



TDSB/OISE Action Research Team

Research Summary

Introducing the Teacher-Researcher, Students & School:

Beka Ly is “heart educator” who loves co-learning with her students. She has a Master of Teaching degree from the University of Toronto and participates on an action research team with the University of Toronto (TDSB-OISE) focused on Environmental Sustainability Education (ESE). She focuses on crafting meaningful connections for students through hands-on experiences and heartfelt conversations. This year she is teaching Grade 6 at Gateway Public School which serves Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6 students in the vibrant neighbourhood of Flemingdon Park. The school population is close to 950 students. Gateway is a diverse community, representative of the multicultural centre Toronto has become.

Research Question:

How can students’ ecological identities be developed through environmental and sustainability education (ESE)?

Sub-questions

Questions:

What is the connection between ecological identity and garden-based learning? What kinds of garden-based activities support students’ learning?

How can meaningful connections to a class garden, food literacy, and nature experiences inform and connect to students’ past experiences and ecological identity?

Curricular Implementation:

Science (Biodiversity) is delivered through Flemingdon Park farm visits, Eco Sparks programming, in-class garden-based inquiry, and workshops, enabling students to investigate interdependence, life systems, and human impact firsthand.

Social Studies is authentically embedded through exploration of Indigenous land stewardship, local/global food systems, and environmental decision-making in both strands of the Gr. 6 curriculum.

The Arts provide a reflective and expressive lens, using design principles to communicate environmental understanding through nature, landscape drawings, poetry etc.

Mathematics is applied through real-world measurement and data analysis (e.g., plant growth, graphing from our Tomatosphere project)

Language Arts is integrated across all experiences via research, nature journaling, discussion, and

media analysis through daily news clips, strengthening communication and critical literacy around sustainability and other local and global issues.



Data Collection Strategies:

- Journal Entries/Notes
- Photos
- Student work samples
- Student interviews

Insights from this Action Research Study

Gardens can be a Gateway to Self and World Connections - Gardens, over the past 3 years of my research, whether inside the classroom or in and around the community, has been a gateway to environmental connections and reflections.

Reflection and Collection - When reflection is invited, allowed and “formally” collected - there are deep connections made. Written reflections showed deeper connections than verbal reflections.

Identity-forming experiences - Students seem to naturally make connections about themselves, their families and past places when given opportunities to be in nature and time to reflect after.

Other Notes:

View a webinar that shares Beka’s teaching practices [here](#)

Info about the TDSB/OISE Action Research Team can be found on the [TDSB](#) and [OISE](#) websites