OISE Community
Learning Garden
Annual Report

October 2015
Introduction

Over the past five years, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto has proven to be a leader of environmental and sustainability education (ESE). OISE has been cultivating innovative methods for infusing ESE into our educational programming, organizational habits and practices, and our buildings’ facilities. This commitment to initiating and embedding a culture of sustainability within OISE originated as a call to action on new environmental education policy stemming from the Ontario Ministry of Education (Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow, 2009) and has since moved beyond this to accomplish OISE’s mandate to strive for social and ecological responsibility.

Thanks to funding by TD Friends of the Environment Foundation we have been able to continue this mission through the OISE Community Learning Garden. The Learning Garden is a labour of love (and many green thumbs), cared for by students, staff and faculty to support integrated learning about and through ESE for all members of the OISE community. Having just finished its third growing season, this report speaks to the garden’s successes for 2014-15.

TDSB teachers learning in the garden in July 2015 while participating in the EE Additional Qualification professional development course.
The OISE Community Learning Garden

In an ‘urban jungle’ as vibrant and diverse as Toronto, the garden was created to promote ESE, but to do so in a way that represented OISE’s collaborative nature and reflected its lively diversity.

The OISE Community Learning Garden is a series of six gardens found in large planters spanning across the front of the OISE building at 252 Bloor Street West, near the north end of the University of Toronto St. George campus. The garden is situated in an ideal location, juxtaposed between the spaces of institution and public, classroom and community, and natural and man-made surroundings.

Peering from the inside out, the garden can be glimpsed from the library’s front windows, serving as a constant reminder to those inside to embrace a growth mindset. Looking outside-in, the garden’s inaugural planting day marked the beginning of a community wherein the street would be lined with signs of life and colour, not just concrete. This eye-catching ESE initiative has established itself as a natural focal point and meeting place, drawing together students, staff, faculty and members of the local neighbourhood in new and engaging ways.

The Learning Garden is home to 35 different plants native to the region. Each of the six gardens are created and named to honour a foundational concept of education at OISE: Equity and Inclusive Education, Aboriginal Education, Holistic Education, Creativity in Education and, of course, Environmental and Sustainability Education. Each garden contains plants thoughtfully selected to reflect its core concept through a meaningful and vivid visual representation. The garden as a whole also showcases OISE’s pedagogical and curricular approaches for the local community.
Highlights from the Garden This Year

May 2015 – Planting day got new and old friends involved in ESE – even our littlest green thumbs from the Early Learning Centre helped dig up plants for relocation and took home sunflowers!

June 2015 – Everfruiting strawberries ripened in the Creativity Garden, delighting humans and squirrels in the neighbourhood

July 2015: The ELC daycare children participated in a workshop planting seeds, painting pots, and drawing garden wildlife

July 2015: The garden was a learning resource for teachers completing the EE (Part 1) AQ Course

Aug. 2015: Having tracked their growth all summer, honourary Garden Assistant Snickelfritz guards his sunflowers
Supporting Our Community Garden

We were fortunate to receive funding through the *TD Friends of the Environment Foundation*. Last year the grant allowed us to fund the following:

- training for 2 work-study students (fall/winter & spring/summer)
- many garden-based workshops and events (see pg. 7) for the OISE community
- new plants for the garden
- workshop and event supplies;
- seeds, compost, natural fertilizer, natural rodent repellent, etc.
- website support and development
- promotional materials

In addition to the grant, our support came from the OISE community members who donated: time and energy to assist with planting and garden maintenance; plants that were difficult to find; new homes to plant cuttings and seedlings; and enthusiasm for the garden through social media posts and verbal feedback.
Growing the Garden Beyond Its Borders

The Learning Garden was once again abuzz with lots of wide-ranging activities that helped to encourage a sense of belonging in every friend of the garden, no matter how big or small – or what species! These friends help to spread its ideas well beyond its borders, mimicking the cross-pollination of its insect citizens.

Insects photographed in the Learning Garden Summer 2015

New Friends
With so many plants, the garden was a perfect destination for many insects to frequent, live and thrive. We observed a lot of insect activity, from bumble bees, ladybugs, caterpillars, butterflies, and some not-yet-identified bugs.

Sharing the Garden Through Social Media
We have been maintaining an active social media presence on Twitter (@OISEese) to share photographs and garden happenings with many individual and community followers. We have continued to add new content to our Down and Dirty Updates garden blog to share what’s growing in the garden, and also to capture and inspire moments of gardening and ESE in action through the addition of healthy plant-based recipes. Our website has become a popular destination for those wanting to learn about educational gardening (http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ese/OISE_Learning_Garden/index.html) The garden was also featured in the U of T Bulletin this year, read by the entire campus: Third Spring Planting of OISE’s Community Learning Garden http://www.sustainability.utoronto.ca/news/calendar/OISElearninggarden.htm

Student Training
Over the course of 2014-15, the Learning Garden formally trained three OISE students who spent over 375 hours honing their skills through working in/on the garden, maintaining the website and blog, supporting events, leading and facilitating workshops, and pursuing research and curriculum development related to ESE.

Intern Jamie Wei, faculty member Hilary Inwood, and Garden Coordinator Alysse Kennedy were just some of the OISE community members working to develop, maintain and promote the Learning Garden this year.
Growing the Garden Beyond Its Borders (continued)

Seeds for Change
We continued to bring the garden ‘inside’ for year-round learning, in part by becoming a branch of the Toronto Seed Library (in the OISE Library). Supporting this project has in turn led to strengthening other ESE-related endeavors, such as facilitating events for curious young minds like working with daycare students to harvest seeds, and creating collaborative eco-art projects to increase visibility.

Environmental Artworks

This past year we created four environmental artworks inspired by the garden. In the The Garden Towers Project, OISE students hand-sculpted, glazed and fired a number of clay towers to bring the themes of the garden inside, as well as increase the visibility of the Seed Library. As a result of our Garden Photos Contest last year, one of our main meeting rooms now has six large-scale photos of the garden adorning its walls. FLAP 2.0: For the Birds consists of birds hand-painted or drawn by the students and faculty to create a breathtaking art installation in the OISE stairwell representing the plight of migratory birds in urban environments. And Growing in New Directions is a painting installation created in collaboration with Grade 3 students at OISE’s Laboratory School at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, who used the Aboriginal Education Garden as a starting point to explore the four cardinal directions of First Nations cultures. The latter two artworks are part of OISE’s “Take the Stairs” campaign, which promotes sustainability through energy conservation and health and wellness. For more info on the artworks, visit: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ese/ESE_in_Practice/Eco-Art_Projects.html

Garden-based Research
Teaching and Learning Events

The Learning Garden team continued to use the garden as starting point for helping the OISE community learn about the positive impacts of greening urban spaces for adults, children and the environment. The garden has also been a springboard for meaningful dialogue surrounding Indigenous culture, equity, inclusion, social justice, environmental justice, creativity and holistic learning.

Community Events and Student Workshops related to ESE and the Garden:

- **Sept. 26, 2014** – Learning Garden Open House
- **Oct. 1, 2014** - ESE Launch/Planting Seeds for Change
- **Oct. 8, 2014** – Getting kids outside Workshop; Annie Vandenberg, Evergreen
- **Jan. 14, 2015** – Growing ESE in Secondary Schools; Martha Gonya, Kiplng CI
- **Jan. 21, 2015** – OISE EcoFair, with many exhibitors focused on educational gardens
- **Jan. 21, 2015** – Worming your Way into Education: Vermicomposting for Integrated Learning from Cathy Nesbitt
- **Jan. 28, 2015** – EcoSchools: Integrating Ecoliteracy into TDSB Schools from Erin Wood, TDSB EcoSchools’ Facilitator
- **Feb. 11, 2015** – Creative Approaches to ESE: Eco-art Workshop with Hilary Inwood, OISE Art Educator
- **May 26, 2015** – Third Annual Planting Day for the garden and Garden Open House
- **June 3, 2015** – Pollinating Partnerships: Celebrating ESE and EcoSchools Success – event for over a hundred TDSB EcoSchools’ teachers
- **July 2015** – Workshop for OISE’s Early Learning Centre daycare - planting seeds, exploring wildlife in the garden, and painting planters
- **July 2015** – EcoSchools teachers attend Part 1 of the Environmental Education (EE) Additional Qualification held at OISE
- **Sept. 30, 2015** – Back for new students, Worming your Way into Education: Vermicomposting for Integrated Learning from Cathy Nesbitt
- **Oct. 1, 2015** – OISE Community Learning Garden Open House
- **Oct. 1, 2015** – Indigenous approaches to Gardening, Elder Jacqueline Lavalley
- **Oct. 1, 2015** – Workshop for OISE’s Early Learning Centre daycare harvesting seeds from the garden and learning about plant growth;
- **Oct. 1, 2015** – Seed workshop with grade one students from the Lab School at OISE’s Institute of Child Studies
Feedback on the Learning Garden

From the UofT Sustainability Office’s Project Coordinator: “The OISE Learning Garden is just one small aspect of what makes U of T “Greener” but I’m consistently amazed by its impact. I often have people telling me that they appreciate both the added green space, and the learning aspects of the garden. I agree: we should have more projects like this across campus!”

From an OISE Master of Teaching Student:
“I really enjoy having the gardens out front of OISE. I had the opportunity to talk with a student who tends the gardens and she explained to me the different types of plants and flowers and why they were chosen to be planted. A lot of time and care go into the planning, planting and continued tending of these gardens and that effort does not go unnoticed. The plots truly brighten up the front of the building!”

From a Community Member:
"The garden is lovely. I could tell those were chives by the fresh aromas they gave off. This is one of my favourite parts of the city to walk past."

From one of the Work-Study Students (also an OISE Master of Teaching Student):
“The garden work-study position has fully enriched my experience as a graduate student in the Master of Teaching program in so many diverse ways. Through the Learning Garden I have been able to cultivate my passion for supporting environmental and sustainability education (ESE) and expand my knowledge. Being that the ESE Initiative is the most active student organization at OISE, my role with the garden has allowed me to develop meaningful relationships with a lively group of faculty, staff, fellow students and members of the neighbourhood. The garden has proven itself to be a focal point, situating OISE’s ESE initiative within the context of the surrounding community, and I have gained valuable experience using the garden as a way to reach out and promote building community. This has included writing weekly blog posts on related content, and planning and facilitating events for diverse audiences. Highlights include the garden’s annual Open House and creating and delivering workshops for children in OISE’s Early Learning Centre and Grade 1 students at the Institute of Child Study. These have allowed me the opportunity to gain more experience as a teacher, especially by developing lesson plans to connect the garden and the curriculum, and honing my classroom management skills. And, of course, my work with the garden has taught me about different plant species, best practices for caring for a garden, and shown me the literal fruits – and other plants – of how hard work pays off!”
From OISE’s Property Manager:
“The OISE Learning Garden is a beautiful escape for all to enjoy as we walk by during our busy work day, or weekend. As demand for real estate has taken away a lot of green space which was once evident on main streets, it is comforting to stop for a moment and enjoy viewing the various plants and flowers which are displayed. The garden reminds us to “stop and smell the roses” when we walk by, reminding us of the beauty of nature which does exist in the centre of the City.”

From an OISE Master of Teaching Student:
“The OISE Learning Garden brings a smile to my face and brightens up my day. It’s nice to see some greenery around attached to the building. It makes me proud that our school has a community garden in the pocket of downtown.”

From a Community Member:
"I always walk this way to check out what's growing and take a look at everything."

From a Continuing Education Student:
“As someone who has tried (and failed) to maintain a simple garden of herbs at home, I can only imagine how much hard work and dedication must have gone into successfully building such a colourful, fragrant garden in a space where I thought it'd be next to impossible. Great work, I'm jealous!”

From an OISE faculty member:
“Being involved in the garden has been an enriching experience! It is lovely to see plants and wildlife thrive in such a ‘concrete jungle’. Sharing the garden with students in my courses has become a point of pride – if we can grow such a vibrant set of native plants in this environment, they feel encouraged that it can be done in schoolyards with more natural spaces. Thanks to TDFEF for helping to fund this project – it is a constant reminder about the importance of environmental learning at OISE!”

From a Community Member:
"The flowers look very nice. It is so wonderful that there are all these things growing in the city like this."

From an OISE Librarian:
“It’s lovely to see wildflowers in the concrete planters at 252 Bloor St. People walk by and smile “It’s nice to see someone watering them. The Native garden attracts positive attention from humans, butterflies and bees. It's a joyful experience and lovely to see this initiative get financial support.”

From a Community Member:
"We have milkweeds in South Africa but they look a lot different then these ones in the garden. It's amazing to see the differences and similarities across the world.”
From a Community Member:
"This looks fantastic - without this project, there would just be weeds here, and it affects people to see all these lively plants. It's important to keep these alive."

Pollinating Partnerships OISE/TDSB partnership event June 2015

Two of the Garden photos installed in the OISE Meeting Room 11-164
Looking Ahead

As we look back on all that we have been able to accomplish through the *OISE Community Learning Garden* this past year, we look forward to the events, workshops and learning that continue to flourish. For our third season we will be developing the following activities:

- **“Bee” the Change Eco-art Project:** We will once again continue to make sustainability prominent at OISE through the installation of an environmental artwork; this year’s theme is the importance of bees as pollinators.

- **Expanding Audiences:** We will continue to develop new content, programming and events to make the *Learning Garden* appeal to broader audiences.

- **Forging Meaningful Relationships:** We will continue to use the *Learning Garden* to inspire conversations with practicing teachers from TDSB and Ontario EcoSchools to talk about approaches to ESE within K-12 schools. This helps us to support teachers’ professional development, as well as re-connect our alumni, many of whom are now working in K-12 schools.

- **Sowing Seeds:** We will continue to promote the OISE branch of the Toronto Seed Library, both by supplying it with seeds from the *Learning Garden*, and by promoting its presence on campus.

- **Build our Community via the Learning Garden:** The garden consistently acts as a catalyst for community connections between members of the OISE community and with nature. The care that is needed to tend a garden is closely tied to what it takes to build an inclusive, thriving community. The *Learning Garden* requires its community members to be responsible for a place, and be conscious of how their actions impact the social and ecological well-being of their surroundings.