

Midyear Research Report

“Collaboratively Developing and Assessing Garden-based Environmental Education in Seattle's International District”

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PROGRESS TO DATE

Beginning in June 2013, my research has taken two forms. First and foremost, I began working closely with my partner organization, InterIm CDA to better understand both their assessment needs and goals and the actual content of the garden-based environmental education programming that they were offering to local youth. This has involved repeated meetings with the main instructors as well as administrators at the school (Bailey Gatzert) where their programming is focused, in order to grasp the goals of the educational outreach and their assessment needs. In addition, each week in Fall quarter I observed InterIm's class (held on alternate weeks at Bailey Gatzert and InterIm's Danny Woo Garden in the International District) and discussed its conduct with the instructors and volunteers in order to develop a first-hand understanding of the content that InterIm is offering. My second goal during the first half of my fellowship has been to gather as much research as possible on the assessment of garden-based learning. In addition to the typical approach of gathering materials through library databases, I also benefitted enormously from interactions with two individuals: the first a faculty colleague in Psychology with whom I was able to engage in a focused reading and discussion of assessment materials, and the second an education professor at Portland State University (and former Portland school board member) who has been a leading researcher, writer and practitioner in the field of garden-based learning. The combination of these parallel research initiatives have helped to deepen my understanding and hone my focus regarding my primary research goal, namely to collaboratively develop and assess the garden-based educational programming InterIm offers to local schoolchildren.

FUTURE PLANS

For the remainder of my fellowship term, I have three objectives. First, I will assist InterIm CDA in implementing, assessing and revising the evaluation tools for their spring quarter educational outreach. This outreach is directed at elementary school students at Bailey Gatzert as well as preschool children at the Denise Louie Preschool in the International District. Second, I intend to expand my inquiry on assessment to encompass other programs that are providing enrichment activities to elementary school students at Bailey Gatzert. In my assessment discussions with various parties over the past year, it has become clear that the assessment mandate is spreading in ways that 1) do not necessarily generate the type of constructive, formative feedback they are ostensibly intended to provide, and 2) may have a negative effect on the actual services being provided to students. These examples of assessment will provide important context and comparative examples for my work with InterIm on their own attempts at evaluation. Finally, following the final assessments in June, I intend to begin combining the data from this year's work with the research on environmental education assessment and move to writing up my analysis for publication.