OISE Community Learning Garden

Annual Report 2017

OISE Learning Garden Report 2017
Introduction

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto has committed to embedding Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE) into educational programming, organizational practices, and set-up of our facilities. OISE is committed to taking an active role in addressing environmental issues such as water and air pollution, climate change and biodiversity by creating a culture of sustainability at OISE. One of the ways that OISE demonstrates this is through our ongoing commitment to growing and tending our Community Learning Garden, which has been funded by TD Friends of the Environment Foundation since its inception in 2013. Over the past five years, we have been able to maintain an important and visible manifestation of our commitment to ESE through Learning Garden. This report aims to give an overview of the Garden’s successes and contribution to ESE at OISE throughout 2017.

Dean Glen Jones, CAO Helen Huang, faculty, students & community members at the Fall Learning Garden Open House

OISE Learning Garden Report 2017
OISE Community Learning Garden

The OISE Community Learning Garden is located in the urban centre of Toronto at Bloor and St. George streets, at the north end of the University of Toronto St. George campus. The garden is highly visible to OISE students, faculty, staff, and those who pass by. It is situated between public and private spaces in a busy, urban environment, offering a reminder of the possibility of natural space existing within the context of urban space.

The garden is visible from the OISE library, acting as reminder to students to embrace a growth mindset. The garden draws attention to its natural colours and plant species, rather than to the built environment that surrounds it. The gardens engage all five senses of those passing by, and especially for those who take a moment to smell the lemon balm or taste the kale. Students, faculty and staff use the garden as a meeting place, for pedagogical activities, projects, and for inspiration.

The six garden beds centre around five specific themes related to educational themes important to OISE: Indigenous Education, Equity and Inclusive Education, Holistic Education, Creativity in Education, and Environmental and Sustainability Education. The plants in each garden have been carefully selected to represent these themes. In total, there are 34 different indigenous plant species that thrive in the six garden beds. A map of the gardens and information on each plant species can be found at [http://uoft.me/OISEGarden](http://uoft.me/OISEGarden)

TDSB teachers collecting seeds at the Seed Saving Workshop in September 2017

The Indigenous Education Garden over the summer months
Garden Highlights 2017

In September, students from a partner school attended a workshop on what can be found in the garden and seed saving. This workshop was designed and led by OISE student/summer garden coordinator Janna Barkman, in conjunction with three other OISE students.

The planting day in May was a success. A large team of OISE students came together to set the garden up for the summer season, tending to the existing perennial plants which had survived the winter, and planting new additions.

Seed Saving in the Fall was an important part of the process of maintaining the garden and contributing to the community via the Toronto Seed Library. Many OISE students and TDSB teachers came for an evening of seed saving.
Gardening as Pedagogy

OISE community members were an important part of the Garden’s success this year. The garden was maintained by a team of OISE volunteers who devoted hours to planting, watering and tending to the garden. Community members dedicated their time and enthusiasm to attending events and engaging with us on social media. We also saw lots of evidence of community members spreading what they learned about educational gardens to their own communities and to their schools. They also showed their commitment to biodiversity by taking seeds harvested from the garden, and planting them elsewhere.

The Swamp Rose flourished this year because of the rainy weather.

Many people contributed to making the garden a success over the year, however the funding received from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation was instrumental in making the garden thrive. The grant allowed us to hire two work-study students to coordinate the garden (one in the summer, and one in the fall), maintain the garden (plant stock, supplies, etc.), and cover the costs of programming the garden events, workshops and talks. The grant also funded promotional materials and new signs for our garden.

OISE Learning Garden Report 2017
Educational Programming: Teaching & Learning Events

The Learning Garden has been an important starting point for educational activities and workshops. The garden has also been a springboard for meaningful dialogue surrounding Indigenous culture, equity, inclusion, social justice, environmental justice, creativity and holistic learning. We have had the pleasure of welcoming experts to facilitate workshops on these themes at our after-school workshops, as well as at our annual ESE conference. All of our events are now attended by both OISE students and TDSB EcoSchools teachers as part of our new collaboration with the TDSB, ensuring healthy audiences for each event.

Winter, Spring & Summer Events

The 3Rs & Artistic Activism: Eco-art Workshop
Jessie Sawyers and Hilary Inwood
Jan. 17, 2017

Integrating Ecoliteracy into TDSB Schools
Cynthia Chan, TDSB EcoSchools
Jan. 19, 2017

Changing the Climate: Environmental Ed in Action Conference & EcoFair
Feb. 4, 2017
  - Designing New Approaches to Outdoor Kindergarten Spaces - Gail Bornstein, TDSB EcoSchools
  - Telling Stories: Being A Part of Nature, not Apart from Nature - Ron Ballentine
  - Edible Elementary Environmental Education - Sunday Harrison, Green Thumbs Growing Kids

Project Wild Workshop
Farah Wadia, Project Wild
April 1, 2017

Spring Learning Garden Planting Day
Learning Garden Team
May 24, 2017

Summer Learning Garden Open House
Learning Garden Team
July 25, 2017

Fall Events

Connecting Gardening to Indigenous Education
Isaac Crosby, Evergreen Brickworks
September 18, 2017

Fall Learning Garden Open House
Learning Garden Team
September 18, 2017

Seed Saving Workshop
September 28, 2017
Olivia Orton, Coordinator of the Learning Garden

Food Literacy Education: A Recipe for Change!
Nicolas Peña Parra, FoodShare
October 4, 2017

Growing Approaches to Environmental Art: Native Plants
Janna Barkman and Hilary Inwood
October 24, 2017

TDSB Platinum EcoSchool Workshop: Warren Park OE Centre
Lori Yez, TDSB
November 13, 2017
This year we requested funding to support a new pilot project to provide educational programming to local K-12 teachers and their students. There are a number of schools within walking distance to OISE, and we have begun to develop connections with teachers at these schools around environmental learning. This aspect was a success thanks to Summer Garden Coordinator Janna Barkman. As an experienced environmental educator, Janna brought her existing experience working with elementary students to this curriculum development project, which resulted in two programs being created (overview below). With the help of other OISE students, Janna was able to pilot these programs with children and their teachers to ensure that the activities were age-appropriate, educational and engaging. These programs will be used to guide more daycare and school visits in the next growing season, and shared on our Learning Garden website.

Daycare Program - Garden Power!
This program aims to spark curiosity in daycare students to further explore the important role that native plant gardens (from the soil, to the plant, to the pollinator!) play. Through movement, hands-on investigation, and art, children will discover the diverse ‘powers’ that native plant gardens have in our eco-systems.

Grade 1-2 Program – Super Seed Saving
This program aims to get grade 1 students excited about the important role that seeds play in our natural world and for us as humans. It involves a life cycle game, a ‘super plant’ investigation, and seed-saving activity that students can use to jumpstart the growing process in their regular classroom.
Growing Beyond the Garden Borders

There is lots of evidence to show that the garden is a meeting place not only for the OISE community, but also for various insects and animals. The garden has many positive effects beyond the walls of the garden spaces.

New Friends
Due to the wide variety of native plant species growing in our garden, it attracts many insects and animals. We have observed lady bugs, bumble bees, wasps, caterpillars, butterflies, and squirrels, and birds enjoying the bounty of the garden.

Student Training
In 2017, two OISE students were formally trained for the Learning Garden. These students spent hours developing their skills through working on the garden, maintaining the blog, website and social media accounts, and planning and facilitating events. They will take these skills, their acquired knowledge, and enthusiasm for educational gardening with them as they begin their careers.

Supporting New School Gardens
Our new cohort of OISE teacher candidates, focused on Social Justice and Eco-Justice Education, is ‘embedded’ at Ryerson Community School, near Bathurst and Dundas. As part of their learning in the school, they are supporting and helping to maintain Ryerson’s new learning garden, which started in 2016.

Sharing the Garden through Social Media
We continue to maintain an active social media presence on Twitter (@OISEese) and Facebook (@OISEese) to share photos and updates on the garden; this social media presence has also helped us make new connections with other ESE organizations. We continue to add new content to our Down and Dirty blog, which include updates on the garden, recaps of our events, info on maintaining a garden, as well as educator resources. ([http://uoft.me/OISEGarden](http://uoft.me/OISEGarden)).
Learning Garden Feedback

"The Learning Garden has been a way for me to find a community of like-minded people on campus at OISE. Taking care of the garden was also an opportunity for me to connect with nature during very busy times when I might not have been able to otherwise. I was surprised by how many people would stop and tell me about a personal connection they had to something growing in the Garden, or ask an interesting question. I love that plant species native to this area grow in the Garden; I didn't know some of them were native species until I learned about them in the Garden. In such an urban area, it can be difficult to find native species. There is no doubt that the Learning Garden is small but impactful."

“I always loving walking home from work and seeing the plants growing just a little bigger.”

“The OISE learning garden has provided a place to connect and reconnect. Every time I have stopped in to take a moment in the garden, or to take a shift caring for it through weeding and watering, I have had a positive interaction with both the OISE and greater Bloor Street community. People love to take a moment in the garden. Because of the diversity of the native plants we selected, someone can always find a connection to a plant. Several times, I have had a passerby stop and tell me a story about a plant and a connection they have to it. Once, an older couple stopped to tell me about their memories of milkweed and butterflies in Toronto, and that they are so pleased to see them on Bloor Street now. It's always a positive experience, and I am so happy I had a part in making it happen!”

“It is so great to hear that teachers are learning about gardening and plants. Our children need to learn about that today more than ever, and it is up to our teachers to give that knowledge.”

“The garden has gotten so big this year compared to last year - this makes me so happy!”

“After being involved in the Learning Garden for the last few years, I am always surprised about the ways it helps to build a sense of community here at OISE – who knew that plants can help to bring people together?! Welcoming people to our events and workshops helps to bring people out of their departmental silos and find connections between students, staff and faculty that haven’t existed before. It also helps them to make connections between their professional and personal lives – many of these people make a point to tell me how the seeds or plants they
have had from their Learning Garden continue to grow and thrive in their own gardens, or in school gardens that they are involved in. It never ceases to amaze me how a small garden can have such big impacts!“

“I love seeing people getting their hands dirty right in the middle of Toronto!”

“From May to September 2017, I took care of the OISE Learning Garden, coordinated volunteers, and facilitated Garden programming for OISE community members. In my experiences watering, weeding, and delivering tours to OISE students, it became apparent how much of an impact the Learning Gardens had on the OISE community; from engaging teacher candidates in garden-based learning, connecting staff and faculty to transplants from the garden, engaging in conversation with people passing by, and witnessing a child stop for a moment as she breathes in the fresh scent of Virginia Mint. The garden truly was a hub, not just for learning, but for establishing a deeper connection to place. I heard from many of our volunteers just how enjoyable it was to spend time watering the gardens every week, as an opportunity to step away from the daily grind of writing papers. For several of our volunteers, this was their first time caring for a garden. It was exciting to support them in learning more about gardens, and how they could take their newfound skills to their next practicum. I also developed and facilitated several programs for children in local nursery and primary school. One such program had students participate in seed saving, while learning about the important of Indigenous plans to Toronto's ecosystem. Another group played games in the garden and used different parts of plants to create garden art murals. It was a big learning experience for me; caring for Indigenous gardens in an urban context was an opportunity to build on my existing skills, while learning new ones along the way.”
Looking Ahead

As we reflect and celebrate what we have accomplished over the past year, we are also thinking about how we plan to move forward. For the next growing season, we will focus on these key areas of development:

- **New Relationships**: We are expanding our relationships outside of OISE through our new collaboration with the Toronto District School Board’s EcoSchools Program. This will bring increasing numbers of teachers into OISE for professional learning focused on ESE, and we anticipate being able to share the Learning Garden and the educational gardening movement with a growing number of practicing teachers each year.

- **Virtual Garden**: We are aiming to develop videos to promote our garden, and for use within the classroom. These videos will showcase our garden, while also providing information on the plants found in the garden, and educational gardening ideas.

- **Eco-Art Installation**: This year we are already in process on our next eco-art installation, this year focused specifically on our Learning Garden. OISE students and TDSB teachers have been introduced to the benefits and challenges of native plant species, and have working collaboratively to create large-scale stencils of leaves and flowers from the OISE Garden. These stencils will be used to create a large-scale mural at OISE in April 2018.

- **Sowing Seeds**: We will continue to contribute to the Toronto Seed Saving Library by harvesting seeds from the Learning Garden, and promoting the Seed Saving Library on campus for use by students in their practica, and by sharing with TDSB teachers.

- **Building Community**: The OISE Community Learning Garden will continue to be a place that connects OISE community members to each other and to nature. By caring for the garden, community members have created a passionate, dedicated and inclusive community. This garden will continue to be a place where OISE community members can come together to discuss, plan and reflect on how they want to live sustainable, environmentally- sustainable lives.

- **Expanding Audiences**: Through social media, and continually diversified programming and outreach events, we are hoping to reach a larger audience both within OISE and in the larger education community.
Many Thanks!

The OISE Learning Garden Team would like to express our sincere appreciation to TD Friends of the Environment’s for their ongoing contribution to the development of our Learning Garden and the educational programming that surrounds it.

Thank you for your support of OISE’s ESE initiative!

Asters in our Learning Garden in bloom in August

Our newest eco-art installation focused on the benefits and challenges faced by local butterflies