

## **PDX Garden Stories**

### **Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Youth Grow Program**

#### **Portland, Oregon**

#### **Interview with Julia**

Conducted by Isabelle Kiely, Zach Berquist & Pauline Wood

Portland State University, Urban Agriculture & Food Systems Capstone, Spring 2016

Faculty Instructor: Nathan McClintock, PhD

---

#### **For the layperson, what is the professional learning community?**

**Julia:** So this is the second year that Growing Gardens has offered the garden education professional learning community, and this year the PLC consists of a total of twelve participants from around the Portland metro area - nine classroom teachers and three garden educators. We meet once each month, January through May, in the evenings. The goal of the PLC is to work collaboratively to share ideas and inspire each other to use school gardens to enhance curriculum and increase student engagement. The PLC is a participant-driven professional development opportunity for teachers interested in finding new ways to use school gardens to meet classroom learning goals and the needs of their students. So we work together collaboratively to identify both individual and group goals. At the end of each meeting, participants decide what actions they will take before the next meeting and how they'd like to use their time. During the meetings we break into small groups, to give teachers an opportunity to share lesson ideas and work together to align garden-based curriculum and instructional practices with new educational standards. Participants then ask each other questions about their lessons, how they plan to integrate it, and brainstorm ways to make each lesson more successful, which leads to deeper discussion. We use a problem-solving approach where participants ask each other questions and collectively help brainstorm solutions. For example, one question participants had was, "how can we encourage more teacher involvement with the school gardens?" So each participant shared strategies to increase involvement with the school garden program at their school, and they shared strategies they've used or ones they would like to try in the future. The PLC offers participants an opportunity to work collaboratively to share ideas and resources, inspire each other, support each other, and offer accountability, all in their effort to deepen their garden education practice.

#### **How would you say the PLC benefits teachers and students?**

**Julia:** The PLC offers an opportunity for teachers to come together to support each other and inspire each other. I've got a couple quotes from some teachers. One teacher said that, "The

group improved my teaching and made the students' experience richer." Another teacher said, "During the PLC, I was able to co-create ideas and lessons for my students. We shared a lot of resources and personal stories that benefitted my understanding of teaching in the garden. When bringing people together from other schools, teachers are able to grow in a more meaningful way." They said that they really enjoyed the learning and networking part of the PLC, and that they now feel they have people to ask for advice and help when planning a garden lesson. Another teacher said, "The PLC gave me ideas, offered accountability, and provided planning time with other teachers." I think the biggest part is that the PLC gives a chance for teachers to support each other and share ideas... ideas that they can use, ideas that they saw were successful at another school. So then they can say, "Oh, I can try that!" They're sharing ideas, and they're then able to share successes and ask each other questions and help through a problem-solving approach of like, "Well what would you do here?" and "How could I incorporate a lesson or activity here?" And they can then share ideas and resources to help each other in their efforts.

### **Any plans for the future of the PLC, or Growing Gardens and education?**

**Julia:** Our goal is for there to be leaders in each school community who support the development of each garden education program. We would love for this project to help embed learning gardens into curriculum development and school programming. We know that a successful garden education program includes lots of involvement in different ways. It needs administrative support and teachers that are utilizing the garden as an outdoor classroom, and students having ownership over the garden as well. There may be an after-school program, there may be harvesting greens for the cafeteria, there may be events after school or during community work days. There's so many ways for a garden to be incorporated into a school community, and we know that one integral part is for teachers to be incorporating it into their classroom curriculum, and connecting it to what students are already learning in their classrooms, so that they're seeing the ties into math and science, and social studies and art, and that it's connected to what they're learning in the classroom as well.