

Monarch Majesty



photo: © Anne Marie Di Michele

Reflections

on the

Dawson Monarch Nursery Project

Dawson College, 2016



photo: © Danyel Verdon

Introduction

Although they were not yet aware of the migratory journey of the monarch butterfly, the Purépecha and Otomí First Peoples of Mexico carefully cared for and protected them, calling them Daughters of the Sun or living flames. Their arrival at the end of the year coincided with the mystical celebration of the day of the dead. A Purépecha legend tells us that the monarch butterflies, with their fire colors, are the embodiment of the souls of the deceased who return each year on their own. For this reason, they valued them so much that they protected the forests in which they congregated to spend the winter, but kept that place a secret and did not allow anyone to disturb them. As a gesture of gratitude, they sowed paths of milkweed, the plant that fed the monarchs. In addition, it was thought that monarchs brought abundance to the families because their arrival coincides with the harvest season in the fields.

When I participated in Dawson College's Monarch Nursery Project initiative, it filled my mind with ideas, questions, and especially examples of how we can achieve emotional well-being. My professional training as a clinical psychologist for children and adolescents often puts me in challenging situations where I need to decide how to best support people recovering from emotional stress. My experience in this initiative gave me valuable insight for my practice. I observed the richness of how nurturing another living thing helps us achieve well-being.

I have been happy to witness how Dawson staff and students are attracted to caring for the caterpillars and butterfly. We tend to care for each other while we take care for the monarchs. I feel it also gives us the opportunity to see ourselves in the freedom they exert when they take flight and perhaps also helps reinforce a sense of liberty in us.

The monarch project at Dawson takes the College well-being for all value and directs it into action. I have seen how people smile, how their bodies "jump in happiness" and have heard shouts of joy when they witness the first flight of their butterfly, and these manifestations are contagious, respected, appreciated and multiplied. How wonderful that is.

*Luisa Montes, Clinical Psychologist
Sustainable Campuses Initiative
Dawson/Mexico Partnership*



photo: © Danyel Verdon

What a joy it was to be involved in this project!
I was excited everyday to take care of them and see what was new in their enclosure.
My social media feed was all about my “babies” and it was fun to see how other people reacted to my butterfly adventure.
#monarchswithoutborders #natureasmentor
My good friend who lives in Mexico, sent me this link about 1000s of butterflies appearing in Ohio and I felt so proud.
<http://mexiconewsdaily.com/facebook-butterflies/>
Thank you to Brenda for being a great coordinator and to all of you for sharing in this wonderful adventure!

Sarah Cartier - Faculty

I brought the cage into two second year Interior Design classes before the first chrysalis opened and a monarch emerged. The students were very interested in the project overall and were fascinated by the sequence of transformations from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly. They also become more knowledgeable about the monarchs in general. Most of the students could not believe the monarchs were robust enough to make the journey to Mexico. I also introduced the monarch project to my 3rd year students who were equally amazed and impressed by the ambitious quest of this seemingly fragile insect.

Scott Millar - Faculty



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Having the butterfly kit in the office sparked many conversations. I would say easily 3 a day – be it with colleagues or teachers dropping by the office. Even my friends outside the college were interested and would constantly ask for updates and loved seeing the many photos I had. I have had two friends come to the office to see them!

I can confidently say that having the caterpillars positively changed the dynamics in our office. It was something we all enjoyed talking about together. We would be excited about the changes we would see and surprised at how much could happen and wanted to share what we had seen with others.

It was also very nice to release them all together as a group. It was nice to have something to talk about beside work things and it was fun learning more about monarchs and sharing the knowledge.

I really enjoyed being a part of this project. It was unfortunate about the diseases, but hopefully that can be addressed for the next time. This was such a great project and I hope to be a part of it again.

Allison Freund - Student AccessAbility Centre

We placed our kit on the Circulation Desk in the Library. The students were very interested and excited to stop by and see the progress of our caterpillars and chrysalises. A lot of cell phone pictures were being taken. We put the information sheets on the desk and the students were bursting with questions!

An older student, who had emigrated from Iran, was so thrilled with the idea that the fuzzy worm could turn into a beautiful butterfly. She politely requested permission to take a picture to send to her children and returned each day to see them grow and share new photos with her children.

We learned so much, as well as having a hand in educating others passing through the Library. We were hesitant at first to participate, but have been tremendously overwhelmed by the experience and would do it again.

Suzanne Bellefleur - Library



photo: © Brenda Lee

We absolutely loved participating in the Monarch Nursery Project! Countless conversations were held daily about the monarchs, no matter the stage they were in. Having the monarchs in our workplace generally brightened the mood of everyone – especially on days when a caterpillar made their chrysalis, a butterfly emerged or a butterfly was released. Many employees participated in the naming and releasing of the butterflies. Even though many of our caterpillars did not make it we became invested in all of the monarchs in 2D.6. Overall, we thoroughly enjoyed watching our “work-babies” grow and evolve!

Julie Austen - Registrar's Office

Numerous conversations took place in our office because of the monarchs. There are 6 of us on the Adaptech team and we all took responsibility and talked about the monarchs – thus a great team building activity (even if some discussion dealt with the death and mourning of the caterpillars). Two examples that illustrate the impact of this project on our team:

1. One of our younger members (a university student) came in on the weekend to make sure there was food available in case a butterfly emerged. This proved that, not only was everyone interested, they were also engaged.
2. The only monarch that emerged was deformed. There was some discussion among the team as to its plight. As our research focuses on individuals with disabilities, the idea arose that we might be able to raise the monarchas a disabled butterfly.

Alice Havel - Adaptech



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photo: © Julia Lijeron

The Monarch Nursery Project sparked a great deal of conversation regarding its relevance in our student union office. Most students were curious as to why we were nursing monarchs and were not aware of the decline in their numbers as a species. It was a great peer-to-peer learning opportunity!

What was great was watching everyone take time in their day to see how the caterpillars were doing and see them warm up to them. I think the caterpillars helped our union become more observant and compassionate in our general work environment.

Annie Quadros - Dawson Student Union

Teachers and staff here in my wing (5E) were all happy, coming in and out of my office, admiring the beauty of mother nature unfolding right before their eyes. They were so grateful to witness a miracle. Everyone wants to know and can't wait when this amazing project will be happening again. I am truly grateful for this experience. Thank you.

Sarah de Guzman - Multimedia Productions

We really enjoyed being a part of this project at the First Peoples Centre. Every day students would take a vested interest in participating in the project, checking on the caterpillars, etc. They were also quite heartbroken when a caterpillar died and were quite disappointed that our chrysalis did not survive and neither did any of our caterpillars. We would definitely love to participate in this activity again.

Orenda Boucher - First Peoples Centre



For obvious reasons, this year's experience differed greatly from last year. What struck me was how so many people were affected by our caterpillar health problems. My fellow foster parents rallied behind me when my caterpillars died off. Several co-workers gave me words of encouragement and even offered to share their healthier caterpillars with me. In the end, it reminded me that the Dawson community is a family of sorts; sharing in the good times as well as the bad. Look forward to next year, and I am grateful for this experience.

Kelly Ann Morel - Counselling

I love this project! It brought my fellow employees and I together as a team. When it was time to release the last four monarchs, I had work duties that were time sensitive, so I asked my co-workers to help; they released them and documented the experience for me - I loved that! This experience was wonderful and I wish to take part in it again.

Francesca Cuffaro - Registrar's Office

Real life experiences are more memorable to students than videos. Students were excited to hear about the monarch caterpillars in my office. They would come regularly to check on their progress. They were curious to watch the transformations and the hatching of the butterflies was always a very touching moment. We discussed each stage, what it involved and its duration; we discussed the importance of preserving the fragile ecosystem.

Many conversations occurred about the monarchs regarding the fragility and the magic of life, the persistence and the courage of some caterpillars that took up to two hours to climb up the cage to attach themselves to the mesh and the apparent shyness that made them transition when no one was present.

Nobody remains indifferent to the presence of monarch caterpillars in an office, it carries the positive vibes of a promise to come, of the miracle of new life!

Julianna Joos - Faculty



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A Word from the Academic Dean

Educate. Enrich. Engage.

These words are found in the Dawson College mission statement, and are truly encompassed by the Monarch Nursery Project.

Witnessing the metamorphosis of caterpillar to butterfly and learning about the life cycle of this beautiful insect brought students, faculty and staff together in a unique way. The experience enriched our daily routine and contributed to positive relationship building (new and old). Mini communities formed near the monarch locations and conversations and goodwill blossomed. Although sadly, many of our monarchs succumbed to disease, this reality enabled us to learn and teach an unexpected lesson. *Well-being for all* is a concept that we value at Dawson. The Monarch Nursery Project contributed to well-being for all by providing opportunities:

- to experience transformative learning
- to connect with nature
- to make positive emotional connections
- for social and academic engagement
- to experience a sense of accomplishment and purpose

This experience has enhanced our community in obvious and subtle ways, and is one that I hope to repeat every year!

Diane Gauvin
Academic Dean, Dawson College



photo: © Danyel Verdon

Special Thanks to

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