

## Highlights from pre-service teacher's student teaching experiences at schools with gardens Fall 2013

The following statements were collected from pre-service teachers who completed the school garden training who then completed their student teaching placement at a school with access to a garden. The pre-service teachers had varied experiences in the school garden at their student teaching site, as some only visited the garden once while other visited several times. In addition, one student was involved on a committee planning a school garden for that school. The names of student teachers, teachers, schools and volunteers have been replaced with "student teacher", "teacher", "school" and "volunteer".

### Student Teacher One:

In the 12 weeks that I was student teaching, I would say that my class and my own experiences with the garden were really good. My class went out several times and each time my students were excited to spend time in the school garden. In all, our class went out to the garden about seven times while I was student teaching. A lot of our lessons in the garden were fairly improvised or aimed at accomplishing something other than academic standards. For example, we paired up with other classes about three times to harvest for school lunches or to teach others about the garden.

Over the first 12 weeks of school, there were several barriers in getting classes out to the garden and creating dynamic lessons which incorporated academic standards with the school garden. In our own class, we found it was hard to get to the garden initially because we had 31 students. With both *teacher* and I leading the front and back ends of the class, we were able to teach all of the students but the logistics of teaching outside were tricky. One time, we paired up with another first grade classroom of 31 students and it took nearly half an hour to walk all the students around the perimeter of the garden and all eight beds inside of the garden. Another problem with getting outside were some of the behaviors in our class. Even after the first grade classes were whittled down to just over 20 students, we had one student in particular who was very difficult to bring outside. While this student made great strides in managing his anger, it was simply unsafe to bring out the students without establishing guidelines for the classes behaviors.

When it came to other classes, we found that many teachers were reluctant to go out to the garden unless *teacher* or *teacher*—a fifth grade teacher—would lead the class through the garden. Part of the problem was that the teachers did not know what to do in the garden or even what was in the garden. Another problem was that teachers did not want to go to the garden unless they could tie in lessons to curriculum and state standards. Unfortunately, teachers do not have time to build multiple original lessons that can supplement school curriculum and meet state standards. When I look back at the times that we offered to take classes out to the garden, teachers were most willing to go to the garden when there was a foreseeable goal or outcome of a garden outing. For example, when we asked teachers to bring

their students to harvest herbs for the chicken hot lunch or the school salsa, teachers knew what they needed to do and why so we got lots of classes which volunteered to go to the garden.

By the end of my 12 weeks, almost all the teachers had made it out to the garden, but we found that teachers still needed to be led through lessons by *teacher*. It was a bit frustrating that so many teachers were so hesitant to go out and it started to feel like we needed to hold their hands when they went to the garden. I imagine as teachers become more familiar with the garden, they will be more willing to go on their own. If we could redo this year, there should have been a tour of the garden before school started and teachers should have been given more resources to understand could be done at the garden. Another way to get teachers to the garden are to provide them with lesson plans that build upon the district's established curriculum and adhere to school, district, and state standards.

The main logistical problems that occurred while I was at *school* included finding help to maintain the garden, and funding or resources for upkeep of the garden. Prior to the school year, the community generously came together to build the garden and prepare it for the school year. Once the school year started, the main leaders of the garden were *teacher, teacher*, and a handful of parent volunteers but it was hard to keep the entire garden healthy. *Teacher, teacher*, and one of the parent volunteers did talk about getting a master gardener to volunteer their time to maintain the garden and help teachers to teach their students about the garden. However, in the time I was at *school*, a master gardener was not found to work with the school. Another major problem was funding. *Teacher, teacher*, and *volunteer* (one of our classroom parents and garden volunteer), discussed writing grants to maintain the garden but that is an uncertain funding source.

Overall, I'm really happy with the experience that I had at the garden but I wish more teachers would have been involved in the garden. A school garden is absolutely an asset to any school and all children. My students came from a variety of backgrounds but there's no doubt in my mind that their experiences in the garden helped them to understand where food comes from and that foods from the garden taste great! I hope that with more time and experimenting, teachers find more ways to be involved in the garden.

### **Student Teacher 2:**

We had some members of the PTA meet us outside by the school garden. They asked the students what they know about the word harvest. She let students answer and then reinforced that harvest means to collect the crops that were grown. She explained that since it's about to get cold outside they need to harvest the vegetables and flowers that were in the garden. She said they could each start by harvesting one vegetable/flower and put it in the appropriate bag (each vegetable had it's own bag).

She then let them harvest more once everyone found some. My cooperating teacher and I walked around asking students what the vegetable or flower was that they were harvesting.

She told our class we could keep the tomatoes and decide, as a class, what to do with them. The rest of the flowers and vegetables were set up in the library. Students were also able to bring in garden flowers/veggies to be a part of the Harvest Festival. All the kids that brought in something from the garden were given a ribbon. Classes could tour the Harvest Festival if the teachers wanted them to.

Our class voted on what to make with our tomatoes-and salsa won-so we had a salsa and chip party! The kids loved it, of course! I thought it was fun to be able to eat something grown from their own school. They had some great ideas what else they could make with tomatoes-spaghetti, salad, chili, BLTs.

### **Student Teacher 3:**

I wasn't actually able to teach a garden lesson. It took awhile for my first graders to get the routines down and the teacher to get a schedule going. By the time this was all good and I was able to start teaching, the third graders had already harvested the school garden.

### **Student Teacher 4:**

So in my class we did stuff with the garden 3 times. My kids loved it every time. One time me and my teacher just took the out and we did a taste test tour and harvested chives. The other time we went out with a first grade buddy and paired them up. They just harvested everything because it was getting colder. Lastly we planted daffodil bulbs.

Working with first grade buddies went very nice to be able to pair my kindergarteners up with another student to help them. Also for the daffodil bulbs i used the smart board slides and tutorial to introduce it to my class first. Then we had the first grade teacher her student teacher, myself, a sub and a parent go outside with my class to plant. This went very smooth with the introduction done first and then having 5 adults outside to help.

My teacher just needed someone with garden experience to help her use it. *Student teacher's* teacher took on that role at *school* and helped all the teachers use the garden. I wish we could of got my class out there more because they loved it every time but with kindergarteners you need to have extra hands out their every time we would go. As a student teacher I would of loved to be more involved with the garden too but I had to just go a long with my teacher. In my class science is one area that is really lacking my teacher doesn't really do it at all and science is only really done when someone else comes into our room and does it. This would be an idea to have someone by a garden expert that comes around helping the teachers incorporate the the garden a lot more.

### **Student Teacher 5 (on garden planning Committee):**

It is very ironic that you emailed me today because we had a meeting this afternoon. Things are starting to get serious with our garden committee. We met with the Head of Grounds at the

last meeting and he has been giving us pointers on where things can go and some things that we need to look at before we start building anything. Some of the members of the committee were able to go to *school, school, and school* to see their school gardens. They realized that all three were vastly different in structure. We are looking into foundations and other places where we can get grants. We also talked about creating our mission statement during our next meeting in December. What will be our purpose of these gardens? How will they look? What will they be used for now and in the future? How can we create sustainability within the gardens? These are the kinds of questions we will be answering within our mission statement.