

How Does Your Garden Grow?

By Lee Borrowman

If you happened to be hanging out in the Garden Classroom at Burton Valley Elementary last week, you might have had the pleasure of watching a small group of special education students experiencing the sensory delights of honeysuckles and snapdragons, or listened in amazement to young voices asking for “More salad, please!” From green beans to chard, if your student attends BVE she may actually be eating her vegetables. And there are many more lessons to be learned in the Garden Classroom.

There are beds in the Garden with such names as Pizza, Salad, Soup and Salsa. Students can visit a Hummingbird Garden, a Butterfly Garden or the new Tops and Bottoms Garden (inspired by Janet Steven’s Caldecott Honor book of the same name). Or walk through Central Valley, where food crops grow, and take the California Native Trail that features a wide variety of native plants. On Wednesdays students can spend “Lunch in the Garden,” picnicking and helping out with garden chores.

Science teacher Mallory Peirce explains, “The garden was designed from the beginning with curriculum in mind. Because of this, while the garden has been evolving over the past 3 years to include all elements needed to teach the curriculum, we initially developed the lessons to meet

the state content standards - not just in science, but social studies and other subjects. Every lesson in the garden either enriches or delivers classroom content.”

Peirce’s favorite lesson teaches to a 2nd grade standard, “Soil – It’s Alive.” Soil is made partly from organic materials and partly from weathered rock. Thriving worm bins and compost bins, for both food scraps and plant materials, feature the organic components of the soil. Nothing goes to waste in the Garden Classroom.

Even the storm drain serves as a focal point for a lesson on watershed. Science teacher Laura Lowell takes her 5th grade classes to visit a creek at the beginning of the school year. Then they watch water run-off to the Garden creek go down the storm drain. Back in the classroom, they use maps to trace the path of the water to Las Trampas Creek, where it joins Tice Creek under Broadway Plaza to form Walnut Creek, and moves on through Suisun Bay and finally meets the ocean. The students make connections between water conservation, ecology and the watershed.

The Garden Classroom also serves as an outdoor laboratory for a lesson on pollination. After dissecting a flower in the classroom, students use the garden to watch pollinators at



Proud student offers samples work; the Garden is home to hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, small flies and beetles all busily doing their thing. Other classes use native plants such as soap root in their studies of Native Americans.

Photo by Lee Borrowman



Pollinators at work

ers use the Garden in one way or another. Curiel also encourages students to just quietly observe the Garden. She says, “Their minds really turn on when they see and smell and taste.”

Support of many organizations, such as the BVE PTA, Soda Foundation, LASF, Intero Realty, East Bay Nursery, Garden Arts, The Water Project, and the Lafayette Community Foundation, and Boy/Girl Scouts have been invaluable. The PTA made possible last year the hiring of garden manager/instructor Kim Curiel. Peirce says, “Having Kim has allowed us to bring children into the garden, on a weekly basis, for activities. She has also expanded the original science/social studies curriculum to integrate nutrition education, art, literature and physical activity.” Nearly all of BVE’s teach-



Kim Curiel (center) with special ed class

Photo by Lee Borrowman



The Hummingbird Garden

Photo by Lee Borrowman

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