Promoting environmental stewardship through gardens: A case study of children’s views of an urban school garden

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Abstract

Fostering children’s relationships with nature to develop their sense of environmental stewardship is an important means for redressing damage to the planet caused by human consumption and our collective failure to connect with the natural world. School garden programs provide a potentially meaningful way to promote...
children’s sense of connection to nature. This paper describes findings from an 8-month qualitative study investigating how a school garden program at one public elementary school in southeastern Ontario promoted the students’ sense of environmental stewardship. Data collected from eight students through observations, semi-structured interviews, and students’ photographs identified five broad themes associated with enhancing environmental stewardship for children (including connecting with nature, caretaking, and harvesting) as well as three broad themes that help explain the long-term success of the venture (including parental involvement and community connections). The discussion highlights some of the benefits of the school garden program, as well as some of the difficulties associated with the program and limitations of the study.

Keywords
environmental stewardship; school gardens; environmental connectedness; photographic narratives

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A study of third, fourth and fifth graders showed that students participating in a garden program had increased self-understanding, interpersonal skills, and cooperative skills when compared to non-gardening students. (Robinson & Zajicek, 2006). Promoting Community Gardening Through Research: A Survey. Community Greening Review, 41. Bell, A. C., & Dyment, J. E. 2008. Promoting Environmental Stewardship through gardens: A case study of children’s views of an urban school garden. Rena Upitis, Scott Hughes, Anna Peterson. Fostering children’s relationships with nature to develop their sense of environmental stewardship is an important means for redressing damage to the planet caused by human consumption and our collective failure to connect with the natural world. School garden programs provide a potentially meaningful way to promote children’s sense of connection to nature. This paper describes findings from an 8-month qualitative study investigating how a school garden program at one public elementary school in southeastern Ontario promoted the students’ sense of environmental stewardship.