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## A lesson learned from these award-winning teachers

Innovative projects inspire students

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Stephane Cote has already spent \$11,000 of his own money to develop innovative programs for his students at Ecole primaire Lalande in Roxboro.

Now the Grade 6 teacher will have \$5,000 more to work with. He's won the prestigious Prime Minister's award for excellence in teaching, the only Quebec teacher to win the national distinction this year.

The money goes to the school, with the winner deciding how it will be spent - on education projects or equipment, for instance.

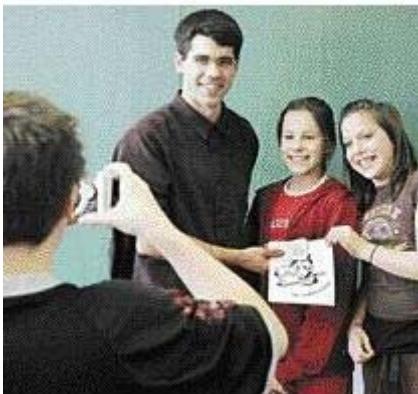
"I'm very excited and pleased," Cote said of his certificate of excellence, one of 15 handed out across Canada this year.

Three other Montreal teachers were awarded lesser certificates of achievement, which come with a \$1,000 prize.

"I believe in the projects I do but sometimes I'm ahead of (the Quebec Education Department's curriculum) reform so it's nice to have this affirmation."

In a recent Quebec history project, for instance, Cote had the students become filmmakers in order to learn their history.

Students had to calculate the cost of renting equipment and hiring actors. They had to prepare a storyboard, shoot the movie with a digital camera, then edit it



CREDIT: GORDON BECK, THE GAZETTE

"It's about offering a situation where a student can learn," says award-winning teacher Stephane Cote, posing with students (from left) Noemie Cardinal and Maude Regnier.

on the computer, adding special effects.

It culminated in a gala party and screening, where students got awards based on how much they had improved, not on how good their movie was.

The filmmaking "is something that seems to interest the students," Cote said.

"I'm not sure I really teach," Cote explained. "It's about offering a situation where a student can learn."

It's the second time he's been recognized by the Prime Minister's awards. Two years ago, he won a certificate of achievement.

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In an age of World of Warcraft and online dating, motivating kids in public school to play and practise viola can be daunting.

Theodora Stathopoulos, a music teacher at FACE School since 1991, has found a way to energize music students to practise:

She insists on hard work, but lards her lessons with serious praise that makes her students strive for excellence.

For that she was awarded the Prime Minister's certificate of achievement this year.

During a classroom visit, it was apparent she is the kind of teacher who can make a difference in a young person's life. She was rehearsing string players when we dropped in on the University St. school and heard her mix calls for more vibrato with lots of encouragement.

Parents and her colleagues admire her success at motivating students. Stathopoulos said she's been able to get "the kids to stay with the program and attract students who are more serious about string playing."

Since founding FACE's symphony orchestra in 1998, she has conducted its 60-plus members. She also conducts the school's junior and intermediate orchestras, as well as junior and senior chamber ensembles.

Emilie Gelinas-Nobel, 15, a viola player at the school, has known Stathopoulos "since Kindergarten" and finds she's "really very organized."

"She stays on top of five or six orchestras, and expects us to be very devoted to music."

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Gloria Chalupovitsch knows why she won her certificate of achievement:

"I never repeat myself. I try to get to know the kids before I even know what projects we're going to do," she said at Merton elementary school in Cote St. Luc.

Her specialty is cross-curricular and project-based learning, a fancy way of saying she uses media to get the students to learn their math, English and moral education lessons.

To help make the kids "more technologically savvy," Chalupovitsch just finished a project where students created clay models they later used in an animation film.

In moral education classes, the students saw the silent Charlie Chaplin movie The Great Dictator, with its anti-racism message. And they listened to Where's the Love?, a rap song by the Black Eyed Peas with lyrics:

"But if you only have love for your own race,

"Then you only leave space to discriminate."

Chalupovitsch makes her point about racism: "The problems are still not solved and the kids are becoming more aware of that" through these projects.

The whole point is to help students discover their talents, she added. "Some kids really don't know what they are good at, and if you only do just the reading and writing, they never find out."

Ahmed Bensaada's winning formula is to use computers to bring the basics of physics and chemistry to life.

That way his Grade 10 students learn their physical science course and computer applications at the same time.

He earned his certificate of achievement for his innovative work over 10 years at Ecole secondaire La Dauversiere on l'Acadie Blvd.

"I began using the project-based approach to teaching before it became part of the curriculum," he said.

He has created a website where students at the multi-ethnic school display highlights of their science projects. Students design their own projects and work at a pace that reflects their ability.

"Often it is not just the strongest students whose projects get published, but

those who put in more work and come up with something really interesting."

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