Success Story: Lakeview Elementary School Music Brings Educational Opportunities to the Garden



At the Wisconsin School Garden Network, we are building a space to share ideas and experiences related to garden-based education. This month's story exemplifies how sharing ideas can lead to innovative garden features and enhance educational opportunities for everyone.

Terri Felton is the music teacher at Lakeview Elementary School, which has a long-standing tradition of garden-based education. A few years ago, Felton attended Community GroundWorks' Growing Minds course (see Announcements above!), held in the Troy Kids' Garden in Madison. There, past the vegetable beds and the outdoor kitchen, she first saw the Mulberry Music Grove – a music installation in the form of an A-frame strung with pots and pans.

The installation was inspired by the Tree o' Tunes in the Life Lab Garden Classroom in California. Community Groundworks Education Director, Ginny Hughes, has seen the music area give kids additional ways to connect with the garden.

"Music is such a natural way for people of all ages to engage in the garden," says Hughes. "Our smallest visitors love to bang (often loudly!) on the colorful pots and pans, while older children create complex rhythms together."

After the week-long Growing Minds course, Felton wanted to build a music area of her own in Lakeview Elementary School's forest, next to its garden. She and the school's art teacher, Sebastian Vang, designed an A-frame that could support pots, pans, and other recycled materials – similar to what

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she saw at the Troy Kids' Garden. Students even got in on the action, designing their own instruments.

The new music area required some trial and error. Early iterations did not hold up to the weather and heavy use. But the experience was enriching for the students who built the instruments and it helped Felton determine which materials would be long-lasting.

Over time, a more permanent music area came together thanks to Vang and help from UW Law School students participating in a community volunteer day. Felton and Vang separated the up-cycled instruments into two A-frames: one for plastic instruments such as buckets, and one for metal ones like pots and pans. They created chimes by hanging PVC pipes of different lengths from a large tree, which also supports a series of 2x4s cut to specific lengths to create different pitches – essentially a large xylophone.

With these instruments as her inspiration, Felton developed outdoor music curriculum for Lakeview's kindergarten through fifth grade student body. "We go out right away in the fall, around the third week of school," Felton says. "The first class is mostly about exploring...Half the kids can go to the metal instruments and half can go to the plastic ones. I prep them to think about which instruments are going to be the loudest or make certain sounds, and why."

Younger kids whack away at metal pots and plastic buckets using old mallets donated by local high schools. Older students are exposed to more complex concepts, exploring how length and pitch are related. In addition to the tree-

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mounted 2x4 xylophone, kids can experiment with a set of boomwhackers (large plastic tubes of different lengths that can be whacked against the ground to make sound). "We're doing a lot of physics of sound," Felton explains.

Felton also up-cycles Mason jars. "I have a crate of Mason jars and I fill them with water and try to tune them to a scale. We hypothesize about which is going to have a lower pitch – jars with more water or jars with more air."

By weaving together what she has learned from her own experiences in the outdoor classroom with inspiration from other local gardens and parks, Felton has created a rich environment for students to interact with music and nature. But children don't need physical instruments – or even a formal garden space! – to bring music lessons outside. Students at Lakeview also spend time just listening to the sounds around them in the garden and thinking about their origin. They identify "nature sounds" and "machine sounds" and then create dances to act out what they've heard.

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