

## The Co-Creation of a “Kinder Garden”

Jennifer Heinrichs

**Jennifer Heinrichs** completed her master of education at the University of Saskatchewan in December 2014. She has been an educator for 18 years and has experience teaching kindergarten through grade 8 as a teacher-librarian, core French teacher, music teacher, and vice-principal. She has taught kindergarten for the past 11 years in a small community in Saskatchewan where she lives with her husband and three children. Email: [jennifer.heinrichs@spiritsd.ca](mailto:jennifer.heinrichs@spiritsd.ca)

Central to this paper is the author’s assertion that interacting authentically with the outdoors can connect children to the earth, thus creating in them a heart for the place in which they live (Louv, 2008). Using narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the author explored her co-creation of a “kinder garden” with her kindergarten students and their parents. In this article, she reflects on how creating this garden benefited the children and their learning, both at school and at home. She discusses how creating the garden also benefited the families and the community involved. Finally, using input from parents, the author imagines new possibilities for the co-creation of such gardens.

### Developing a Love for Our Prairie Earth

We bundled up one crisp, blustery October morning and set off to inspect the signs that fall had arrived. I had planned to have all 19 kindergarten students sit in a circle under our beautiful poplar tree, pass around a leaf, and describe the sights, smells, sounds, and feelings that they were experiencing. The children, however, had other plans. I could not get their attention. They were constantly lifting up the leaves and throwing them in the air, watching them, and giggling as the wind carried them above our heads and swirled them around. I decided to set aside my plan and invite the children to explore this new phenomenon with gusto—and so they did. Over and over, every child threw the leaves up into the air, squealing with delight, crazily running, laughing, and chasing the leaves, finally falling to the ground to make leaf angels, just as

they do in the snow. It was a magical, memorable time.

At first, so intent on following my lesson plan, I almost missed this very special learning activity. Yet, what did the children learn instead? After pondering this, I realized that they learned the wind could lift a leaf and carry it up into the sky. They learned that leaves fall to the ground in abundance around a poplar tree. They experienced the scent of fall in the air, breathing in this mustiness as they laid on the ground making angels. They felt the leaves in their hands and against their cheeks. They heard the crunch of the leaves under their feet and the wind in the branches of our tree. They also heard the shouts of laughter from their friends as everyone experienced the joy of fall and the love of the outdoors together. The kindergarten curriculum outcome “explore features of the natural surroundings” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010) was indeed “covered,” despite my abandonment of my lesson plan. Escamilla (2013) notes:

An effective life science curriculum for young children does not necessarily emerge from a set of materials purchased from a catalogue, or from pre-planned lessons written by experts. Instead, as I strongly believe, children’s natural curiosity and their inquisitive minds can be used as catalysts to learn about the natural world in deep and sustained ways. (p. 214)

In this moment, I discovered that the outdoors can offer rich and meaningful lessons for young children (Louv, 2008). How, then, as a teacher could I facilitate more such outdoor learning experiences?

### The Inspiration for Our Garden

Reflecting on the children’s experience in the leaves, I was drawn back to my own childhood experiences with nature. I believe that my connection to our earth grew from my childhood play and enjoyment of the outdoors. I am a prairie girl: the wheat fields, the maple trees, Grandma’s garden, the gophers, the bitter cold of winter, the sunlight sparkling on our beloved Candle Lake in summer are close to my heart. This love for the outdoors grew from my father’s teachings, growing up on a horse farm. He taught us by leading us to the barn to see the new baby foal that had been born in the night. We planted mountain ash, pine, and fruit tree saplings and nourished and tended them to grow taller than our heads. We were never bored because we had many yard and garden chores to attend to every day, as well as

animals to feed and care for. When we were done, we played in the pasture making forts in the bush. Our vacationing as a family also centred on the outdoors. We spent two weeks every summer camping at the lake, swimming, fishing, water skiing, and sitting around the campfire. Many winters, we also travelled to the mountains to ski. As an adult having grown up with these experiences with the earth, I think about making careful choices and doing my part to take care of our planet. As a teacher, seeing the children's joy when they were playing outside in the leaves, I saw within my pedagogical approach the possibility to connect children with the earth.

I dreamed of creating a "kinder garden" after reading the article "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place" by Gruenewald (2003). Sobel, as cited in Gruenewald, stated, "What's important is that children have an opportunity to bond with the natural world, to learn to love it, before being asked to heal its wounds" (p. 7). I believe this to be true. I believe that, in order for children to play and interact in a meaningful way with nature, they require the time and opportunity to engage in learning in the outdoors. When they are connected to the earth and they value it, they will want to care for and protect it always.

Thinking about how, as a parent, I found that I was continually encouraging my children to engage in outdoor activities and I limited their electronic play, I wondered if other parents felt the same way about outdoor play as I did. Interested in a "pedagogy of place" (Gruenewald, 2003), I invited my students' families to complete a questionnaire regarding how they spend their family time and how their children engage with the outdoors. Seventeen out of 38 families participated in the survey. Six families believed their children spent a reasonable time outdoors and did not think it was harder for their children to interact with the outdoors than it had been for them when they were children. The remaining 11 families listed a number of obstacles that they felt made interacting with the outdoors more challenging for their children than for them when they were children. These obstacles included many electronic distractions, children's preference for electronic play, busy family schedules, harsh winter weather, and fewer open spaces in which to play. Parents also shared that a changing world caused them to be leery of allowing their children the freedom they had had as children and resulted in them restricting how far away from home their children could play, lessening their opportunities to interact with nature. In reading the parents' survey responses, I realized that their families were facing the same struggles my family encounters daily.

Many of our children prefer to sit indoors to watch television, play video games, or occupy their time on computer devices rather than play outside and discover the wonders of nature. Banning and Sullivan (2011) state, "In response to this loss, schools and early childhood settings have both an opportunity and an obligation to advocate for children and nature" (p. 12). As educators, I believe we have a responsibility to reconnect children to our earth. Through facilitating hands-on, inquiry-based wonder projects, we can teach our students to love the earth and thus create in them an ecological heart. Pelo (2013) concurs:

We teach children to write and to read and to navigate mathematical systems so that they can access the world of ideas and questions and intellectual exchange. We teach children how to behave with other people so that they can grow joyful and nourishing relationships. We teach children history so that they know where they come from, and we teach them art, so that they can imagine what might be and we teach them science so that they understand the intricate workings of the physical world ... Just so, we must nurture children's intrinsic ecological identities with intentional and attentive action. This is our work as parents, caregivers, teachers: to invite children to braid their identities together with the place where they live by calling their attention to the air, the sky, the cracks in the sidewalk where the earth bursts out of its cement cage ... When we live this way with children, we align ourselves with the instinct to know the place where we live. (pp. 42–43)

By inviting children to know the earth, their home, we develop within them a wish to interact with it, play with it, and care for it, and then, because of these authentic experiences, our ultimate hope is that they will develop a heart for it.

### **The Study: Beginning the Kinder Garden**

The environmental project into which I invited my kindergarten students involved transforming the small, fenced-in outdoor area outside our classroom side door into a green space, a place for children to grow something—vegetables, flowers, herbs, or whatever they decided they wanted to grow. I aspired to create an opportunity in which students could watch these plants growing, tend to them, observe them, and perhaps harvest something from them. I also hoped that in this green space the students might be able to watch visiting insects, butterflies, birds, or bees, experiences which would help them connect to a little piece of their prairie earth. My outcomes were situated in place-based education. Smith (2002) explains:

The primary value of place-based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen children's connections to others and to the regions in which they live ... By reconnecting rather than separating children from the world, place-based education serves

both individuals and communities, helping individuals to experience the value they hold for others and allowing communities to benefit from the commitment and contributions of their members. (p. 594)

The connections I hoped my students would make with their surroundings were the most important part of this project. However, I also thought that our school community and town would benefit by obtaining a new garden to observe and enjoy as they visited the adjacent playground at our school.

### *Lynn's garden*

It was through home visits conducted at the beginning of the school year that I met Lynn.<sup>1</sup> This mom had an amazing yard near the river, covered in flower beds, beautiful shrubs, and trees. Along the pathway to her front door was a vegetable patch surrounded by perennials. It definitely caught my attention as I walked by. When I complimented her on the beauty of her place, Lynn explained that she had learned about gardening from her mother and she was passing on this knowledge to her son, Mark. Lynn taught Mark about seeds and how to identify flowers, care for them, and tend a garden patch. Such an education, learned in the home, is different from what a child learns through formalized schooling. Both what is learned at home and what is learned at school contribute to a child's education. Both are important and make up the child's education as a whole individual. Pushor (2013) clarifies that

our role as teacher, in this view of schooling as a support to a child's education, becomes one in which we walk alongside parents for the time we are with them to support them in achieving their life's work for their child. (p. 9)

Schooling is one form of education. It does not include the entire learning in a child's lifetime of knowledge attainment. When teachers truly internalize this differentiation, they can begin to weave together a curriculum that supports learning from the home as well.

### *Co-creating a kinder garden*

I gathered my students inside the chain-link-fenced-in outdoor space and asked them, "What is this area for?" They replied: "It's a playground." "It's nothing." "It's only for babies." Others said maturely: "There's nothing fun for kids." "There's nothing in here." I then asked them, "What could we do with this space to make it better for kindergarten students?" They responded with a wide range of ideas and suggestions, some focused on structures: "Put in swings, slides, and monkey bars." "Have a pool." "Make a tree fort." "Build a toy house." "Put the old baby toys away and get new ones." "Maybe a slide." Other students thought about nature: "Plant flowers." "Make bushes so we can pick leaves off." "Open the gate." "Add water and fish." "Make a garden with flowers, strawberries, and vegetables." Some of the children were interested in cleaning up the space: "Paint some colours out here." "Paint the school." "Pick the weeds." "Cut the grass." "Clean up the windows." "Get the spider webs off the walls and paint the sidewalk." Finally I asked them, "What could we learn about out here?" They offered, enthusiastically: "We could learn how leaves change colour." "We could learn about butterflies, bugs, ladybugs, caterpillars, and grasshoppers." "We need to plant flowers for the ladybugs to climb on them." "We need to make chairs and then we could have lunch out here." "We could paint out here." I was inspired and impressed with their ideas. From all their responses, I knew the kinder garden project would be met with enthusiasm and determination. Together we decided that we would start with building a garden and later we would add some of the other ideas: tables at which to eat, a water play area, and perhaps some sort of playhouse. We also agreed together to abandon the playground ideas of slides and monkey bars because of the nearby school play structure adjacent to our garden.

### *Building the garden*

We began building our garden at the end of September. We were unable to till the soil in this area because of the many poplar roots from our beloved tree. In consultation with a carpenter and the school's caretaker, it was decided that raised flower beds would be the best option. We chose cinder blocks because of the ease with which they could be moved and their low cost. Together the children and I lifted all 106 cinder blocks into place. Needing crushed rock and soil for our garden and knowing that one of the children's grandparents owned a gravel company, I decided we could write this community member a letter of request. Through the class letter-writing process, the children learned that there is a purpose for writing, that what we say can be written down, that Jamieson's grandfather owns a gravel company, and that we could order materials for our garden with the help of an adult. Jamieson's grandfather was so impressed with

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used throughout the article to protect the anonymity of children, parents, family and community members, and teaching colleagues.

our letter that he responded by donating all the rock and soil we needed. We were excited to hear back from him so quickly, and we were grateful for his generous donation. Later, after our garden was complete, we also wrote him a thank you card. My students made connections with community members in an authentic way, another important life lesson. Beyond the literacy outcomes mentioned, many other curriculum outcomes were also addressed as we worked together in our garden solving problems. The children learned the math concepts of more, less, and equal. They learned the physical movements of lifting and carrying and the physical benefits of building muscles and stamina.

After the soil was delivered, we worked with sand pails and shovels moving the soil from one side of the garden to the other. After 10 minutes of shovelling I said, “Wow, we still have quite a mountain of soil to move, how are we ever going to do this?” Devin wisely replied, “We just keep digging.” How smart of him. My wish for him is that he will always have this stamina, developed through his experience of digging and moving soil in our kinder garden. I hope that if he ever encounters difficulties in school—in learning to read or write, or in learning anything new—he will “just keep digging.”

The children worked with enthusiasm, and as people passed by, they proudly replied to the question, “What are you doing?” with a very excited chorus of, “We’re building a garden.” One little girl added, “It’s going to be beautiful!”

We planted perennials on October 25<sup>th</sup>, all of which were donations from our classroom families. They included Virginia creeper, delphiniums, hollyhocks, irises, daisies, mums, poppies, and tiger lilies. I invited Lynn to join us, knowing of her extensive knowledge through my home visit and because of her enthusiastic response to our project, having donated the majority of the perennials. Lynn and I worked with 10 children at a time. They were very enthusiastic and continually asked both of us, “Can I plant another one?” Gavin and I were planting delphiniums and hollyhock seeds along the fence. I was planting the delphiniums because they are poisonous if ingested (which I learned from Lynn). As we were planting, I witnessed another extension of our curriculum when Gavin turned to me and remarked, “We’re making a pattern: hollyhock, poison one, hollyhock, poison one. . .” I smiled and answered, “I’m so glad you noticed that. The poisonous one is called a delphinium.” We had finished a patterning unit in September and Gavin was making a connection to that schema from his math lessons.

Snow covered our garden in early November. I marvelled at how the children continued to explore the outdoors. They brought in snow and icicles to melt, they wondered about the hoarfrost on the trees, and they noted the differences in the daylight. They were attuned to what was happening outside. I had never experienced such rich science lessons on the water cycle, the changes of the seasons, and the weather.

We planted tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, herbs, and butterfly flowers in little garden containers and placed them on our classroom windowsills in March. When spring came, these seedlings were transferred into our outdoor garden. We also planted strawberries and a few new perennials that I purchased at our local greenhouse, using money from our kindergarten school budget. The children watched with eagerness as little plants popped up. I explained to them that these were the plants that they had carefully placed in the soil with Lynn in October. Every day there was something new to discover, and the children’s enthusiasm never waned.

### **Lessons Learned From Our Kinder Garden**

A year had passed since we began building our little garden. I decided to conduct research on how our garden project had affected the families and children. The methodological approach that I utilized for this research study was narrative inquiry, the focus of which is lived experience—that is, lives and how they are lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I wanted to focus on the lived experiences of my students and their families and on my own personal learning from our garden. Narrative inquiry considers participants as holders and constructors of knowledge who retell stories, reflecting on past experiences in educative ways, in order to live their lives in the future with new possibility. Narrative inquiry has an inherent duality. Story is both the phenomenon and the method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To hear their stories, I invited three parents to participate in individual recorded conversations with me about the garden. I selected parents with diverse stories to share and used recorded conversations as a way to capture their voices. These conversations were then transcribed and the transcripts were brought back to parents for their editing and approval. Through this narrative inquiry, I explored the parents’ responses to my research puzzle regarding whether and how the kinder garden had impacted their child’s learning and enhanced their child’s interest in the outdoors. I also wanted to discover what effect, if any, they believed the garden had had on our community. Finally, I asked them to offer advice on what I could do to enhance our garden in years to come.

*Impact on children's learning*

All three parents agreed that the project helped nurture a love for the outdoors or “brought about a new awareness” (Lynn, recorded conversation, October 24, 2014) in their children. Anya explained:

Isaak was interested in everything that he was learning about in the garden and almost every day he would update us on the progress of the garden. In the evenings, when our family would go for a bike ride, Isaak would always want us to stop by the school so he could talk about his garden. (recorded conversation, October 9, 2014)

The parents were impressed with their children's attention to details when exploring outside. This was evident in their willingness to help in their families' gardens, their interest in the kinder garden's progress, the creatures that inhabited the garden, and their constant remarks about treasures they found while exploring outside. I believe that because of my invitations to wonder, question, touch, feel, smell, see, and hear the outdoor marvels, the children were more open to sharing these discoveries with their families. Chalufour and Worth (2003) write of this notion of wonder:

We've created a whole culture of inquiry. It seems like wherever kids are—in the classroom, in the park, or just walking somewhere—they are so attuned to what's around them, and there's always a sense of wonder, a sense that there's something to examine and investigate and discover. (p. 11)

The children were able to partake in rich observations and discoveries because we worked in the garden every day, no matter what the weather. We had a deadline, since the winter snows were just around the corner, and so we dressed for the weather and worked. From discovering ladybugs hiding in a curled up leaf against the east side of the school, to inspecting the heavy frost on the trees and wondering if the foggy morning made the frost bigger and thicker, to carrying in huge chunks of snow and ice so that we could see what would happen to them inside, to bringing in mitts full of snowflakes and asking for the magnifying glasses to check this new marvel out, the children were engaged in authentic inquiries. This sense of discovery, I learned, has carried into their grade 1 year. My colleague told me one day after school,

You've done a great job of nurturing a love for the outdoors with these kids. They sat under their chosen tree and drew about their discoveries for an entire hour today. I was really impressed by that. (personal communication, September 2014)

The parents I spoke with in my narrative inquiry noted that their children were completely engaged in our project and that this engagement continued with garden projects at home as well. Lynn explained:

I know he had more of an appreciation with getting in there and helping me, instead of after the fact when things were coming up. He participated in planting his own rows this year. Like the cucumbers were his baby. At first he was a little disappointed. He said, “Well, Mom, they're not very big.” And then all of a sudden we got some heat and the flowers [appeared]. He didn't believe me that the flowers were going to amount to cucumbers, and then he was fascinated with the fact that, well, you could pick cucumbers and like literally overnight, there would be cucumbers the next day. He thought that was unbelievable. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

This young boy thrived in our outdoor experiential activities. He struggled with sitting still and conducting any task that required a pencil and paper. On the other hand, he absorbed information gathered from our outdoor experiences and had a strong memory. He was always completely engaged and on task in our garden. He amazed me with his knowledge of the flowers we planted. His vocabulary was extensive and he could name and identify each and every flower we planted. This was knowledge that he most definitely learned at home.

Louv (2008) states, “Many parents notice significant changes in their children's stress levels and hyperactivity when they spend time outside” (p. 102). I have witnessed this “nature therapy” (Louv, 2008) many times in our garden. Children who are emotionally upset grow calm and focused as they dig, sniff, pull, see, and touch the wonders in our little garden.

Anya, another parent, concurred that she, too, saw an increased interest in the outdoors with her son, Isaak:

[Isaak] was very interested in helping me at home too. It seemed to me that he cared a lot about the flowers and the worms. He was really into worms this summer. I don't know if you guys did a lot on worms with the garden, but if he or his sisters found a worm he was taking very good care of that worm because it was important for everything to grow. (recorded conversation,

October 9, 2014)

From these comments, it is apparent that the garden project did provide an opportunity for my students to connect to the earth (Louv, 2008). This connection transferred to the children's lives outside of school as many children helped at home in their families' gardens and their parents witnessed their newfound love of and interest in the outdoors. Lynn noted, "When we go for walks he now spots the little purple bluebells, the wild violets, 'Oh mom, look...'" and that to me is the same as stopping and taking in a sunset" (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014). This wakefulness to the natural environment was exactly what I had been hoping for.

When I asked Lynn what was significant to her about the garden project, in regard to student learning, she shared:

Gardening or keeping a potted plant, gardening in general, teaches nurturing. Girls are taught to be nurturing, boys not so much. So when they grow up to be dads and all of a sudden they're holding a little baby in their arms, they're automatically expected to know how to be nurturers, and if it was never taught, you can never expect it. So gardening, I think, helps to teach that. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

This parent gave me a new perspective on our gardening project. That I was helping teach children to be nurturing was another lesson I learned. The garden was full of life, and life is precious, to be cared for, protected, and loved. These valuable teachings were ones that my students would benefit from forever.

As the adult leading this work, I was tempted many times to go out in the garden to complete something on my own, for as adults we know that it is sometimes easier and more efficient to do the work independently of children. However, I avoided this temptation by continually reminding myself that this garden was not mine, it belonged to my students, and whatever work needed to be done needed to include them. By including them in everything, I was able to teach them about creating something from nothing. Angela, the third parent, agreed:

You can plan something, execute it, involve many people, and then finish it. And end up with a beautiful end product. Like you know things just don't happen, you can't just have an idea and then it just happens. So I think that part of the learning ... just project management I guess. That's life, right? (recorded conversation, October 10, 2014)

I had not thought of this learning before talking with the parents. I was pleased to discover another way our garden project affected my students' learning for life.

#### *The effect of the kinder garden on the community*

Our garden has given our community something beautiful to admire. The fenced-in area is filled with flowers, vines, vegetables, and strawberries and has replaced the dull, tired grass that formally occupied the empty enclosure. Anya reflected:

I think everyone in the community who saw it was obviously pleased. I mean, it was sure nicer to look at than what was there. It wasn't being used for anything [before]. Just an open space. I always thought [the garden] was inviting and welcoming, just to walk by, it was right by the main entrance there. Just to see it, coming along every morning as I dropped off Isaak to and from school ... I think it only affected us in a positive way. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

There have been many comments from school staff and community members regarding the beauty of our garden. One teacher even left us a message on our whiteboard telling us how sweet smelling and beautiful our garden was as she walked by it every morning as she arrived at school.

Lynn remarked:

It gave everybody something to look at ... And I thought, you know, if there's fruit or anything poking through the chain-link fence, I'd hope that the kids would know not to rip and tear on it ... and that hasn't happened. They've observed it, they've come up with their own names for these things ... And the times that I've come to pick up Mark, they've been untouched, they're still sitting there, so the entire school really has been respecting the whole project. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

The children could claim the garden as their own: they created it, they tended it, and they knew what was growing in it. Their garden became their piece of the prairie earth, their project. It became something to give back to the community, regardless of their being so young. I believe the children felt pride and satisfaction in knowing they were contributing to our town.

### Plans for the Future

When I interviewed parents, I asked them for future suggestions for our garden. Anya proposed:

I think it would be interesting if you would have planted some grains. Like the stuff that farmers plant around the area. And then possibly getting a farming parent to come in and maybe talk about how it grows in the area and how it is incorporated into the five food groups. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

When teachers learn about their students' families they can "learn better ways to connect their child's home learning and school learning" (Allen, 2007, p. 43). Families in our community have knowledge about farming and gardening. As Gonzáles, Moll, and Amanti (2005, cited in Allen, 2007) point out, "all families have important experiences, skill, and bodies of knowledge—'funds of knowledge'" (p. 47). These funds of knowledge can be used as resources when the teacher chooses to invite parents to join in developing classroom curriculum projects. Planting grains in our kinder garden would help children better understand the phenomenon of growing crops, a process they witness all around them in our small community.

I asked Lynn if she had any suggestions on how I could improve our garden. She replied:

I'm thinking on a grand scale. I suggest you use the current garden area as the greenhouse and growing a row for maybe somebody in town, seniors that are not able maybe? Or even encouraging that in the community, grow a row. (recorded conversation, October 24, 2014)

This conversation has inspired me to dream further. Perhaps I could approach the school community council and propose Lynn's idea. Our little garden could definitely be made into a little greenhouse where the schoolchildren could start seedlings. A wonderful connection could begin between the school and the community to create a sustainable garden plot in the playground, where children, adults, community gardeners, and teachers could work together to produce vegetables and fruit to eat and flowers to admire and care for. I think the idea might be well received because one summer night when I went to tend our kinder garden, a grandmother stopped while taking her granddaughter to the playground and asked if she could help me weed the plot. She told me that she had walked by the day before and had thought, "If I had the key, I could help clean up those weeds" (personal communication, July 2014). We live in a community where at one time or another most people have tended a garden. Perhaps they would love to help children learn about gardening. They too would benefit from the produce and the beauty of the place. I am dreaming of fruit trees and perhaps some grand trees like a maple or an oak, a tree that when the children from the school have grown, they can return and say, "I remember planting that tree, look at it now." I am dreaming of children learning about gardens and vegetable growth alongside their parents and the community members. I would love to see a sustainable garden that would grow more and more beautiful and beneficial for all in each passing year.

### Considerations for Teachers

Building a garden on a school property takes planning. School divisions have facility policies and procedures of which one must be cognizant, so research needs to be done prior to beginning any construction. Gathering interested people who would be willing to contribute to the garden might be a good place to start. This team could be composed of children, parents, community members, and school staff. It might be beneficial to include an administrator or school division office staff member as well. I believe that many obstacles can be overcome if people work together. Budget is not all that important because I have learned that when you ask your community for help they are more than willing to offer their resources. The only costs of building our garden were the cinder blocks (75 cents a block) and a few of the perennials. The rest of the materials were donated by our community, families, school staff, and friends. The children and I cared for the garden together during the school year. In the summer, I tended the garden when I was home and the school administrative assistant, also a community member, took care of the garden when our family went on holidays. Families may choose to take turns with this task as well. When teachers work together with the families in the school community, bonds between home and school are formed and there is strength in these relationships. Everyone benefits from working together in this way.

## Closing Thoughts

*Every kid needs to dig, every kid needs to get dirty without getting in trouble, and every kid needs to discover. Whether they find an old marble in the dirt, or a worm, or some kind of freaky bug, whatever.* (Lynn, recorded conversation, October 24, 2014).

It is in the digging, and the getting dirty, that children grow more connected to the earth. All that my “kinder” gardeners discovered made the garden special, wondrous, a source of never-ending fun, and a place of continually new and exciting learning. This garden project has been the highlight of my teaching career. I am awed and humbled by how it has mattered to so many people. Its effect on our school and community has far surpassed what I had hoped it would accomplish.

## References

- Allen, J. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Banning, W., & Sullivan, G. (2011). *Lens on outdoor learning*. St. Paul MN: Redleaf Press.
- Chalufour, I., & Worth, K. (2003). *Discovering nature with young children*. St. Paul MN: Redleaf Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Escamilla, I. M. (2013). Drawing, photographs, and painting: Learning about the natural world in an urban preschool. In D. R. Meier & S. Sisk-Hilton (Eds.), *Nature education with young children: Integrating inquiry and practice* (pp. 194–215). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3–12.
- Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.
- Pelo, A. (2013). *The goodness of rain: Developing an ecological identity in young children*. Redmond, WA: Exchange Press.
- Pushor, D. (2013). Bringing into being a curriculum of parents. In D. Pushor & The Parent Engagement Collaborative, *Portals of promise: Transforming beliefs and practices through a curriculum of parents* (pp. 5–19). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2010). Kindergarten curriculum. Retrieved from: <https://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/index.jsp>
- Smith, G. A. (2002). Place-based education: Learning to be where we are. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(2), 584–594.