

The Project Approach to Learning at

RisingOaks
Early Learning

| John Sweeney

Project Name: Gardens

Age Group: Toddler (18mo. - 2.6y.)

Project Start Date: June 13, 2022

Project End Date: August 26, 2022



RisingOaks
Early Learning

Growing minds through play

Background

The garden project started in the toddler room on June 13, 2022 and ended on August 26, 2022. The twenty children involved in making the project were aged from 18 months to 2.6 years. The three educators learning alongside the children during this project were Debbie McNanney, RECE, Sierra Robichaud, RECE and Shannon Dobson, RECE.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

The garden project was initiated by the children throughout the early days of June, when the children were becoming more eager to explore the gardens in our playground. Educator Debbie brought in a few reusable sticker sheets that were garden and farm themed. Natalie, Thomas and Fox helped place the stickers onto the sheet. Some of the stickers represented different vegetables and tools used in the garden.



Figure 1 - Thomas using the farm themed reusable sticker sheet.

In order to set themselves up for success, the educators in the room created a learning web to set out their expectations for learning. It lined out different areas for exploration and activity ideas to help the learning continue.

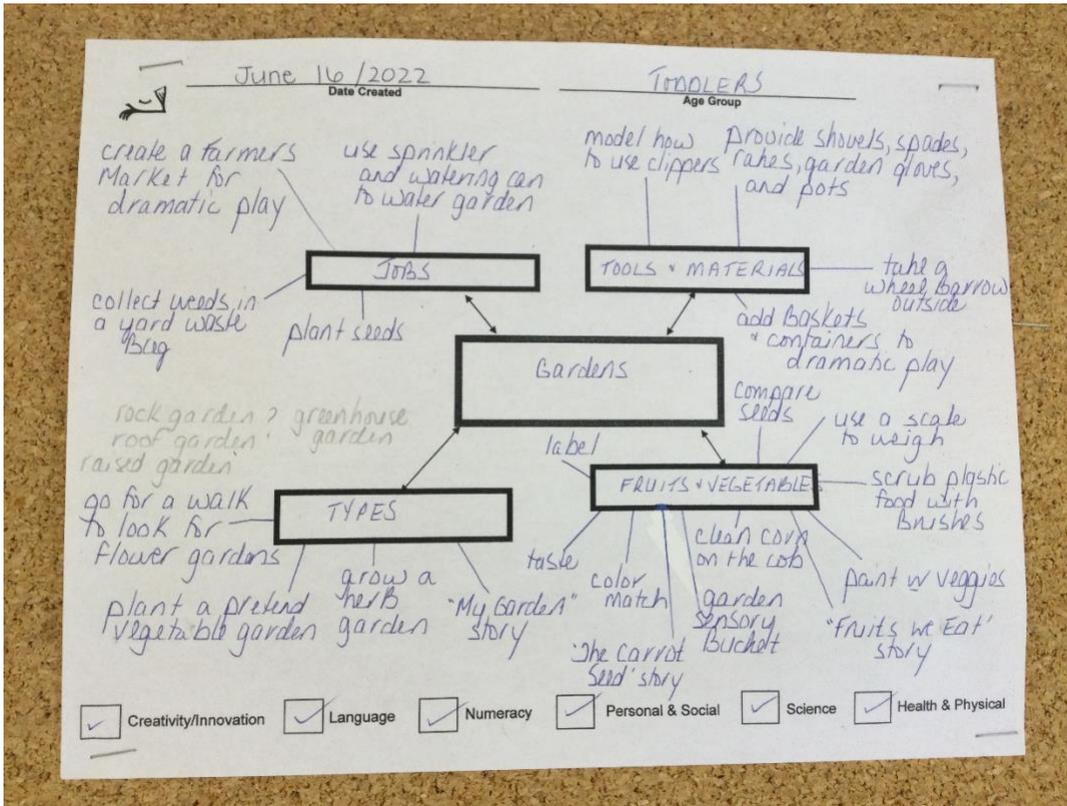


Figure 2 - Garden project learning web.

Once the web was created, it was time for the children to begin learning! First, the group worked together to discuss what things they already knew about gardens, what they wanted to know about gardens, and who/where could they find answers to these questions. By writing down their existing knowledge and questions and posting it in the classroom, the group was able to reflect and look back on what was being learned!

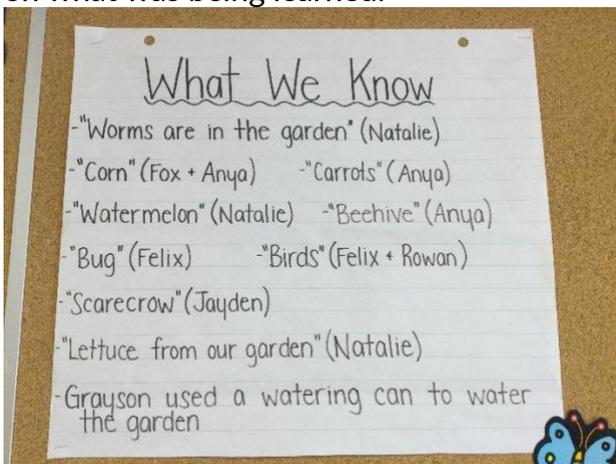


Figure 3 - What we know.

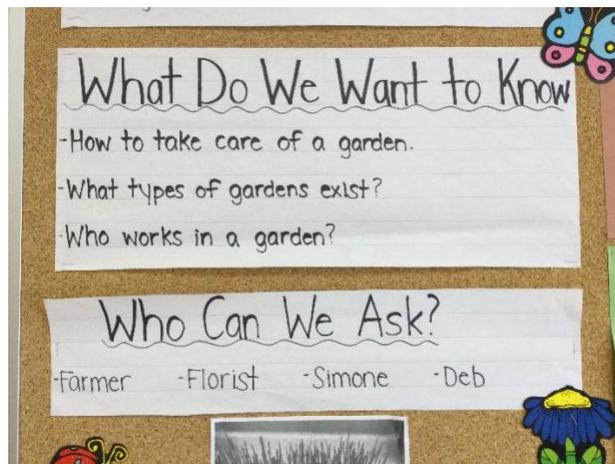


Figure 4 - What we want to know and who we can ask.

Phase 2: Developing the Project

To begin the investigation of the project, educators needed to find answers to the initial questions asked. One of the questions the group wanted answers to was how to take care of a garden. After conducting research online, educators decided that the main tasks to take care of a garden were planting, watering and maintaining a garden. The garden bed within the boundaries of the playground had already been started for the year, so educator Sierra decided to grow a small container of cat grass in the classroom so children would be able to visualize the process of it growing. Outside one morning, Natalie, Fox, Christian and Felix assisted in planting the seeds by adding soil, seeds and water to a container. Over the next few days, they helped water it once a day and eventually they observed the change! Grass was growing! Once the grass grew tall enough, Felix enhanced his cutting skills as he assisted Sierra in trimming the grass. Thomas, Stella, Jason and Jayden explored the grass clippings. The children further developed their senses as they smelled the clippings, touched them and even tasted them!



Figure 5 - Felix transferring soil into the grass container.



Figure 6 - Stella exploring the grass clippings.

Another important task when taking care of a garden is weeding. Educator Debbie brought in some compost bags and gave the children some gardening gloves. They all worked together to pull out the weeds in our playground! Evelyn, Christian and Rowan were Debbie's biggest helpers! While pulling the weeds, educators discussed the importance of removing the weeds, explaining that the weeds prevent the good grass from being able to grow.



Figure 7 - Christian and Rowan helping to pull weeds.

While continuing to investigate the questions that the children and educators originally posed, it was time for them to learn about the different types of gardens. They already had preexisting knowledge about vegetable gardens, since they had one in their playground. The class decided to go for a walk to see what other gardens they could find! While on their walk, they discovered another vegetable garden by the main entrance of John Sweeney Catholic school. While exploring the community, they also found a rock garden and a flower garden!



Figure 8 - The class discovering and exploring another vegetable garden.

After observing flower gardens and rock gardens in the neighborhood, the class decided to create their own flower and rock gardens! Educators Debbie and Sierra worked together to create a small

cardboard box garden within the classroom. By attaching photos of flowers to popsicle sticks, the children were able to "plant" the flowers in the cardboard garden! Ariaah, Anya and Inayra loved planting the flowers. Educator Debbie labelled the names of the flowers as the children tried to repeat the names. When creating the rock garden, Educator Shannon provided many different colours of acrylic paint and the children were all able to decorate their own rocks! Once the rocks had dried, we added them to our garden in the playground.



Figure 9 – Inayra planting fake flowers in the cardboard garden.



Figure 10 – Phoebe painting her rock for the rock garden.

To learn about who works in a garden, Debbie brought in a picture of a Farmer named Joe. With Joe came photos of all the tools he uses on the farm. To our surprise, Evelyn was able to label almost all of the tools! The photos of the tools included: a shovel, a rake, a watering can, a wheelbarrow, and a pair of gardening gloves!

An educator from the Preschool room, Simone, took lots of pride in caring for our garden in the playground. One morning, she harvested the Kohlrabi that was growing and brought it to the toddler room so the children could see and taste the new vegetable! Tomas, Rowan and Christian were very eager to taste the Kohlrabi leaves! When parents learned that the children were exploring their sense of taste by trying new vegetables, some of the parents decided to bring in vegetables from their own gardens for the children to try! Christian's family brought in currants for everyone to taste. Rowan, Felix and Addison made funny faces as they tasted the bitter berries! After tasting vegetables from Christian's garden, Evelyn and Elias' families brought in veggies from their home gardens, too!



Figure 11 - Inayra and Elias tasting vegetables from the garden.

Another way families became involved was by answering the class survey about gardens. Out of the twenty children that were involved in the project, thirteen families returned their surveys. The survey helped educators gather insight into what experiences the children may have already had with gardens.

Questions	Yes	No
Do you have a garden at home?	11	2
Do you know someone that has a garden?	12	1
Has your child ever been to a Farmer's Market?	11	2

Figure 12 - Parent survey results.

The children's learning was represented through several learning experiences. Educator Shannon asked the children to help harvest the potatoes from the RisingOaks| John Sweeney garden located in the mail playground. The children displayed so much joy while digging through the dirt. They were surprised to discover that the potatoes were located so deep in the dirt! After harvesting the potatoes,

Shannon cut the potatoes and used them for stamping. The children were able to recognize that the prints left on their paper were from the potatoes!



Figure 13 – Christian and educator Shannon harvesting the potatoes.

In addition to the potatoes, the children were also able to recognize corn markings. Educator Debbie brought in several pieces of corn on the cob and had the children work hard to shuck them. It took lots of muscle to get the silk off the cob, but the children displayed pride in their hard work! Once the corn was shucked, the children then used the corn to create corn prints on paper. They rolled the corn in yellow paint, then rolled it onto their paper!



Figure 14 – Evelyn, Tomas and Grayson shucking corn.



Figure 15 – Phoebe rolling her corn in paint.

As a final activity to have the children represent what they learned, they completed their second drawings of a garden. At the beginning of the project, before any experiences, the children created

their first drawings of a garden. At this age, the children are not quite able to represent their knowledge through drawings. Instead, some of the children verbalized what they were trying to draw. Tomas' photos are shown below. In his first drawing, he said he was drawing an "apple". By his second drawing, he verbalized that he was drawings "seeds" and his drawing showed small marks made on his paper, similar to seeds!

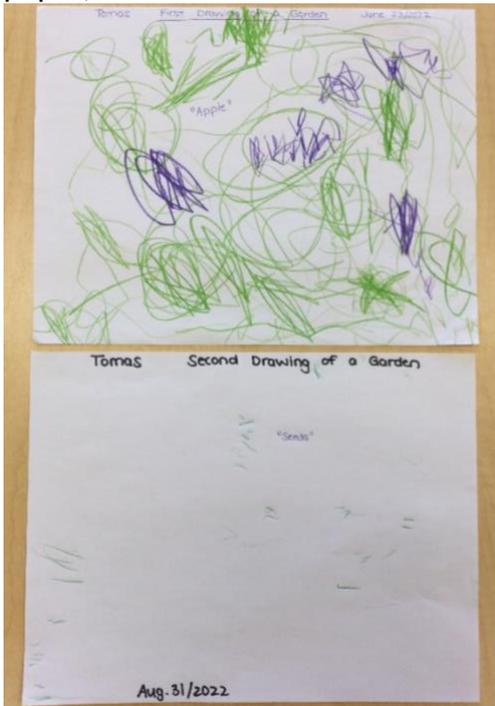


Figure 16 – Tomas' first and second drawings.

Throughout the duration of the garden project, educators kept track of the new words and vocabulary that the children were learning. Each time the group learned a new word, it was added to the large list displayed in the classroom!

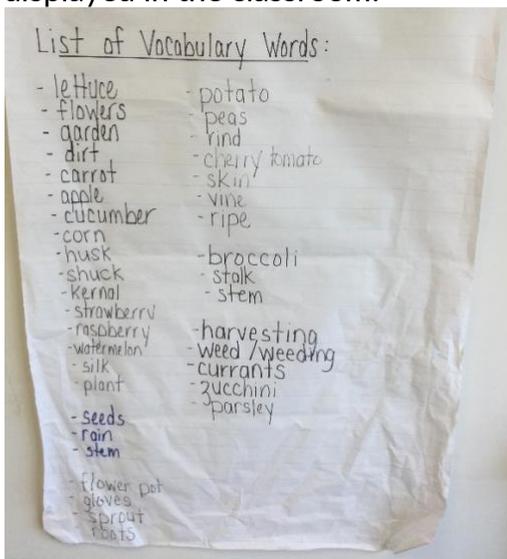


Figure 17 - List of new vocabulary learned.

Phase 3: Concluding the Project

The final experiences that helped to wrap up the garden project was the creation of the 3D garden, and a visit from the special guest.

Educator Sierra collected pool noodles, brown construction paper and popsicle sticks to create a 3D garden. Brown paper was wrapped around the pool noodles, and the noodles were connected with tape, popsicle sticks and glue. Once the 3D garden had dried, it was ready to use! Using the same popsicle stick flowers, fruits and vegetables from a previous experience, children "planted" and "picked" the different items from the garden! Jason and Harper had fun with this experience!



Figure 18 – Jason and Rowan “planting” in the 3D garden.

Simone, an educator from Preschool 1, was the special guest for this project. Simone has her own garden at home and was the primary caretaker of the RisingOaks| John Sweeney garden as well. Simone was able to answer several of the questions the children had, such as "Who works in a garden?" She explained that a farmer works in the garden on the farm but that really, anybody can work in the garden, even the toddlers! Simone even sang a song about gardens and involved the children but having them clap to the beat!

To display the project to the families, educators created a binder that represented a full timeline of events. The binder displayed all of the activities and experience the children had in chronological order. Families were encouraged to become a part of this experience by reading and looking through the binder with their children. It was displayed right outside the classroom for them to have access to at any time. Family involvement in creating the binder was created by adding a portion of the binder with photos of the children and families' gardens from home! The children were definitely excited to see photos of their home gardens included in the document.