Abstract


The CCSS have now been adopted by 45 states, including Vermont (Roberts, 2012). For many teachers, these standards require a rigorous re-evaluation of grade level expectations and strategies for teaching across the curriculum. There is also a great need for educators to provide engaging lessons that can suit diverse learners while aligning to the new standards. Research shows hands-on experiential learning as a powerful and effective method of teaching that enhances opportunities for students to build valuable connections between themselves and their world (Poudel, Vincent, Anzalone, Huner, Wollard, DeRamus & Blakewood, 2005). As an educator, the garden is an opportune place for hands-on learning while providing a multitude of learning opportunities for academic, personal, and community development in a variety of educational environments. The purpose of this resource guide is to deliver lesson plans, ideas, resources, and inspiration for third grade teachers in Vermont, combining the new Common Core State Standards, with Vermont State Standards for Social Studies, Science, Math, and the Arts. This resource provides a curricular framework for integrating thematic learning in the garden, and acts as a foundation for individual garden-based learning projects that can be modified to suit various needs and interests.

Project Goals

The main goal for this project is to provide a resource guide for elementary teachers in Vermont for cross-curricular learning in a garden. This resource guide focuses on the third grade level and corresponding standards. The guide contains cross-curricular thematic units with strategies for differentiating instruction with additional resources for garden-based learning in Vermont. The secondary goal of this project is to motivate students by providing engaging, multi-modal learning opportunities in the garden and classroom that promote sense of belonging, ownership, team-building, leadership, and self-efficacy.

Professional Questions and Rationale

How can a school garden program provide an exceptional source of experiential, cross-curricular learning while following the educational protocol of the Common Core State Standards?

At present, because the CCSS only addresses Language Arts and Mathematics standards in Vermont, it is up to teachers to combine these standards to the local state standards. As a result, classroom teachers’ tasks have broadened even further in order to bridge standards and expectations across the curriculum. Experiential learning in the garden offers both individual and community-based activities that promote involvement in the learning process, and combine standards-based learning with real world connections.

In addition to academic goals, what social and interpersonal skills can be supported through experiential learning in the garden?

Garden programs support autonomy by engaging students in meaningful activities that provide purpose, pride, and sense of ownership (Skinner, 2012). The skills that students learn during the process of gardening are not just about plants, but about themselves, their communities, and their world. Skinner’s quantitative research has shown that the “active ingredients” for success in gardening programs is intrinsic motivation and engagement (p.16), offering a strong theory suggesting that self-perceptions of competence, relatedness, and autonomy predict student engagement in academic work. Relatedness is met through cooperative projects and team work with classmates and teachers. Competence can be developed through various problem-solving tasks and effort with substantial outcomes.

Professional Standards

The following Core Propositions from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are included:

Proposition 1: Teachers are committed to students and learning.

Proposition 4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

The following InTASC standards were addressed in this project:

Standard #1: Learner Development
Standard #2: Learning Differences
Standard #3: Learning Environments
Standard #7: Planning for Instruction

Content Standards

The following Vermont State History/Social Studies, Science, and Art Standards were addressed in this project:

H&SS3-4.8: Students connect past with the present.
H&SS3-4.13: Students analyze how and why cultures continue and change over time.

References


