Building food literate citizens through hands-on whole food cycle education: The power of partnerships

Dr. Gwen Chapman
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
Vancouver based 5 year community based action research project (2010-2015)

Partnership of academic researchers Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Food Policy Council, non-profit food and environmental organizations

Dr. Alejandro Rojas
Building Partnerships
Whole food system learning by doing
Social learning experiment for food system eco-literacy and social change
Goal: students will be engaged in all aspects of the food system within their schools
Project Objectives

- **Short term:** To engage students in growing, preparing, and sharing food at school and sustainably managing food waste

- **Intermediate term:** To promote development of healthy, sustainable food systems in Vancouver schools

- **Long term:** To enhance regional food security, health, food system sustainability
Project Overview

- Community of learners approach, bringing together university students and professors; K-12 students, teachers & staff; farmers, gardeners, and restaurateurs; nutrition, health, and community development professionals
- Community based action research, facilitating school and School Board based projects to implement
  - Food and environment education across the curriculum
  - School gardens that produce food used in school
  - Functioning food waste compost/recycling systems
  - Food programs that provide safe, healthy, sustainable foods that students eat
  - Policies that promote healthy, sustainable school food systems
Project Activities

- Community-based Experiential Learning
- Small Grants
- Collaborative Inquiry
- Summer Institute/Professional Development
Community-based Experiential Learning

- University students deliver workshops to K-12 students, or provide service to community

- Curricular activities that
  - connect theory to practice
  - develop food system skills
  - promote reflective practice

- Examples:
  - Vermicomposting
  - Planting Garlic
  - Prepare & Share
  - Classroom Art

- 1500+ students in 125+ classrooms
Small Grants: Bottom-Up

- Model for distributing grant funds ($20-$35k/year)
- Opportunity for community to design own food system projects
- Up to $2000/school for integrative, food system projects
  - 2011/12 – 14 schools
  - 2012/13 – 17 schools
  - 2013/14 – 33 schools
  - 2014/15 – 38 schools
- 2018/19 – City of Vancouver providing $25k for small grants
Teacher Collaborative Inquiry

- Exploration of how school-university collaboration can facilitate development of curriculum and pedagogies for integrating food system education into schools
- Teams established in two elementary schools: 8-10 teachers, 2-4 university team members, interested parents
- Monthly meetings
3 Day Intensives and Other Pro D Workshops

- 90+ participants per year: teachers, administration, students
- 30+ community workshops: gardening, food preparation, food curriculum
- Delicious food, networking, energy
Evaluation and Lessons Learned

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation
School Garden Development

Number of Schools

- Year 1 (n=10)
  - Nothing happening (0): 0
  - Just getting started (1): 2
  - Up and running (2): 5
  - Well used (3): 3
  - Fully integrated (4): 0

- Year 2 (n=19)
  - Nothing happening (0): 0
  - Just getting started (1): 2
  - Up and running (2): 5
  - Well used (3): 3
  - Fully integrated (4): 1

- Year 3 (n=29)
  - Nothing happening (0): 1
  - Just getting started (1): 4
  - Up and running (2): 6
  - Well used (3): 6
  - Fully integrated (4): 10

- Year 4 (n=28)
  - Nothing happening (0): 2
  - Just getting started (1): 2
  - Up and running (2): 4
  - Well used (3): 5
  - Fully integrated (4): 4
Classroom Food Preparation

- Year 2 (n=19):
  - Nothing happening (0): 6
  - Just getting started (1): 10
  - Up and running (2): 2

- Year 3 (n=29):
  - Nothing happening (0): 0
  - Just getting started (1): 14
  - Up and running (2): 10
  - Well used (3): 4

- Year 4 (n=25):
  - Nothing happening (0): 0
  - Just getting started (1): 12
  - Up and running (2): 7
  - Well used (3): 4
  - Fully integrated (4): 2
Food Cycle Teaching & Learning

- Year 1 (n=10): Nothing happening (0), Just getting started (1), Up and running (2), Well used (3), Fully integrated (4)
- Year 2 (n=19): Nothing happening (0), Just getting started (1), Up and running (2), Well used (3), Fully integrated (4)
- Year 3 (n=30): Nothing happening (0), Just getting started (1), Up and running (2), Well used (3), Fully integrated (4)
- Year 4 (n=28): Nothing happening (0), Just getting started (1), Up and running (2), Well used (3), Fully integrated (4)
Evaluation and Lessons Learned

- When children plan, plant, grow, prepare food and eat together, celebrate and compost, they show increased appreciation for food and the learning experience
  - Children try [and enjoy] foods they grow and prepare that they would otherwise would not even touch
- Experiencing and living the entire food cycle is key, but must be supported by exposure to food system thinking to make connections and increase impact
- Teachers need and appreciate support:
  - University students and community partners
  - Supportive administrators
  - Funding
  - Networking, curriculum ideas, hands on training
Acknowledgments

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For more information: [www.thinkeatgreen.ca](http://www.thinkeatgreen.ca)