable learning gains among even the poorest and most disadvantaged children” (Farrell, 2007, p. 219). Central to these schools are teachers who act as “promoters and drivers of such change”, continuously adjusting the structure and practice through best practices and innovation-diffusion sharing (Farrell, 2007, p. 219).

In an alternative school context, teachers can find themselves with greater professional autonomy, but might, as Basica & Rottmann (2011) explained, face certain dilemmas when trying to reconcile the national curriculum and standardized examinations with their innovative practices. However, alternative education can allow teachers to experience and develop a new vision of schooling (Ford, 2014). The present study presents some of the challenges and tensions encountered by three teachers as they develop their own new vision of schooling upon having gained greater professional autonomy.

Methodology

The current paper follows the case-study methodology developed by Yin (2009), structuring the investigation of the founding of the Mile-Ed school from within its context (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2009). This methodology was selected to “identify themes or categories of behavior and events” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 16). That is, the boundaries between the phenomenon (creation of an alternative school) and the professional context of the founders are ambiguous, and insights into one can enhance our understanding of the other (Yin, 2009). Moreover, case-study findings, according to Merriam (2001), have the potential to directly influence policy, procedures, and future research.

While the case-study methodology is framed around Yin (2009), it is informed by Smith's (1987; 1990; 2005) institutional ethnography. Foundational to this approach is the tenet that people are experts of their own conditions and should be encouraged to speak for themselves and their experience (Smith, 1987). As such, the inquiry is guided by the voices of the founders and “begins from the site of people's experience” (Smith, 1990, p. 43).

Context of the Study

The alternative school, which I will refer to as Mile-Ed, launched its inaugural year with a cohort of 29 students ranging from ages 10 to 15. Mile-Ed's teaching faculty consisted of three full-time teachers/administrators and three part-time teachers. The school is accredited by the government as a private alternative French middle school.

Mile-Ed distinguishes itself through its adherence to a holistic educational approach, one that is focused on student-centered learning, individual growth, and empowerment as its main objectives. Creating and maintaining a space where students' intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs are met is central to the school. More succinctly, Mile-Ed describes itself as pursuing the following goals: (1) To anchor the curriculum in each student's articulation of their academic, personal, and long-term life goals; (2) To create an effective 21st century learning

environment where learners are happy, feel cared for, and are engaged in their learning; and (3) To meet the highest global academic standards outlined in the provincial curriculum of the Ministry of Education (MÉ; 2006).

Fundamentally, Mile-Ed's commitment to providing individualized support to its students is reflected in the decision to limit the size of the institution. The small number of students is seen as an asset in building a supportive community. Students work regularly across multi-aged groups, and the teacher's role is that of facilitator, fostering the individual strengths and development of each learner as they become independent, self-aware, and lifelong learners.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this paper were collected during the inaugural year of Mile-Ed as part of a larger research project. The data corpus features primarily individual interview transcripts of conversations with each of the founders that occurred in French. The interviews occurred in June 2020 over videoconference due to the COVID-19 public health measure restricting access to research sites and lasted between forty and sixty minutes. Only the audio files were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company. I translated the transcripts into English with the help of another bilingual researcher. Also available for this study were the field notes, gathered over the course of the inaugural year by members of the research team including myself; however, their limited use will be explored in the next part.

The larger research which this case-study is part of is grounded in social-constructionism where "meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather than inhering within individuals" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.85). Therefore, I selected thematic analysis to explore the social and cultural context of the teachers' lived experiences as it arises through individual interviews (Braun & Clark, 2006). Identifying and selecting themes is dependent on the researcher, and therefore cannot be separated or taken as "stand-alone" (Ely et al., 1997, p. 205-6). As such, the reliance on the connection between the data and themes had to be strong to be considered (Patton, 1990). Lastly, the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was calibrated and supplemented when deemed appropriate with the data from the field notes.

Results

The analysis yielded two overarching themes: (a) Teacher Working Conditions; (b) Teachers' Challenges in Alternative Education, each with several sub-themes.

Teacher Working Conditions

Teachers' working conditions affect their emotions, agency, and self-efficacy, and ultimately the decision of whether to maintain teaching employment or look for other professional opportunities both within and outside of teaching (Basica & Rottmann, 2011). The different factors making up the working conditions are embedded in the teaching context, creating a complex set of dependent variables that make it challenging to single out and or identify the root causes. Teachers in this study articulated four subthemes associated with their working conditions: (a) Congruence between Individual and Organizational Goals; (b) Collegiality and Stimulating Professional Interactions; (c) Opportunities to Experiment, Learn, and Improve; and (d) Ability to Influence School Decisions.

Congruence between Individual and Organizational Goals. At a macro level, the trio explained in their own ways how the organizational goals of the schools they worked at did not align with their personal educational philosophy. Their dissatisfaction was consistent with the results reported by Stearns et al. (2014, 2015).

At the core of their shared educational philosophy is the view that teaching is primarily about facilitating individual growth and self-discovery. That is, the focus is on supporting students to grow and develop, while the academic results are viewed as a by-product of the individual's progress. The current state-sponsored education system isolates teachers in their classroom and creates immense pressures associated with performance culture and accountability measures. This represented a major barrier for the founders' philosophy. They denounced the current mandate of traditional teaching asking them to "perform in the short term, because anyway you can't see the student after your course is done. Basically, you've fulfilled your mandate as soon as [the student] passed the evaluation at the

end of the year.” The performance-based system is designed to passively coerce teachers into tailoring their teaching to maximize their students' performance on evaluations. Limiting teachers' mandate to increasing student scores reduces the impact teachers can have on the holistic development of their students. Furthermore, a focus on an individual's growth is a lengthy commitment and cannot be limited to segregated subject areas with a specific limited time in a schedule.

The founders expressed being faced with a dilemma: help a student improve and grow as an individual, or prepare them to perform on a specific task (i.e., standardized examinations). Teaching only to get the students to be deemed competent with respect to government standards does not guarantee students' development from within. The finite instructional time with their students forces teachers to distribute their teaching between preparing the student for the artificial environment of examinations or for their experience in the real world. Overall, the three founders were critical of the uniformity brought about by standardized evaluations.

Collegiality and Stimulating Professional Interactions. In this performance-based culture, the founders described a low level of collegial relationships. The founders' focus on individuals' growth clashed with that of their colleagues, who limited their teaching to the traditional mandate. The founders critiqued the feeling of detachment and nonchalance of teachers with respect to students' progress: “When a child failed a task, what I heard from former colleagues was ‘Oh well, he didn't work, well, he's always absent.’”

Teachers dissociating themselves from their students was counterproductive for the founders who saw students' success as a reflection of their own performance as teachers. They attributed this attitude to the inability of teachers to have a more profound impact on their students. They connected this lack of accountability to an overall weak cohesive educational approach created by the school's leadership team.

Opportunities to Experiment, Learn, and Improve. Through field observations during the inaugural year at Mile-Ed, I witnessed the integral role of reflexivity in their pedagogies, with the founders consistently taking the opportunity to discuss, analyze, and adjust their practices. When asked about the ideal type of teacher, this member shared the following description:

A teacher who is constantly questioning their work. By that I mean people who put in impossible hours, constant self-reflection, constant questioning. But for that you must be more than passionate about your job, you must be devoted body and soul. Are we entitled to expect this of teachers? I don't know.

For the founders, the constant questioning of one's pedagogical approach was only possible through experimentation in the classroom to determine the best combination to unleash students' learning potential.

While believing in the importance of reflexivity, they understood it was beyond the mandate of traditional teachers. The founders reported feeling unacknowledged, and that there was no discussion and implementation of best practices. More importantly, they also reported lacking the support of their administration, which they attributed to the fact that their educational approach stood outside the traditional mandate, as noted above. In their experience, they recalled administrators who attempted to discourage risk-taking.

My experience with school management is: [it acts] as a brake rather than as a carrier, a facilitator, a creator. Management in a school puts a brake. A budgetary, management, organizational and planning brake, it really acts as a brake rather than a support.

The lack of administrative support for pedagogical experimentation was a prominent challenge in their working conditions. Furthermore, the founders saw administrators avert non-traditional pedagogies, and as such played a role in the lack of professional commitment to innovate and adapt pedagogies to the needs of the students. In this environment, most practitioners simply stayed within the comfort of traditional practices.

Ability to Influence School Decisions. The founders have been committed to uncover the needs of their students. Nevertheless, while teaching in the traditional school system, their voices were silenced by administrations in the decision-making process related to student support. The founders described a situation where “the director guards the administration and has no reality of a pedagogy, a reality of the field, a reality of the students.” The disconnect between the administration and the teachers' reality, together with the administration's silencing of

teachers' voices, generated a feeling of powerlessness among the founders. One founder explained the larger issue involving the mandated curriculum, the graduation requirements, and credentialism:

What I see is a system that has many paths, many ways to get to graduation. It's not difficult to get the 54 credits required. So, I see a lot of possibilities for creating pathways. [...] There is a lot of inefficiency in the system and even a race for credits, a kind of inflation made by the competition between high schools. So, it ends up being students who have 70 to 90 credits graduating. It's a decentralization of the real needs of students who focus more on building a good record to be accepted in particular schools.

This account places the responsibility of the "race for credits" onto the different schools, while identifying the effort as ineffective at addressing the real needs of the students. Central to the founders' critique is the role of administrators' encouragement of performance-based pedagogies and the pursuit of credentialism. The founders understood they would be unable to change the educational structures from within, but saw enough flexibility in the Quebec Educational Program to implement the pedagogy they believe in.

The professional experiences and working conditions in traditional schools led the founders to seek professional autonomy. Alternative education offered a path where they could remove the administrative barriers and establish a leadership where "a principal must be a facilitator above all to bring out the essence of a school." Consequently, the three members took on the responsibilities of administrators and began creating a space that would eventually become Mile-Ed.

Teachers' Challenges in Alternative Education

The sheer scale of a project like creating a new school is hard to quantify, but one thing is consistent in the literature: the enormous difficulties that must be overcome (McConaghy, 2004). Through the inaugural year of Mile-Ed and the exploration of the alternative educational space, a few critical challenges emerged. The founders articulated three main aspects: (1) Educational Aims and Goals of Mile-Ed; (2) Collegiality; and (3) Relation between School and Families/Households.

Educational Aims and Goals of Mile-Ed. The ways in which the founders described their school from the marketing discourse to casual conversation about the organization relied primarily on what the school is not. Essentially, the founders could not articulate the student profile they were creating a school for. This lack of organizational clarity around a vision and mission generated issues in all facets of the school.

On the topic of prospective families, on several occasions, the founders showed discomfort about the "alternative school" classification. In Quebec, the stigma that alternative schools serve children who cannot function in the "normal" educational system, as also stated in Arnove and Strout (1978) in America's context, affects families' impression of the school. The following passage illustrates the dilemma they were, and are still, faced with:

And there's still a lot of pressure on us not to be seen as an alternative leftist school out of the system. It's by choice, the idea is for us to stay within the system [...] so the parent trusts us that all learning is perfectly validated, and you can leave with that baggage there and continue to a regular path which is CEGEP or elsewhere.

More importantly, this passage speaks to the level of autonomy of Mile-Ed within Québec's educational landscape. Their commitment to the educational program, and to the attention paid to the next step in their students' academic journey is the reason, even though they created a new school, they remained within the Québec education system. While the founders' educational philosophy is certainly aligned with more progressive pedagogies, mainly through their belief in student-centered and self-directed learning, these stances come from their own experimentation and lack any engagement with established practices and literatures. The absence of well-articulated educational aims and objectives of Mile-Ed was rationalized as an opportunity to experiment through the agility of the school, a characteristic of alternative schools (Raywid, 1999).

In their role as administrators, the founders' responsibilities extend beyond their personal teaching conditions. Initially observed during field visits and corroborated through the conversations I had with the founders, two key

facets of administration posed challenges over the course of the initial year: collegiality with fellow teachers and relations with families/households of students.

Collegiality. The founders' critique of traditional education emphasized the lack of collaboration and pedagogical consistency between the different teachers because these conditions lowered their ability to support the progress of each individual student. The Mile-Ed educational framework envisioned by the founders addresses this issue by promoting consistency, for example, in the expectations of students regardless of academic subject.

Lacking a clearly defined vision and mission, the founders were incapable of appropriately onboarding the teachers into the Mile-Ed educational project. Furthermore, the way they defined the Mile-Ed teacher profile is elusive at best. One founder described the ideal candidate as "a teacher who reflects and intervenes each time they can do something that will bring the student closer to an optimal learning dynamic." That said, the inaugural year was characterized by experimentation by the founders, but the involvement of the rest of the staff was effectively inexistent.

Faced with the challenges of collaborative leadership and the fast-pace of running a school, communication and support of the school's part-time teaching staff was relegated to a second-order priority. The founders focused on the realization of their constantly evolving vision of Mile-Ed and forged ahead; however, they neglected to include and involve their teaching staff in the process. One member of the trio said, "This year we've really moved forward alone with our students, and we haven't been able to create a real team". To a certain extent, the desire to maintain control over the educational project of the Mile-Ed school created a boundary between themselves and the rest of the staff. The lack of communication meant the trios' decisions were passed down through emails, over-the-counter chat, and other informal means. For teachers, the continuous experimentation translated to a higher workload and generated a feeling of alienation. A part-time teacher described having to adapt to daily pivots by the founders by always having a lesson plan A, B and C.

An inability to create a cohesive team where the teaching staff is involved in the decision-making, if not addressed, can lead to a disconnect with the administrators. Not only are the founders replicating the same working conditions they themselves were critical of, but this time they are not the ones suffering from the lack of collegiality and autonomy. Unsurprisingly, at the end of the inaugural year, the school failed to retain a strong candidate with years of experience in the alternative education ecosystem.

Relation between School and Families/Households. Similarly, the development of a relationship with the families was a major challenge due to a lack of a clearly defined mission and vision, the stigma of alternative education, and expectations carried from traditional school. That is, the founders had to deconstruct prior beliefs and expectations, before they could explain the school's educational project and, consequently, gain families' trust.

The founders had to accompany not only the students but also their families through the Mile-Ed approach, flexible and relying on rapid iteration. This period of adaptation was a source of frustration for the founders, who perceived the process as limiting their work: "We often say this, ah if the parent would let us work! It doesn't mean much, but it's a good reflection, it's about trusting us." The founders' prior experience with parents was mixed and led them to be conservative about parental involvement in the school.

That said, at Mile-Ed, families are expected to fully entrust the educational processes and even extend it within their households. Consistency of the educational framework can compound the effects of students' growth and learning. For a newly established school, the relationship between the school and the families is gradually constructed through effective communication and has been lacking thus far.

A lack of trusting relationships between the families and the school can be detrimental to the overall educational approach whose success is intricately connected to the building of a community. Keeping a tight control over the educational project might be reassuring for the founders but opening to the broader school community and allowing all members to get involved has the potential to compound the positive effects of the educational model. Essentially, any and all matters present in a school that concern the overall goal of increasing opportunities for learning must include all levels of this environment, from students to teachers, administrators and families (Farrell, 2007).

Conclusion

The voices shared in this paper have provided a rich account from the perspective of the three founding teachers of the Mile-Ed school. Their decision to create a new school was based on discontentment with the working conditions in traditional mass-education system. The founders significantly reduced the potential barriers by assuming the administrative responsibilities themselves, yielding high levels professional autonomy. Hence, they have the flexibility and agility to implement change at the Mile-Ed school. However, the implementation of continuous experimentation without adequate consideration for the needs of the broader team, lack of communication, and involvement from the larger community can develop into top-down leadership and working conditions reminiscent of the traditional mass-education systems they criticized themselves.

Mile-Ed proposes an attractive alternative to traditional education by rejecting the push towards credentialism and a performance culture, focusing instead on the development of students as individuals while promoting the mastery of mandated essential knowledge in Québec (MÉ, 2006). More importantly, as this study has shown, the absence of a well-articulated organizational vision and mission is creating problems in every facet of the school. Moving into the second year of Mile-Ed, it will be important for the founders to clearly define and articulate the aims and goals of Mile-Ed. The current research initiative with the Mile-Ed school will continue the documentation of this alternative learning environment with a focus on the direct and indirect effects of this environment on students' development.

The founders of Mile-Ed are an example that once professional autonomy is increased, teachers' ability to create an environment where they can unleash the learning potential of their students is achievable. Conversely, the present case-study can also serve as a reminder that traditional working conditions with a lack of administrative support can diminish teachers' ability to positively impact their students.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frédéric Farmer: Frédéric Farmer is a Ph.D student in Educational Studies at McGill University which is located on the stolen land of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations - the traditional stewards of the territory. He received his master's degree in Educational Leadership from McGill University. His research interests include State-Sponsored Education, Settler-Colonial Studies, Anti-Colonial Educational Studies, Educational Sociology, and Philosophy of Education.