

PDX Garden Stories

Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Youth Grow Program

Portland, Oregon

Interview with Jackie

Conducted by Isabelle Kiely, Zach Berquist & Pauline Wood

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

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What made you decide to get involved with Growing Gardens?

Jackie: Well I saw the email that Julia Grey had sent out about the PLC, the professional learning community, that she was doing this winter and spring. So I applied to be part of that; I had always kind of wanted to, you know, take my class out more to the garden and get them more involved, and we have a garden already at Kelly but not that many teachers utilize it. And so I thought “Gosh, this is a good way to, you know, have me connect with other teachers in the district, or around the area that are already doing things and get some ideas.” So I started that, and that’s kind of what got me hooked up. There’s another teacher at Kelly as well, and then we started collaborating. I met Lisa then through the PLC and had the support of Julia, and other - just, you know, getting more ideas. So that was really the, the main reason I got started with Growing Gardens.

Okay, can you tell me a little more about the PLC? We actually haven’t heard about that before.

Jackie: Sure, so as a professional learning community we kind of started out... I think there’s about twelve or fourteen people and their experiences definitely range from novice to - some are like the garden coordinators at schools. And so we got together and just set some goals for the, for the PLCs. And there - there was requirements. Julia did a really nice job of having it outlined as far as what exactly was required to participate in the PLC. So it was kind of nice we knew what we were getting into prior to starting. And then we set goals for what people wanted to get out of it, and just went forward that way. There was a... So it was nice, I was able to listen - sometimes get in groups where there was other second grade teachers, and what are they doing; listen to garden coordinators that work with all different levels of teachers; you know successes that other schools have already had. Like I said, Kelly’s just kind of - they have their garden, but it’s not - I don’t think as many teachers use it as other schools have - might have going on in their schools. So it was interesting to listen to other people. Yeah, we still have one more at the end of, the end of May, and that will be our last activity. And there was a Skype-in for

participating, for seeds or plants or soils or whatever you wanted to use for different projects related to your lessons. So that was a huge help as well.

Tell me about what students actually learn and do through the garden experience.

Jackie: So, because of the PLC, I actually had a chance - it was great - to look at the new generation science standards. So we looked at those, you know, "what are the new standards." I don't know if you're familiar, but PPS, Portland Public Schools, hasn't even really gotten out the new standards to teachers yet. We're kind of - it feels like - a little behind times. So it was good, to me, just to, for me to look at the standards and see what they are, and then how those standards can, how I can start to use those in the classroom. And that was part of the PLC as well, you know... not only the science standards, which we did a lot of that this spring, but also the other, the other disciplines... as far as writing, you know, and bringing writing out to the garden, and math and... So definitely the learning experience has been connecting students, connecting the garden with standards, as well as giving them just the opportunity to, um, to be in that. They love it out there, you know, to be in a different environment and one that, that's not used that much in the schools. They don't have that much - or, at home. It was interesting, I did a survey - I wanted to do something with composting, and I did a survey prior to starting, as far as "Do you know what composting is? Do you compost at home?" It was about ten questions, and like, I had... the students have very little knowledge of what composting was and why it would be good, and so on. And then, from where we are now, it's incredible. So that was part of how I spent my money is... I got a little bucket, that we're able to use in the classroom. We have the fruits and vegetable program at our school, so every day there's a snack of either a fruit or vegetable and often there's, you know, twenty-four, twenty-five apple cores, or pear cores. And so we started recycling - composting some of those outdoors, and then also with Lisa, from Growing Gardens, started - she came in and did a lesson on worms and worm bins. And so we started a worm bin in the class. And so they get very, very, excited about that. So I feel like their knowledge, from where we were in fall-winter, to now, as far as composting and why, and just the whole... I can tell that they've really learned an incredible amount, in a short amount of time.

If there's any specific activities they do out in the garden, I'd love to hear about those too.

Jackie: Specific activities in the garden: we plant, we've talked a little bit about pollination and how pollination works. I got lavender bushes and we planted those in the yard, and talked about those as being a pollinator for the garden. We've gone out and just made observations with the magnifying glasses and taken notes. We have a bed that's just second grade, and so we plant - we've just started - In the classroom we started seeds, and then eventually planted those outdoors, we moved it. We weed the bed - they're not... Weeding's hard for second graders, but they have a lot of fun. And then just, you know, we're starting to get into harvesting. Next week

we'll have a - we have a lettuce harvest set up on the 16th, where we'll go out and harvest it and make signs and it'll be available in our school cafeteria.

Has your outlook on food or agriculture changed, or gardening?

Jackie: You know, I've always had my own personal little garden here at home, and it's definitely changed. I've just become, I think, more excited about it. I've gotten my own garden done earlier, and I've tried different things from seeds that I haven't done in the past, and... And I can definitely see how much my students love it. I mean, they ask all the time, "Is today a garden day? Are we going out to the garden? When can we go out to the garden? Can I go look in the worm bin? Where's the compost can?" They're so excited about it. So I can definitely - my outlook has changed as far as like, "Gosh, this doesn't have to be something..." I mean, I started in with the PLC in the winter, but I'm excited to kind of think about the experience with our last PLC coming up, and "how can I do this more over the summer?" I'm going to be there a little bit helping out watering at Kelly. But also how can we start in September with my new class, starting to get the experience of harvesting what we've already planted, and kind of make it a school year. You know, the whole entire school year rather than just planting seeds in the spring. So yeah, I think I've... I can see how it can fit, especially in the second grade curriculum, throughout the entire year.

Is there a specific event or experience that you've had or that you've seen that you think shows the impact of gardening on students or on their families?

Jackie: There hasn't been that much family involvement yet. A few families - it's always a challenging situation. You know, I think it comes little by little, getting the kids excited about it. I don't... Not necessarily one event or experience, but I think just that general, like... You know, we have our bucket and I took it home because it was full, and so I took it home to compost some of the cores at my personal home. And the kids didn't have it one day, and they were like, "Oh, Mrs. Sosa, what are we going to do? We can't throw this away!" ...type of thing. Just how, in such a short amount time, how they've gotten so... You know they're so adaptable and flexible, and I think "Gosh, we've been doing this now for three months," and it's really starting to become... Even if they're not doing it at home, it's definitely part of our classroom culture, and when it's not there, they miss it. And I see them asking - you know, it's interesting how some of the kids get really into it, and "When are we going out to the garden? Can we do it today?" "No, not today, we're doing such-and-such." "Gosh, can we do it tomorrow?" And then we were out there the other day, and starting - the radishes were ready to harvest, and we planted some strawberries. And that - the harvesting part is exciting too. This one little girl: "I want to - let me try it, let me try it, I've never had a radish!" So just like... little things like that, throughout the course of the last couple months. I can tell how it's been a really positive, powerful impact for them, as well as for me.