

Grandma under the microscope

Concertation-Femme publishes anthology of worldwide natural remedies

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From Argentina to Moldova, from Guinea to China, women exchange all kinds of remedies to fix all kinds of booboos, both small and big alike. With the interest in natural care generated by its members, Concertation-Femme had the idea to publish a compilation of these remedies. To help people understand the effects of mustard poultice and other treatments, students from La Dauversière school set out to research over 60 different recipes collected by the organization. The Concertation-Femme's latest guide, *Remèdes naturels du Monde* (Natural Remedies from Around the World), is the fruit of their research. When traditional remedies have a scientific basis...

Every year, Concertation-Femme publishes a practical guide for women who spend time at the organization. After collecting research for last year's content, Maysoun Faouri had the idea to find traditional remedies and dissect them. After talks with La Dauversière, the students in Ahmed Bensaada's international program embarked on a research project to find as many different remedies as possible.

Bensaada underlined that the project permitted students to see traditional remedies in a different light: "They had just been thought of things without any great value," he remembered.

As most of the remedies had active elements, the young scientists were able to see what they were made up of. "It made me have more confidence in traditional remedies," said student Cristian Margineanu. "It's been hundreds of years that grandmothers have treated illnesses with these remedies, and we saw that they really do work." This aspect also touched on teaching, said the professor: "That's the beauty of the project. It allows us to break misconceptions down and rebuild from there," he said, smiling.

Learning science before time

During the project, Bensaada's students learnt how to do things beyond their competencies: when a project does not involve any laboratory operations (the necessary practices required too many materials), the research demanded of the students can be quite challenging. The professor asked them to search on the Internet, in books, in serious studies, and then separate the truthful facts from false statements. The students were then evaluated on this process. For Laurence Matteau-Pelletier, this research process was among the difficulties of the project: "It required a lot of perseverance. There were many active elements, many different areas to



The project allowed the students to undertake research work and see what the remedies are made up of. Cristian Margineanu said he now has more faith in traditional remedies: "It made me have more confidence in traditional remedies. It's been hundreds of years that grandmothers have treated illnesses with these remedies, and we saw that they really do work." Laurence Matteau-Pelletier underlined the difficulties of the project: "It required a lot of perseverance. There were many active elements, many different areas to explore." Photo: Martin Alarie

explore." In effect, these remedies worked, for the most part, when two active elements were combined, through a chemical reaction.

If this type of work seems less scientific because of the absence of any laboratory work, the professor believes this process is actually very close to real scientific work. "It is very important to shape this scientific aspect before getting to CEGEP. There, they will already have a precise idea about science." For him, a project like *Remèdes naturels du monde entier* allows one to find a fair balance between numbers and text, as science does not only explain itself in numbers.

The project sensitized the students to another important aspect of scientific work: copyright laws. For the project, the young people had to provide images, but not just from anywhere. "I asked them to provide images free of any copyright, or to get permission to use them. Young people



Ahmed Bensaada, the professor in charge of the project at La Dauversière school, found motivation in the project. "That's the beauty of the project. It allowed us to break false conceptions down and rebuild from there," he said. Photo: Martin Alarie

aren't used to that. We're in a world where the youth have a reflex to take without asking," said Bensaada.

One thing is certain, if the recipes were free form copyrights, they were sometimes free of any active ingredients. That is why only 49 of the 60 collected remedies were explained in the guide. However, Concertation-Femme wanted to underline the work of those who did research, called the countries, and put in time and energy. This is why – even though the recipe for lengthening eyelashes could not be explained due to a lack of previous research – it can be found in the compilation of remedies that includes a cabbage juice cure for hearing loss.

The guide is sold at Concertation-Femme, 2005 Victor-Doré, for \$15. For more information, visit www.csdm.qc.ca/ladauversiere/Projet_concertation_femmes/Accueil.htm.