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# Digging it: A participatory ethnography of the experiences at a school garden

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Digging It: A Participatory Ethnography of the Experiences at a School Garden

by

Branimir Cvetkovic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Sociology  
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University of South Florida

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To the students and teachers at the organic garden

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
CHAPTER 1 – Introduction.....	1
Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.....	4
Gemeinschaft in Child Rearing Philosophy.....	12
Literature Review.....	16
CHAPTER 2 – Data.....	21
CHAPTER 3 – Methods.....	23
CHAPTER 4 – Setting.....	26
CHAPTER 5 – Mastery, Belonging, Independence, and Generosity.....	33
Mastery.....	35
Belonging.....	46
Independence.....	55
Generosity.....	59
CHAPTER 6 – Tensions to Community.....	64
Discipline.....	65
Solving Problems.....	80
CHAPTER 7 – Conclusion.....	83
References.....	87

## **Digging It: A Participatory Ethnography of the Experiences at a School Garden**

Branimir Cvetkovic

### **ABSTRACT**

This case study of a school garden focuses on concepts of community that are fostered and embodied at this setting. By utilizing participatory ethnographic methodologies, this research explored *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* concepts of community. Data reveals that students are able to learn mastery, belonging, generosity and independence while participating in the garden work. Teachers manage students who attempt to challenge the boundaries of this community by utilizing an ethic of care which allows teachers to de-emphasize authority and to first consider the networks of relationships and how to mend and improve them. Students are able to experience governmentality and an opportunity to reassess their behaviors against the community norms. It also appears that students are socialized into *gemeinschaft* values by experiencing caring, loving, and nurturing relationships that are meaningful and significant. Students also experience their own independence and self-governance and are afforded opportunities to share authority in a bottom-up approach. It appears that school gardens have benefits that are far more significant than simply learning math and science skills.

## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

During my childhood, I spent several months out of each year at my grandfather's farmland in Serbia. At the age of five, my grandfather would take me along on hikes through mountains and hills, tending his flock of sheep or cattle. After we would reach a parcel he deemed sufficient, the flock would typically stay in one area leaving us to explore and take in our surroundings. I always felt at home up on that mountain side. There was something about lying on that grass, surrounded in nature that felt peaceful, beautiful, and introspective.

But my grandfather also expected me to know the larger picture of the life cycle and made sure that at age seven, I witnessed him slaughtering one of those same sheep. He had harvested the sheep wool over the years, and the final contribution from nature would be to allow us to feast from its bounty at a religious and communal celebration. My grandfather spent hours cooking that sheep over an open charcoal pit while aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews predictably showed up. He also invited a priest and several other families who brought food. He thanked everyone for coming, wished them all good health, and dispensed the wine he had made with a neighbor. This interdependency for the various parts of the meal and the shared values of this group helped shape my early concepts of community. I came to understand that community meant inclusion of others, selfless behavior, and the interrelationship of nature, people, and nature's bounty. I thought about how we were rewarded by nature with this

celebration, but that it could not have been possible without all the hard work and sacrifice that my grandfather, and other members of the community, had dedicated towards this goal.

At the age of nine, I left Serbia, and the ideas that I was taught about community as a young child were transformed to reflect a broader U.S. culture. I have attempted to maintain my relationship with nature by fishing, camping, and kayaking, and have been relatively successful. However, I have a noticeably different experience of community. In my current living situation, privacy is valued. My neighbors keep to themselves with the exception of the occasional greeting in the stairway. I have never been into their homes, and they have never been inside of mine. Similarly, my experiences in U.S. schools highlighted an individualistic approach that emphasized competition for grades and opportunities, and a guarded and somewhat distanced relationship with teachers. In so far as these events helped shape my understanding of different kinds of community experiences, both of which have benefits and drawbacks, they allowed me to be a participant as well as an observer of two theoretical concepts of community.

The early experiences with my grandfather allowed me to observe a community where the relationships among people are personal, caring, and meaningful. On the other hand, my recent experiences have allowed for a community with an emphasis on competition, privacy, and impersonal relationships. Since schools often appear to be organizational institutions that emphasize strict rules, regulations and procedures, the opportunity to conduct research in the organic garden of an environmental charter school became particularly fascinating for me.



The organic garden was a place that allowed students to experience nature and *its* concepts of time, one that I recall from my childhood with my grandfather. Similarly, the school garden appears to foster and embody personal, caring, and meaningful relationships, and allows students to gain a sense of belonging, independence, generosity, and mastery. When students challenge the authority of the garden teachers and the boundaries of the type of community found at the garden, they are met with an ethic of care which focused on repairing relationships instead of punitive punishments. The garden teachers are able to utilize the ethic of care to de-emphasize authority and allow the students to reassess their own behaviors and experience self-governance and independence. But before we get to the story of the organic garden, I turn to a more elaborate explanation of two very important theoretical concepts.

### *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*

Gemeinschaft and gesellschaft are theoretical ideal types that help us understand two distinct ways of thinking, living, and making choices. Ideal types are useful tools conceived as metaphors laden with detailed and thorough images. They reveal two ideal patterns at the opposite ends of a continuum (Lindbeck 1992). They are theoretical exaggerations and hypothetical constructs designed to be used as a comparison point for any “real” instance of a concept in real life. Although social life is complex and rarely fits perfectly into these ideal types, they can be useful to the extent that we can say that something leans toward one ideal type or another. Ideal types can also help us to figure out the interesting questions to ask in our research. For example, community in a regular school is not like the community that evolves around a school garden. How are they different? You can compare each against an “ideal type” of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft in order to figure out how they differ from the exaggerated concept.

The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) used ideal types to represent gemeinschaft as community, and gesellschaft as society (Bell and Newby 1972). Tönnies describes the shift in values that accompanied the transition from a hunting and gathering society, to an agricultural society, and finally to an industrial society (Sergiovanni 1994). He theorized that each stage represented a further shift from gemeinschaft (community) toward gesellschaft (society). Others have expanded on these ideas and have come to include the shift to a post-modern society (Richmond 1969).

Tönnies posited that in *gemeinschaft* communities, the relationships between members are intimate and enduring (Bell and Newby 1972; Tönnies [1887] 1974). In *gesellschaft* communities, relationships are impersonal and contractual. In *gemeinschaft*, connections among people and between them are meaningful and significant, whereas in *gesellschaft*, connections are contrived. *Gesellschaft* represents individuality to the extent that members seek to gain skills and knowledge that will further their self-interests in “an impersonal and competitive world” (Sergiovanni 1994:9). People relate to each other in *gesellschaft* in instrumental and rational ways that will benefit them, and once the usefulness of a relationship is used up, they can dissolve their associations freely and easily. In *gemeinschaft*, people relate to each other because “doing so has its own intrinsic meaning and significance,” and is based on cultural loyalties, purposes and sentiments allowing enduring relationships in spite of people’s separating factors (Sergiovanni 1994:9).

These two distinct concepts of community, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, raise the question: what happens when we experience a loss of community and shift towards a predominantly *gesellschaft* life? The most frequently mentioned ramifications are psychological in nature and include feelings of alienation, isolation, meaninglessness, loneliness, and feelings of being disconnected from others and from society (Sergiovanni 1994; Seeman 1959; Durkheim [1897] 1951; Ollman 1975).

Emile Durkheim’s work on suicide emphasizes the human need to belong, to be connected with others, and to identify with a set of norms that helps to give us direction and meaning to our lives (Durkheim [1897] 1951; Sergiovanni 1994). Indeed, Durkheim explained, the absence of a feeling of belonging and connectedness may lead individuals

to feelings of isolation and alienation that may even result in egoistic suicide (Delaney 2006). In Durkheim's *Division of Labor in Society* ([1893] 1964), he further explained that when society fails to act as a regulatory force to curb people's insatiable desires, people become unsure of how to proceed and anomie can arise. Anomie is the feeling of normlessness and a lack of clear guidelines that can allow individuals to become alienated from themselves, from others, and from society.

Similarly, Marx explored the ways that the shift towards more industrial society and capitalism, with its emphasis on individuality, can create alienation (Ollman 1976). Marx explains that as we become more industrialized, people come to have most distant relationships and experience alienation. For him, alienation is a concept described in reference to its opposite – man's species being. That is, man's species being is a life that man would lead in primitive communism, a life of freedom and consciousness where man is not consumed by labor, but because of the communal nature of primitive communism, he is able to explore his own creativity and independence (Ollman 1975). Man as a species being feels connected not only to other people, but also to the resources that will yield the product of his labor. He depends on nature to provide these resources and the relationships that develop to this material world of work come to be reflected in the social relationships with others. Marx lists the manifestations of alienation in work: (1) man is separated from the product of his labor; (2) man is separated from the process of production; (3) man is separated from one's self, and; (4) he is also separated from other human beings (Ollman 1975; Case 2007). In each instance, people are disconnected from desired or expected community relationships.

Is the loss of *gemeinschaft* and the move towards *gesellschaft* all bad? Of course not, after all, we live in a *gesellschaft* world. Sergioivanni explains that it is “important to recognize that the *gesellschaft* perspective is both valuable and inescapable” (Sergioivanni 1994:13). He argues that *gesellschaft* has indeed brought us many valuable gains including technological advances in medicine and science, great universities, and workable government systems.

However, the extreme of either *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft* can create negative consequences. As Durkheim and Marx explained, the loss of community can lead to individuals feeling alienated, lonely, depressed and isolated. However, Drucker (1992) explains that *gemeinschaft* in the extreme can become an institution that maintains stability and prevents or resists change (Drucker 1992). Drucker elaborates that too much *gemeinschaft* has the ability to retard progress, whereas too much *gesellschaft* can lead to a loss of community with the negative consequences of alienation, isolation, and loneliness. Therefore, we must strike a delicate balance between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* concepts of community.

How essential is our need for community especially since community seems to conflict with the traditional ideas of initiative, freedom, choice, and competition? Sergioivanni (1992; 1994) explains that we have come to over-emphasize the importance of *gesellschaft* and its reliance on self-interest, personal pleasure, and individual choice, to the detriment of more altruistic explanations. Including, our “willingness to sacrifice self-interest for purposes and causes we believe in and our propensity to be influenced by membership in groups” (Sergioivanni 1994:54). Amitai Etzioni (1988) explains that although we make our decisions by calculating costs and benefits, we also take into

account the norms, values, beliefs and preferences of ourselves and others. We also calculate how others will behave and what they will think of our decisions and actions. Our decisions, therefore, are influenced by the norms and beliefs which may not be in our best self-interests. Etzioni (1988) explains that we frequently make selfless acts and respond to the felt duties and obligations that arise from our connections with others. These altruistic feelings matter to us as much as our individual, competitive feelings do.

To this extent, we can see that extrinsic motivating factors seem to follow *gesellschaft* ideas of individuality, competition, and calculated involvement. These motivations are based on rational pursuits of self-interests. However, we can also see that there are two other motivations, intrinsic and moral, which seem to follow *gemeinschaft* ideas of selflessness. Intrinsic ties motivate us to do things not because they will yield some reward, but precisely because they are rewarding in and of themselves. Moral ties motivate us to do things because of our felt obligations and duties toward certain persons whom we hold important in our lives. Moral and intrinsic motivations are based on loyalty, purpose and sentiment. Because humans encompass all three of these motivators in our daily life, we can surmise that community is indeed part of our human nature (Sergiovanni 1994; Etzioni 1988). Similarly, both Durkheim and Marx believed that community was an essential part of human nature. By over-emphasizing *gesellschaft* over *gemeinschaft*, Durkheim posited that we would be led into a state of anomie, but that we could avoid this by building a sense of community which would give us purpose and meaning. Marx also expressed the notion that community is part of human nature by emphasizing the need for connection to the product, to the means of production, and to others.

But because *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* are ideal types, our institutions are always some mix of both of these theoretical concepts. So, how do we determine where we want to balance *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* for particular institutions within our lives? Sergioivanni expresses that “we need to decide which theory should dominate which spheres of our lives” (Sergioivanni 1994:14). It makes sense that some spheres should be dominated by *gesellschaft* ideas for us to maintain progress (Drucker 1992). For instance, business, science, and medicine will most likely lean toward *gesellschaft* ideas and values, whereas families and neighborhoods will most likely lean toward *gemeinschaft* ideas. However, where do we want to place schools on this continuum?

Currently and arguably, most schools will lean toward the *gesellschaft* ideas (Woodrum 2004; Merz and Furman 1997; Tyack and Hanson 1982; Barth 1990). Alie Woodrum (2004) explains that current schooling with its emphasis on competition, utility and efficiency endorses *gesellschaft* ideas. Woodrum found that teachers and schools endorse competition among their students through the use of state-mandated tests. Schools have shifted more power to state and federal levels through the use of these tests, “thus implicitly endorsing the *gesellschaft* over the *gemeinschaft* concept of community” (Woodrum 2004:7). Similarly, Barth (1990) suggests that *gesellschaft* concepts are also prevalent in school relationships which focus on competition among teachers and students, adversarial relationships that sacrifice others for self-interests, and work that is independent of some common goal. When schools over-emphasize ideals of *gesellschaft*, some argue that schools can experience a loss of community (Sergioivanni 1992, 1994; Barth 1990; Merz and Furman 1997; Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern 1990).

Since most schools lean toward *gesellschaft*, it is not surprising that students often become alienated from the school (Case 2007; Mann, 2001; Brendtro et al. 1990), experience emotional distress, risky behavior, and aggression (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, Beuhring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearinger and Udry 1997), and may experience increased substance use, delinquency, violence, academic problems, and sexual activity (Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson and Abbott 2001). Sergiovanni (1992; 1994), and others (Barth 1990; Merz and Furman 1997; Brendtro et al. 1990) have argued that there is a real need for more community within schools as an antidote to fragmentation and student alienation. Newmann (1981) suggested that student alienation can be reduced by including *gemeinschaft* like ideas of cooperative goals and meaningful work. Further, Sergiovanni posits that students who experience community can become more cooperative and trusting of others, can decrease academic and behavioral problems, and are able to develop meaningful and healthy relationships.

In what forms can communities exist within schools? Tönnies concept of *gemeinschaft* suggests that there are three reflexive forms of community (Bell and Newby 1972; Tönnies [1887] 1974). First, communities of kinship emerge from a unity of being, where members have a sense of “we” that one could find within a family. In these communities, relationships are closest and most intimate, and are able to survive prolonged distances between members through memories of close bonds. Second, communities of place emerge from the sharing of a space, a common locale. There exists a sense of ownership of a location among the members of a community of place that binds them. Third, communities of mind can emerge when members share a common set of values, goals, and norms. In these communities, members can feel a bond of



cooperation in common tasks. Tönnies explains, “They are of a mental nature and seem to be founded, therefore, as compared with the earlier relationships upon chance and free choice” (Tönnies [1887] 1974:10). The combination of these three forms of gemeinschaft can have the ability to further strengthen the concept of “we” among its members, but communities of mind in conjunction with the others, “represent the truly human and supreme form of community” (Tönnies [1887] 1957:42). It is with these forms of gemeinschaft that Sergiovanni (1994) explains community can be built within schools.

### *Gemeinschaft in Child Rearing Philosophy*

These concepts of community including mind, place and kinship are more theoretical than practical. Fortunately, Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1990) and others (Kress 2005; Gambone, Klem and Connell 2002) have provided a more practical framework which embodies communities of kinship, place, and mind. In Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern's (1990) words:

Traditional Native American child-rearing philosophies provide a powerful alternative in education and youth development. These approaches challenge both the European cultural heritage of child pedagogy and the narrow perspectives of many current psychological theories. Refined over 15,000 years of civilization and preserved in oral traditions, this knowledge is little known outside the two hundred tribal languages that cradle the Native Indian cultures of North America. (p.34)

Coopersmith (1967) identified that children who have the components of significance, competence, power, and virtue tend to avoid social, psychological and learning problems. He explained that significance is found in the acceptance, attention and affection of others and a sense of belonging. Competence develops as an individual is able to master her/his environment, with success bringing innate satisfaction and a sense of self-efficacy. Power is shown in the ability to control one's behavior and gain the respect of others. Virtue is worthiness as judged by the values of one's community.

Similarly, Brendtro et al. (1990) recognized that the four segment approach posited by Coopersmith (1967) resembled the child rearing philosophies derived from Native American cultures. Although there is great diversity within the many Native

American cultures, over 200 Native American tribes, including the Sioux, utilized the concepts of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity to foster *gemeinschaft* ideals and fulfill the “purposes of education and empowerment of children” (Brendtro et al. 1990:35).

According to Brendtro et al. (1990), fostering a sense of belonging for children was of great importance to these Native American tribes. Children were nurtured by the larger circle of significant others allowing them to experience trust, intimacy, and a whole network of caring adults (Brendtro et al. 1990). Kinship, in this sense, is not confined to biology or blood, the responsibilities and bonds rest within the entire community. With an extensive, positive, and caring network of relationships with others, students can come to feel included, secure, and safe, experience feelings of belonging and love, and can create lasting meaningful relationships (Sergiovanni 1994; Kress 2005). By fostering inclusion and belonging, students can even develop a sense of ownership of the community. They may realize that through the participation in the community, they hold a stake in the outcomes of the community’s goals. Fostering a sense of belonging for students is of prime importance, as those who come to feel rejected from families, schools and neighborhoods may pursue “artificial” belongings (Brendtro et al. 1990). Sergiovanni (1994) and Brendtro et al. (1990) explain that when students experience a loss of community and a loss of a sense of belonging, these artificial substitutions can arise and may take anywhere from the mild form of attention seeking, to the extreme form of joining gangs.

The mastery of the cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual realms was also of prime importance to healthy development of children for many Native Americans

(Brendtro et al. 1990). Similarly, Gambone et al. (2002) have shown that children who are afforded an opportunity to master their environment and their surroundings developed motivation for further achievement. Others have suggested that children feel competency, achievement, and success through mastery of their environment, making them more engaged in their learning (Sergiovanni 1994; Kress 2005). For many Native Americans, mastery was important as a goal of the whole community. Competition was not a priority, but achieving and performing to the best of one's ability was heralded. When those who were more skilled stood out, they were treated as a model for others to ascribe to, not as a competitor, and "success became a possession of the many, not a privilege of few" (Bredtro et al. 1990). In this sense, mastery encourages strengthening community ties and relationships as well as promoting achievement for all.

Independence allows students to develop a sense of autonomy and power in their lives. By solving problems on their own, students are able to gain a sense of competence. But independent and autonomous persons also have responsibilities which allows for a feeling of the self that is uniquely their own and self-determined (Kress 2005; Brendtro et al. 1990). As presented in Kress (2005) and Gambone et al. (2002) successful youth development includes the opportunity for students to develop skills and confidence for leadership and self-discipline by building a sense of independence. While independence does mean greater power and influence, it is also linked with responsibility for decisions made and actions taken (Kress 2005).

Brendtro et al. (1990) explain that fostering generous children was of high importance also. Generosity allowed for unselfish behavior and altruism that can further strengthen feelings of community and makes life more meaningful. Generosity can also

shift the priority from material possession and self interest to the welfare of the community and common goals and interests (Sergiovanni 1990). Further, service that is helpful to others can allow for exposure to a larger community and even the world itself. Although schools have been criticized as becoming more beholden to gesellschaft norms, it is not uncommon for some schools to try to establish programs keeping in mind the values of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence fostered by a community setting. With this in mind, school gardens have often been advocated as one such approach (Kohlstedt 2008; Ozer 2007; Vygotsky 1994).

### *Literature Review*

School gardens have had a long history. Starting in the 1890s, progressive educators like John Dewey and Wilbur Jackman urged educators to connect the school curricula with the larger community (Kohlstedt 2008). They advocated for integrating nature study into schools as a way to stimulate a child's curiosity, enthusiasm, and spontaneity. As a result, school gardens sprang up in numbers as proponents sought to provide "practical agricultural training, promote an appreciation for the beauty and bounty of nature, or develop civic pride" (Kohlstedt 2008:60). But as Kohlstedt explains, school methodologies often arrive with enthusiasm and support, are modified to the needs of the school, and wane in popularity as school agendas change or a new enthusiasm builds for another methodology. School gardens met a similar fate after one generation and largely disappeared.

A century later, the enthusiasm for school gardens arose again, as California's Superintendent for Public Instruction called for "a garden in every school" in the late 1990s (Ozer 2007), and others echoed Dewey and Jackman's claim for the environment as a source, rather than simply a setting, for learning and development (Vygotsky 1994). As a result, there are more than 2,000 school gardens in California that are used for academic instruction in science, math, nutrition, environmental studies, and health (Graham 2002).

Academic literature on school gardens also saw similar renewed interest at this time. Several scholars have shown that school gardens can help students in science and math achievement (Rahm 2002; Hilgers, Haynes and Olson 2008; Eames-Sheavly, Lekies, MacDonald and Wong 2007; Graham 2002; Graham, Beall, Luccier, McLaughlin and Zidenberg-Cherr 2005; Klemmer, Waliczek and Zajicek 2005). Others have observed that students who participate in school gardens have more nutritional knowledge and make better food choices (Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr 2002; Morris, Briggs and Zidenberg-Cherr 2006; Twiss, Dickinson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulson and Rilveria 2003; DeMattia and Denney 2008). Through gardening, students can develop appreciation for nature, other species, and environmental protection (Graham et al. 2005; Graham 2002; Hilgers et al. 2008; Eames-Sheavly et al. 2007). Twiss et al. (2003), explain that school gardens can also encourage change in the local community by helping to recognize the validity of water and land conservation ordinances. Similarly, other articles have noted that school gardens may promote community involvement (Herron, Magomo and Gossard 2007), and can allow for a sense of interdependency to develop among the students and teachers by providing opportunities for contribution towards a shared goal (Hoffman, Morales-Knight and Wallach 2007).

While this research appears promising, Ozer (2007) notes that this relatively small body of literature has to catch up with the growing enthusiasm for school gardens. With the exception of two surveys, there has been little documentation of school gardens (Ozer 2007). The existing data on the benefits of school gardening are most often based upon surveys of teachers and administrators and their assessments of student learning. This cross-sectional, statistical research is quite distanced from the social worlds of the

children themselves. Laurie Thorp (2006) explains that often quantitative research lacks depth, interpretive nuances, and the words and stories of the students themselves.

In contrast to previous research, Thorp's study (2006), particularly because of its participatory and ethnographic methodology features, was able to go one step further than other literature on school gardens. She examined, and paid particular attention to, what students were able to gain from gardening. Thorp's ethnography describes how teachers had often complained about students being detached from the learning process before the school started the garden project. Students were often unable to connect with abstract ideas that were being taught to them. However, with the experience of the garden, these same students were able to connect to a place which allowed them to interact with nature and expand their life experiences.

Although Thorp does not specifically discuss community, her ethnographic research suggests that students were able to experience their own feelings of independence, mastery, generosity and belonging. For example, Thorp explains that school gardening has the additional benefit of providing students with a physical space where nature, and not school culture, is in charge (Thorp 2006:5). She describes how the garden does not subscribe to cultural ideas of time, you cannot hurry it along and time seems to drop away. Students and teachers alike lose track of time in this place because they are on individual inquiry journeys. The garden also becomes a place which helps students form bonds (Thorp 2006:33). Students form bonds with each other while working together and feel a sense of belonging. They also form a bond with the garden, as a place on its own.



Thorp mentions that nature is increasingly absent from children's lives (Louv 2005), but that gardening allows them to be able to reconnect with nature, thereby gaining a better understanding of the world around them. The garden also presents students and teachers with multiple opportunities for teamwork, for taking initiative, for noticing change in plants, animal life, soil conditions, etc. that others may have missed, and thereby lending these students a type of authority and independence (Thorp 2006). The garden allows students a type of freedom which is seldom enjoyed in traditional classrooms. Thorp (2006) illustrated in her study that children come to feel a sense of belonging and connection with each other, and with nature as a result of their experiences in the school garden.

Borrowing from many of the insights presented in Thorpe's work, my ethnographic study of an organic garden at a K-8 grade environmental charter school shows that it is helpful to utilize the rich theoretical perspective of *gemeinschaft* as a way to make sense of the kinds of values often fostered by working in a school garden. This theoretical perspective enables me to ask questions of my data. What kinds of relationships are presented in the school garden? How do students learn in this setting? What are students learning and how do they engage with others in the school garden? At the same time, I also observed how the larger theoretical perspective of *gemeinschaft* was helpful in understanding how tensions or challenges to community were handled in the organic garden. In keeping within a *gemeinschaft* tradition, teachers as well as students utilized an "ethic of care" as a way to patrol the boundaries of students' behaviors while working in the garden. Authority was distributed and shared by many allowing for a governmentality that presented students an opportunity to reassess their behavior against

the larger community goals. In an effort to understand the setting of my research better, I now turn to the data and methods.

## **CHAPTER 2: Data**

Heron Academy (pseudonym) is a charter school of 524 students from pre-kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. As explained by The Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (Florida Charter Schools 2009), charter schools are non-profit organizations that have a charter to provide educational services to students which compare with those of the district public schools. Charter schools are afforded increased autonomy in determining their pedagogical methodology and the design of their academic program, in exchange for accountability for academic results. Towards this goal, Heron Academy boasts a 97% satisfaction of Federal No Child Left Behind Act criteria and an “A” in the state grading system.

This environmentally focused charter school has had an organic vegetable garden for two years previous to my observations during the 2008/2009 school year. The school’s administration and the gardening teachers followed a gardening schedule that included all classes in Pre-School to 6th grade. Students who are in the 5th grade or lower come out to the garden for one hour each week at their class’s scheduled time. Since the average class size for Heron Academy is approximately 18 students, each class has been able to get their own raised gardening bed. The students along with their teachers get to decide which plants to grow in their garden beds, while keeping in mind the suggestions made by the gardening teachers about which plants may be in season. There are three 6th grade classes. Their schedule is constructed differently. The three

6th grade classes rotate between three different modules per year. That is, each class gets to spend 12 weeks at the garden, and then rotates into another module. The 6th graders also come four times per week, Mondays through Thursdays. They are the most involved in the garden, as they spend the greatest amount of time there.

Teachers are expected by the Principal of Heron Academy, with the aid of three (3) garden coordinators, to bridge garden work to academic lessons. In addition to its garden, Heron Academy also became the first school in the country to establish nine green modular classrooms which reduce energy consumption by adjusting the humidity instead of the temperature inside of the classrooms. The Principal of Heron Academy requires classes to conduct service projects that are focused on environmental sustainability, removing invasive species, and helping the less fortunate including the homeless. It appears that students at Heron Academy are surrounded by an overall message of the importance of being good stewards of the natural and social environment. The organic garden is a particularly interesting place to observe students because it is in this place where students move from contradictory messages found in traditional classrooms to a more coherent message which supports *gemeinschaft* values.

The garden is less structured than a typical classroom in terms of the time allotted for completing goals, the tasks that need to be accomplished, and how work is going to be completed. This lack of structure enables an observer to see how students themselves borrow from what they have learned around them, to enact various aspects of *gemeinschaft* ideals while their class is out in the garden. In that this particular school has recently made dramatic changes to its campus and curriculum, it is an interesting site for sociological research.

### **CHAPTER 3: Methods**

The data from Heron was gathered by utilizing participatory observer methodology. Over the span of four months, I volunteered several times per week at the school's organic garden. By spending over 75 hours as a participant at Heron's garden, I learned what life was like in the organic garden for these students. I became a member, an active participant, as well as an observer of the experiences at Heron's garden. The ethnographic nature of this research allowed me insights into the routine of activities, the beliefs that guide members' actions, and the linguistic systems that mediate the contexts of activities at this site (Eder and Corsaro, 1999). John Rowan (1981) writes that the classical research design, heavy in quantitative measurement, will yield results which are statistically significant, but humanly insignificant, whereas ethnographic and participant observation research allows the researcher to gain a rich, nuanced account of the experiences at the research site. As a participant observer, I followed a methodology which Gans considers most scientific for social scientists, because "it is the only one that gets close to people" (1999: 540). Since I had this dual role of both a participant and an observer, I was able to witness what people did and did not have to rely strictly on what people describe that they do in this setting.

At the onset of this research, I initially relied on Kress's (2005) typology of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Yet, as I became more comfortable in the field, I relied more on the setting and students' experiences to help guide my

questions. As Guba (1985) explains, it is inconceivable to know enough before entering the field in order to devise an adequate research design. By spending over 30 separate days over three and a half months at the research site, I was able to develop relationships with garden coordinators, teachers, and students which allowed for a more relaxed social setting that diminished feelings of being “investigated” or “researched” for these school members. As is typical in *gemeinschaft* communities, my knowledge and labor was utilized for the betterment of this community garden. It was typical for me to spend the day building fences, watering plants, cutting down invasive species with chainsaws, pressure cleaning the roof of the greenhouse, and making garden beds. I became so involved with the work of gardening because it meant a break from the usual coursework of academia and a moment for personal growth and enjoyment of nature. In effect, I came to have a vested interest in the garden as I contributed and came to have feelings of membership to this school setting. I also got the sense that students and garden coordinators who witnessed my contributions came to accept me as part of the Heron Academy family. On one occasion, Barbara, a garden coordinator, explained that she felt I was just another school member, that I came to work and help, and to be a part of the experience instead of simply to gather data. Similarly, following the conclusion of the semester during which I volunteered at Heron, a mother of a student explained that her son had thought I was “fired” because I was not present at the garden anymore. This student, as many others may have, considered me to be a member of the school because I regularly and actively participated in the work of Heron’s garden.

From these experiences, I began thinking of why exactly I wanted to help? Certainly, I would gain data for my academic research, but many other researchers collect

data without heavy involvement at the research site. What was it about this setting that allowed me to experience a need to contribute when I could have simply observed?

## CHAPTER 4: Setting

*On the first day of my arrival, I parked in front of the main office. Excited laughter filled my ears as soon as I opened the car door. Children were playing a variation of soccer on a large open field. Their teacher stood on the sideline, with a whistle in her hand, and encouraged both teams to pass the ball more effectively. The scene reminded me my own childhood: playing soccer in a neighboring field well past sundown, until our parents called us in. I thought of how a local newspaper recently had a string of articles outlining the drastic decrease in physical fitness and education courses in elementary schools because of the need for teachers to focus on the yearly standardized test – an assessment tool which often links students' test scores to the amount of federal and state funding a school receives. For some reason, this school seemed to have the time to still include these activities. It is these initial observations which suggested to me that this educational environment may be quite unique in its own right.*

After signing in as a volunteer and a visitor of the school at the front office, I followed a gray brick path which headed me to the school's garden. As the path turns next to the cafeteria, I noticed a mural on the side of this building which faces all the other classrooms. It is of a Great Blue Heron in the wetlands. I had witnessed similar scenes while kayaking some of Florida's many backcountry waters. Kayaking always seemed to allow me to release some stress and to feel a sense of peace and tranquility. I wondered if this mural had a similar purpose for these students.

The path led me along a small pond, where I noticed several students taking water samples and looking for insects along the edge. I laughed to myself as I recollected playing with my young friends in the woods and falling into a similar pond when I tried to retrieve a ball from the water's edge. The dirt and water did not matter to us back then. With this reminiscence, I was beginning to think about how the boundaries



between play and school seemed somewhat blurred at this school. Students seemed to be learning through their play.

The brick path ended and I walked in the dirt pathway created by the students on their daily routes to the garden. The path takes me underneath a tree canopy and next to some playground equipment. The playground is not on a concrete slab, but its floor is rather the simple foliage which seems to cover the whole area.

As I walk, I start to consider what this environment means for these students. Clearly, there is an emphasis and value placed on nature and the preservation of natural spaces including the animals that may reside there. Is this the common purpose of this school? Sergiovanni (1994) speaks of the need to create a common purpose, to develop a community of mind towards shared goals and ideologies which reinforce this purpose. He explains that ideologies are shaped by the core values of a school and come to be a way by which members can make sense of their lives, find direction and commit to courses of action that further reinforce the common purpose. As I struggle with these ideas, I take a few more steps and come upon a clearing where I see the organic garden.

The main garden is a large open space of 75 feet by 75 feet. Around the main garden are various tool sheds, raised garden beds, rain barrels, and compost piles framed by many tall native trees including citrus trees. The main garden has a fence made from unpressurized wooden posts and metal wire so that the garden can maintain its integrity as an organic garden. Pressurized wood is treated with arsenic and could leach into the soil and harm the health of children and wild life in the area. This decision to use unpressurized wood is one of the initial examples I witness that seems to further reinforce the organic garden's goal of purpose of natural preservation.

I am also struck by the overall beauty of the garden and the attention to aesthetic details which highlight the contributions of the community of students who have created and maintained the garden since its inception three years ago. At opposite ends of the garden's fence are lattice arches, interlaced with a vine with red flowers, and wooden swinging doors. Hung at around eye height of the arches, there are laminated pictures of the students helping to construct the fence, dig soil, and plant seeds. The vine encircles the pictures and forms a frame around the now fading images of the beginning of the garden. The pattern of the garden beds may have changed now, but the essence of constructing the garden captured in those images is still present in the daily work of these students. It is through this pictorial documentation as well as what I have observed over the last several months that I realize that the garden is a group activity. It is an activity that is not managed or determined by a hierarchical structure which dictates what must be accomplished on a daily basis, but it represents a communal effort that is often driven by student interests and direction.

The communal nature of the garden often extends beyond the students to include their parents' labor too. Around the main garden, there is a large green house with thermostatically controlled ventilation and a concrete slab floor. It is large enough to hold six to eight mesh top gardening tables which were constructed by some of the students' parents. The parents gave input into what materials to use, including the idea of using mesh wire for the top of the tables so that soil would fall through. The green house also has water access inside and is used for germination of plants, and at times as a warm shelter for groups of young chickens.

The school garden is also a setting where teachers strive to present more consistent messages to students. Since the school garden focuses on conservation and sustainability, rain barrels are scattered throughout so that students and teachers can conserve water. The barrels were painted by students and have unique and creative decorations including students' hand prints and images of wildlife. The students are able to see that sustainability is not an abstract idea, but can gain a sense of exactly how to embody sustainability by constructing methods and objects to conserve water.

There are also two areas which have been transformed into class settings. But these class settings are not traditional in the sense of rows of desks and chairs, and a centrally placed teaching authority. Instead, the classrooms are part of the larger garden setting. In one location, which is the most often used as a classroom, it seems that nature is transformed into a circle of logs for students to sit on. This teaching setting is located underneath a canopy of trees, so that it can be more comfortable in the shade. This location is transformed into a makeshift classroom by using traditional supplies such as a large whiteboard for the students and teachers to write on. The students and teachers often begin their garden period here and sit in the circle so that all are afforded an opportunity to speak and be heard. The garden teachers do not sit in the center or in the "front," but are in the circle with students giving the impression that there is no hierarchy of authority here. Teachers and students are given the opportunity to exchange ideas and may come to feel a sense of equal standing within the larger garden community and that their contributions are valued and important. The second class setting is located on the opposite end of the garden, and is marked by another whiteboard. It has picnic tables for students and teachers to sit on, and a small wooden table to display the objects of their

inquiry. This setting was frequently used for lengthy conversations between teachers and students and similarly is without a “central authority;” instead it allows for teachers and students to have informal conversations about future gardening activities and goals.

There are two large sheds. The smaller shed is for large tool storage including a chainsaw, soil tiller, large pickaxes and shovels. The larger shed holds three large desks, mountains of gardening books, a small refrigerator and a microwave for the three gardening teachers. This shed is their office. The garden is their classroom.

What I learned from watching these three gardening teachers over the past several months is that although they may have very different teaching styles, there are shared themes that seem to permeate including competency, passion for nature, patience, and nurturing students. These garden teachers frequently hug students and hold their hands. They appear to show a level of care for students that includes asking about their feelings or experiences. In traditional classroom settings, close relationships between teachers and students are often forbidden because of the threat of lawsuits or fear of inappropriate conduct. The garden teachers, in this sense, appear to follow *gemeinschaft* concepts of relationships that are caring, significant and meaningful for students and teachers.

Kate (all names are pseudonyms) has the most formal training in education of the three teachers, a graduate degree from a local Research I level university. Accordingly, she spends the most instructional time with the students. It is not unusual for her to play out various roles and make up songs especially for students in the younger grade levels. She also appeared to frequently relate nature to students by asking them to consider what resources plants and animals may require. Additionally, she often commented that students should be afforded opportunities to explore and experiment in the garden on

their own. This way, she explained, students are able to develop relationships with plants and animals and can learn about things that interest them and are not scripted and passed down from the teachers as in traditional classroom settings. Kate appeared to not subscribe to traditional authority over students, but expected them to have a level of independence that may allow for learning about topics that interest students.

Barbara is another gardening teacher. I have observed that she typically does not like to follow a specific script, but facilitates discussion about a topic by using a general outline. For example, when teaching about the process of photosynthesis to a group of 2nd graders, Barbara first attempted to explain the scientific process of converting sunlight into sugar energy. When the students seemed puzzled, she used a metaphor of cooking. She explained how the leaf can be thought of as a cooking pan, the sun as the heat from the stove, the water as the oil and the CO<sub>2</sub> as the raw spinach. She further elaborated that when the heat is applied, the pan is able to cook the spinach and release the smell (Oxygen) while at the same time making sugars that the plant can use to grow. While all three of the garden teachers practice this method of allowing the interaction with students to guide the teaching process, Barbara seemed to use it more often than the other teachers.

Casey is the third teacher. Unlike Barbara and Kate, Casey does not spend all of her time at the garden. She is the bus driver who takes groups of students on field trips. Casey has the most experience with gardening and raising chickens, but has less knowledge about growing food organically than Kate. During her adolescent years, she spent much time at her grandfather's garden where her passions for nature were first fortified. She is also very knowledgeable in the maintenance tasks of the garden,

including constructing different sheds, tool hangers, and even chicken areas. Casey often allowed students to explore their own skills in garden construction by asking students to participate and come up with solutions and methods for the organic garden's next ventures.

In this setting, the garden teachers allow for a degree of independence for students in exploring the garden environment and participating in the gardening activities. The teachers asked students for input on which vegetables and fruits to plant, how to organize garden beds, and what activities and topics students would like to explore during their gardening class periods. Students are not expected to meet goals in the traditional sense of learning how to do something and then assessing their performance. Instead, garden teachers were guides that allowed students to experience concepts at students' individual paces. When gardening, students would often play in the soil, examine insects, and inquire about concepts that interest them. In this sense, garden teachers are not encouraging students to "stay on task," but allow them to experience ideas as they arise and interest students themselves. There are no punishments or condemnations for further inquiry into students' interests that may cause a delay in the work of the garden. Instead, when students' interests are peaked by an animal or plant, students are afforded opportunities to explore and observe the objects of their inquiry. This informal setting then allows students to play in the soil and mud, to run after a butterfly, and to stop the garden activity and ask questions from garden teachers and other students. In this sense, Heron's organic garden is a setting that is not guided by traditional and *gesellschaft* concepts of efficiency and discipline, but by students' own interests and creativity. In the next chapter, I turn to the *gemeinschaft* attributes that the school garden seems to foster.

## **CHAPTER 5: Mastery, Belonging, Independence, and Generosity**

It is too often that schools are seen as formal organizations and the behavior within them as organizational behavior (Sergiovanni 1994). Schools in this theoretical frame become disconnected with people and become institutions for shuffling kids through the school system with an emphasis on efficiency, legitimacy of authority, and regulation. Self-interest is assumed to be of prime importance. A *gesellschaft* favoring model of school emerges where students compete for grades, teachers compete for resources, and schools compete with each other in the quest for state and federal funding.

Heron Academy's organic garden has a different feeling. A garden is dependent on nature and natural processes, and becomes the product of time, effort, and trial and error. Self-interest is sacrificed for shared interests, commitments, and obligations. Duties are shared amongst the students and teachers. A *gemeinschaft* leaning model of a school setting emerges that allows for students to master their environment, gain a sense of belonging, generosity, and independence.

Although the dimensions of mastery, belonging, independence, and generosity are separate subsections in this study, the distinctions are made more for organizational purposes than analytical ones. Some combination of these four dimensions frequently appears in any one experience in Heron Academy's school garden. For example, the mastery of the garden environment frequently involves independent exploration and inquiry. When students explore without many restrictions, they may be gaining a sense

of self that is powerful and autonomous, and they can gain insight and mastery of the focus of their interests. Similarly, when students gain an understanding of animals and plants, they may come to recognize the value and position of those entities to the entire garden community which can aid in developing a sense of belonging for those animals and plants, as well as the student. In what follows, I will pay particular attention to how these dimensions appear at Heron's school garden.



## *Mastery*

The ultimate goal of any school is to demonstrate students' mastery of various subjects. Heron's school garden similarly shares this goal. The garden provides a unique setting for students and teachers to learn about science, math, biology, and writing skills by exploring their environment. Students are afforded an opportunity to learn by touching, smelling, experiencing and inquiring at their own pace. Consider the experiences of students who during the first part of their semester learn about the process of gardening in the garden's informal setting. During one afternoon, I observed a lesson in composting. Compost would be needed for the upcoming formation of soil beds, so instead of opening up a book as in a traditional classroom, Kate and a pre-kindergarten class of students walked over to a pile of leaves and dead plants. She asked the students to help her bring this pile of plant matter to a small hole that had previously been dug. As the students started moving the pile, Kate explained that when these leaves are in the ground, they can be used as natural mulch to retain moisture. She then told the students:

Take your banana peels and your orange peels, and add worms into the compost hole. The worms will eat all of that [fruit refuse] and with the mulch, will make humus for us.

A student asked if throwing whole apples into the compost is also beneficial. Kate, however, was careful to explain that although compost is important to the garden, throwing away whole apples or those that are barely eaten is not something she wanted the students to do. As she continued,

I want you to get your nutrition from the apple. Or if you only eat a little, take it home so that your parents can know how much you have eaten for the day and then put it in your own compost piles. If you don't eat it at all, you can save it for tomorrow.

This example illustrates how the informal setting of the garden allows for students to participate in practical lessons in creating organic compost, where students are able to take part in a type of learning that involves experiencing instead of thinking in abstractions. Students got to touch the leaves, twigs and soil, and feel the moisture under the mulch of the compost pit. Students also have the chance to see the process to its end as they continue to come to the school's garden. This informal setting may also allow students to ask questions that arise organically from the activities that students and teachers are experiencing. In this instance, a student wondered about other items that could be used to make compost. Kate was able to use this student's query to also explain the nutritional value of an apple, and the other options as opposed to composting it. This opportunity for "teachable moments," or unplanned moments that allow for opportunities to connect other lessons (Thorp 2006), was a recurring theme at Heron's garden and was utilized by all three of the garden teachers.

The example of the compost activity also serves to illustrate one other point. Kate displayed a care and affection for students' health and nutrition over the potential benefit to the garden by including the apple in the compost. Granted, the effects of one apple are miniscule, but the expected self-interest of teachers in *gesellschaft* would place more importance on making the garden look more successful to supervisors and administrators than the more selfless act of caring about the student. I am not suggesting that if a teacher simply thought about the literal question and answer that "yes, the apple would

help the compost,” he/she is only self-interested, but the fact that Kate actively participated in a selfless act displays certain attributes which are decidedly more *gemeinschaft* rather than *gesellschaft*. I also want to acknowledge that there is no way for me to distinguish whether Kate was genuine in this selflessness or if she was simply performing a presentation of herself that appeared caring and selfless because she is held accountable by the parents of these students. However, no matter what the motivation, the students are still exposed to these relations and may learn *gemeinschaft* ideas through the experience.

At Heron’s school garden, students drive the learning process by using their senses and noticing, touching, and asking questions as they arise. They learn about the things that interest them. Take the example of a pre-kindergarten class that was examining their raised garden bed.

A student is standing as close as possible to the 2 foot high wooden frame of the class’ raised garden bed. He touches the yellow dust on the long leaves of a 4 foot tall corn plant and announces, “There’s pollen on the corn.”

Kate questions, “Did you know that corn has pollen?”

The entire class roars, “Yeah!”

“Of course you did. You’re so smart,” she responds and points out the male flower that produces the pollen as well as the female flower that catches it using the long hair-like silk.

The interest and observations of this student presented an opportunity, a teachable moment, for a quick lesson in corn reproduction where the students were able to connect ideas to the plants themselves. As this class concludes its observation of their garden bed,

Barbara asks, “Do you guys want to go pull some weeds from all the garden beds?”

The students seem excited and again roar, “Yeah.”

Barbara and Kate walk with the students to 3 garden beds that are in particular need of weeding. Barbara asks, “Which of these do you think are weeds? Does that look like a weed? It’s Caesar weed, let’s pull them out together.” She waits until almost all of the students have had a chance to pull a few weeds. “OK. Let’s walk together and put them in the compost. Oh, I guess that one is a squash,” she remarks as a student has pulled out a young squash plant. She takes one of the weeds in her hand and holds it close to the students’ squash plant to point out the difference in leaf shape to the student.

In this example, Barbara emphasizes working together towards a common goal, which closely mirrors the *gemeinschaft* ideas of communal efforts towards shared goals. She also uses the opportunity of misidentification of a plant by a young student to explain the difference and how to identify squash and Caesar weeds. This example demonstrates how using this teachable moment may allow students to further strengthen their mastery of this environment. There is no frustration on the part of Barbara about the mistake of killing a squash plant. Instead, the garden setting allows for the freedom to take chances and make mistakes. Students may further benefit from these types of experiences by being more confident and knowledgeable in future experiences. This freedom further reinforces *gemeinschaft* ideas by not endorsing efficiency and discouraging mistakes, traits found in *gesellschaft* ideas of management and organizations where impersonal and contractual relationships exist. Instead, students at Heron may understand that mistakes will not jeopardize the relationships with other students and teachers who show them care and attention.

By fostering an environment where there is freedom to examine and inquire, the garden at Heron Academy frequently appeared to allow students to explore their curiosities and experiment. For example, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students were planting sunflower seeds, two male students questioned the recommendation given by Casey to

plant their sunflower seeds only ½ inch deep into the ground. In this example, students feel comfortable challenging the traditional authority of teachers.

The students were given a wooden stake where Casey had measured off and marked the ½ inch depth line. One of the students asked, “What would happen if I put my seed as deep as this stake (15 inches)?”

Casey asked the two students who had been standing next to each other and were both eager to plant their seeds as deep as the stake, “What do you think would happen?”

The second boy explained, “I don’t think they would grow at all.”

Casey asked if the students wanted to test their ideas. She suggested that they each plant a green bean seed at different depths, as these seeds are hardier and would have the best chance. She told the students, “Think about how deep you want to plant them and where because a lot of students walk around here.”

The two students decided to plant a seed at the full depth of the stake (15 inches) and the other seed at half the depth of the stake (~7.5 inches). Then they marked the seeds location.

These students would later check on the progress of the experiment to find that even the seed at half of the depth of the stake (~7.5 inches) did not sprout. More importantly, they may have learned something about the scientific process of finding answers. They created a hypothesis and tested it. Additionally, they had to consider where and which seeds to plant. In return, these students may have gotten a chance to master their environment by studying and testing it. By having the freedom to explore without the urgency of efficiency and results, the experiences at this school garden may reflect gemeinschaft ideas of intrinsic motivations for performing tasks. The results of this experiment would not yield these two students a higher grade in their class, but it may have allowed them to fulfill their own intellectual curiosity, a task that is rewarding on its own.

Students may also have experienced feelings of competency and achievement by mastering the garden environment. In particular I observed students who were proud of their achievements.

A 4<sup>th</sup> grade student states to Kate, “The garden really looks good right now.”

Kate replies, “I agree. You guys did a great job.” She pauses for a brief moment, “We are lucky because some students get to learn about flowers from Power Points or textbooks, but we get to see it up close.”

Similarly, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student states, “Look at *our* cherry tomatoes. They get ripe fast (my emphasis).”

Because the garden represents a setting where goals are achieved by a communal effort of many, success is also shared by all. Garden work is often slow and laborious, but because there are so many participants at Heron working towards shared interests, goals are satisfied in a communal way. The students and teacher share in their united success, and students can experience competency and a feeling of achievement by collective mastery of their environment. Additionally, the mastery of this environment is not geared towards traditional ideas of production and efficiency, but rather allows for students to experience and learn about concepts as they arise and interest the students themselves.

Kate also uses this moment of reflection on the successes of the garden between herself and the student to remind both of them of the privilege of being able to have schooling in the garden. This reminder of the unique opportunity to experience schooling in a garden may serve to develop students’ perceptions of their place in the world. It may allow students to recognize the privileges that some are afforded while others are denied. Furthermore, familiarizing students of their privileges may allow them to think of others

by shifting the priorities from self-interests towards the welfare of the larger community. Additionally, this focus on selflessness may allow students to think about how they can share what they know with others.

Students often demonstrated a level of enthusiasm for garden activities which may play an important part in their interest in learning. When students are interested, they are more likely to pay particular attention to their surroundings that may enrich their knowledge. The garden setting seems to foster enthusiasm because of the multitude of learning possibilities that could appear at any moment. For instance, while a group of students were examining the progress of the plants in their garden bed,

A student yelled with excitement, “Do you guys want to see some butterfly eggs?”  
“Yeah!”  
“Cool.”  
“They’re shiny and gold.”  
“Ms. Kate, are they good for the garden?” asked a student.  
Kate replies, “Butterflies are great, they help to pollinate our plants. Some caterpillars that we will find can be good for some things too.”

These students appeared enthusiastic and eager to learn more about butterflies. Similarly, when students were asked by Kate and Barbara if they wanted to check on their flowers, vegetables, or even the chickens, I often heard replies of:

“Yeah.”  
“Cool.”  
“Awesome.”  
“I’m so excited, I love chickies.”  
“I’m gonna look for bugs.”  
“I wanna dig again.”

For these students, going to the garden was an adventure. They were in an open and safe space where they had a degree of freedom to touch, smell, observe, and inquire about their surroundings. This may have afforded many students an opportunity to learn

about their environment at an individual pace by utilizing the excitement and enthusiasm for further inquiry. In this way, the school garden may foster a place where mastery and success become the privileges of the many. The school garden may allow for a focus on collective and communal success over individual competition. Learning is cooperative and students are able to share their knowledge with others based on their independent inquiries and observations. When students find something that is “cool,” they want to share it with their classmates and teachers, and they are validated for their observations and contributions.

In addition to the garden teachers at Heron, the teachers of individual classes that come to the garden once a week often participate in the gardening activities and find opportunities to connect ideas and concepts found at the garden with materials from their regular class time. For example, teachers connect vocabulary words to the objects that they represent, as in the case of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher who announced to her class,

“Look at the tendrils guys. It’s a tendril: a leafless vine attached at the root. It’s one of our vocabulary words.” She then took a digital picture of the vine to use as an example in her classroom.

Similarly, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher used the construction of a chicken coop for the school garden as a means of connecting math and other skills that were part of his regular classroom. The school’s principal and the garden teachers had decided to raise chickens so that they may provide a means of chemical-free pest control and nutrient supplementation as they roam within the confines of the fenced main garden. Students were able to design, estimate materials, and construct the chicken coop together. Although this teacher was the only person to use the power-saw, all of the students participated in constructing the chicken coop including measuring wooden panels and



boards, painting the posts, and using the cordless drill to drive screws. Some students expressed that the task was indeed a large endeavor.

A 7<sup>th</sup> grade student who asked, “How long is this [chicken coop] supposed to last?”

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher replied, “Hopefully forever.”

The student had a puzzled look, “Forever? This thing is supposed to last forever and *we’re* building it? (my emphasis)”

After the chicken coop was completed, several of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were engaged in a discussion of how well it came together and what could have been done differently, including the student who was previously not confident. They appeared to display critical thinking and analytical skills. Although some students were initially not convinced that they had the skills to complete this goal, simply attempting such a task showed many students that they could learn certain skills that are often not possible in a regular classroom setting. Gaining such skills may be rewarding to the extent that student can feel a sense of accomplishment despite a difficult task. Although these skills may be helpful in students’ future occupations thereby mirroring *gesellschaft* ideas of competition, students are afforded an opportunity to gain them in an environment that does not emphasize competition. The goals of constructing the chicken coop are not to prepare students for the carpentry industry, but rather to create something that is beneficial to all of the students and teachers who come to the garden. The construction of the chicken coop benefits the entire community of the school garden, as all of the students and teachers will have the opportunity to enjoy the interactions with the chickens, learn about their behavioral patterns, and reap the bounty of pest-reduction and egg production.

Furthermore, students at Heron's garden had frequent opportunities to learn from each other. In the setting of the garden, students often explored plants, bugs, and the natural surroundings without the constant supervision of the garden teachers. For example, while I graded the soil on a newly formed garden bed,

A group of students are picking up caterpillars from the tomato plants on their own. A 4<sup>th</sup> grade boy asks, "What is that thing?"

One of the girls in the group moves in for a closer look, "It's a tomato horn worm. They are bad for tomatoes and like to eat the leaves and the fruit."

Another boy asks, "What should we do with him?"

"We should smush it," a girl in the group suggests.

The student who correctly identified the horn worm says, "No. Don't you dare kill it. It has feelings too."

Some of the other students suggest that they relocate the tomato horn worm several hundred feet away into the woods. The rest of the group discusses it and agrees, so two students walk over and release the worm away from the garden.

This example highlights the ways that students can obtain some mastery of their environment with the help of their peers. The students were able to find an answer, "that thing" became a "tomato horn worm," by asking and interacting with each other. The student that identified the horn worm was able to provide additional information that described the potential harm to the tomato plants, but also the idea that even this "harmful" animal may have "feelings." She seemed to imply a relationship with the horn worm that included an understanding of the reasons that the animal was attracted to the plant in the first place, as well as a value and respect for its life. In this example, students may be learning about biology and ecology from each other, but also about relationships with natural things that are considerate and come to think of plants and animals as other living beings that are part of the garden.

Although one of the garden teachers may be present during a garden activity, I observed many students who received answers to their questions from each other. For instance,

A 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class is gathered with Kate around their garden bed. A student who I had previously not seen at the garden asks, “How does that yellow dust [pollen] get to another plant? Wind?”

Another student adds, “Bees.”

“And butterflies,” add yet another.

Kate responds, “That’s right? Can you think of any others?”

Yet another student contributes, “Bats and other insects.”

This process, whereby students help each other to arrive at answer to their questions, was frequently observed at Heron’s school garden. Students willingly volunteer and assist each other in mastering this setting. They share the process of learning with each other and emphasize community success over individualistic competition. This focus for the benefit for all is associated with *gemeinschaft* ideas that stress communal relationships instead of the *gesellschaft* ideas of competition and individualism. Furthermore, by highlighting the benefit for all, students may be endorsing the *gemeinschaft* idea that all the members belong to a shared community. Feelings of belonging can be powerful to the extent that they may bind these students further to shared purposes and goals that are communal rather than individual.

## *Belonging*

To the extent that Heron's garden may allow students to experience feelings of belonging, the garden may be a setting which fosters personal, caring and loving relationships found in *gemeinschaft* over the impersonal, competitive, and contractual relationships found in *gesellschaft*.

Some students at Heron Academy's organic garden may come to feel a sense of belonging and ownership through the experiences at the garden. Students have worked hard to make the garden their own. They dug, sowed seeds, and spent numerous hours watering and weeding. On several occasions, I was surprised by how enthusiastically this feeling of ownership extended. For example, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade student noticed that I was jotting down notes as his class presented projects in one of the open classrooms at Heron Academy's garden.

A student asks, "What are you writing?"

"I am just jotting down some notes about what you guys are doing out here at the garden," I reply.

He continues, "Are you planning on stealing our plans for this garden?"

A little surprised at the question, I reply, "Well, it is a good idea right? Maybe it should be copied?"

He explains, "It is not a good idea to copy this garden because a lot of the parents of students at this school are lawyers. My mother passed her BAR exam and she is a lawyer too. Some of these parents might try to sue you if you copy it."

I ask, "Do you think that more students should have gardens like this?"

He pauses for a moment, "They should. But they can come up with their own."

In this example, the student appears to have a close relationship with the garden. He is defensive about it, and implies that it should remain unique and uniquely theirs. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, which this student was a part of, came to the garden four days a week for twelve weeks. They spend at least four hours at the garden each week, and many of these 6<sup>th</sup> grade students have been at the school for the entire span of the gardening program (3 years now) because of the low turnover rate of students at this school. Some students may have been involved from the beginning. Because students physically interact with the plants, animals and the garden through gardening activities, they may develop connections with the garden that take the form of unique, personal, and meaningful relationships.

Another example that illustrates this connection in the form of ownership includes the day when Kate asked me to spray peppermint soap on all the plants. Casey and Kate explained that the soapy mixture would bind to the plants, while being non-toxic and biodegradable, and the strong scent of the peppermint would keep some caterpillars away. I loaded up the spray gun and started spraying all the garden beds. There were no students at the garden during this time, so for the most part I kept working and refueling the spray canister as needed. A class of 1st grade students who I had not previously observed at the garden walked up with their teacher to the class' raised garden bed. They had come to check on their plants while walking from the open field, where recess was often held, back to the classrooms. They were gathered around their garden bed when I walked up.

“Hello, I’m just going to be spraying this bed really quickly,” I explained. Their teacher asks, “Do you work a certain company? Is that going to harm our plants?”

“No,” I replied. “I’m just a volunteer and Kate asked me to spray the beds with peppermint soap to discourage the caterpillars from eating the leaves off of the plants. It doesn’t hurt the plants though.”

Although that may have satisfied the question as to the safety of the plants, a 1<sup>st</sup> grade student then asks, “Will it hurt or kill the caterpillars?”

“No, it is supposed to put this strong peppermint scent that caterpillars don’t like. I’m told that they don’t like it, and that they should leave without harm.”

The students seem satisfied and indicate that I can spray by moving off to the side as to allow access to their garden bed.

This example illustrates how students and teachers can become attached to the garden, and the plants and animal which may be found there. These students seemed protective over their plants, but also valued the life of the caterpillars and did not want them to come to harm. They may have experienced a connectedness, or belonging to the garden and all of its life forms. Similarly, students may have developed significant and meaningful relationships with the plants and animals at the garden as embodied in their concern over potential harm to the plants or caterpillars. Feelings of belonging to something bigger than the individual and forming deep, significant, and meaningful relationships are key ideas of *gemeinschaft*. Within the *gemeinschaft* concept of community, individual self-interests are less valued than the communal interests and goals and relationships are meaningful and caring rather than contractual and impersonal.

Further, expressions of ownership may implicitly indicate feelings of belonging whereby students feel that they belong to a larger community and that they individually hold a stake and ownership of that community’s domain, in this instance, the school garden. As students come to feel a sense of belonging, they may choose to sacrifice their own interests and work towards community goals. At Heron, it was common to observe students sacrificing their play time to water plants and remove the caterpillars from their

leaves instead of socializing with peers or exploring the woods. It may be that these students feel a sense of duty and responsibility to *their* garden. Sergiovanni (1994) explains that *gemeinschaft* ideas focus less on discretion and freedom, but more on commitments, obligations, and duties that are shared by many. Insofar as students at Heron's garden appear to have a sense of obligation to protect the garden "from being copied," and from the harm to plants and animals, and a sense of duty to work for the benefit of all in the garden, they appear to display *gemeinschaft* ideas.

As previously discussed, some students are able to forge connections with plants, animals, and nature while participating in the gardening activities. When the young girl previously discussed, spoke of not killing a tomato horn worm because it had "feelings," she may have implicitly endorsed extending *gemeinschaft* ideas of caring relationships, such as those afforded to students, towards animals and plants which have their own place in the garden, hold a value as beings, and belong to the larger setting of the garden. Towards the idea that all life is valuable, garden teachers often personalize plant and animal life to students. For instance, Kate uses "Seedy," a seed puppet, to illustrate the growth cycle to a pre-kindergarten class.

Kate holds a small green bundle in her hands and squats low to the ground. She asks the students who are huddled around her to squat down into a ball and imagine being a seed in the ground.

"The first thing that Seedy would do is to..." Kate begins.

"Crack," shouts a student.

Kate looks at the student and responds, "That's right. And then Seedy would shoot his root out, so let's all wiggle our feet out and find some nutritious soil." She unwraps the green bundle and presents Seedy's root while moving her feet. After the students wiggle around for a moment, she slowly pulls the steam from the bundle, and explains, "Next, Seedy finds the light." The students are all modeling Kate now who stands up. She continues, "When the sun hides your face, you want to stretch out your arms just like Seedy would want to stretch out

his leaves.” The students laugh as they try to stretch their arms out as wide as possible.

This garden activity may have allowed students to imagine the life of a plant. It may give them the opportunity to understand and empathize with plant and animal life, thereby further forging meaningful relationships between students and plants, animals, and the garden. Other students similarly expressed their connection with plants and animals by personalizing them and giving them names. For example,

A group of girls volunteer that there is a frog in one of the rain barrels which the students have named, “Water Butt.”

A 6<sup>th</sup> grade student explains that a tall oak is really, “Molly, the tree.”

Additionally, students’ connection with plants may be observed when they express feelings as in the following example.

Some of the squash and cucumber plants in a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class’ raised garden bed have wilted and dried up as a result of a mold problem. Kate and Barbara are taking the class to the garden bed to dig up the old, dead plants and make room for others. A student remarks, “It’s sad to have to dig our plants up.”

Kate replies, “Yeah, but don’t worry, we will get to plant new early winter vegetables and Black Simpson lettuce.”

The connections and relationships that students have with the plants and animals found at the garden appear to be meaningful to them. They may also allude to these students’ sense of belonging within this setting. Certainly, students seem to have meaningful and valuable relationships with the garden, but they may also be gaining ideas about where and how plants, animals, the garden, and students themselves fit into the larger garden community. They may understand that in the garden setting, caring and meaningful relationships are to be extended to others, thereby creating a sense of belonging for all of the members including plants and animals.



Other experiences at Heron's garden displayed caring, loving, and understanding relationships between teachers and students. For instance, Kate and Barbara have children who also attend Heron Academy. When their children come out to the garden, they often receive hugs and are asked how their day has been going. But these interactions are not solely reserved for their own children. All of the garden teachers frequently gave hugs to students and inquired as to how students were doing and how they felt. Additionally, I observed that garden teachers spoke to students using polite, caring and encouraging words. For example, Barbara and Kate were listening to a demonstration of the "greenhouse" effect by a group of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students.

A group of four students explains that the greenhouse effect traps heat and moisture and an example of it can be found in the garden's greenhouse. They ask the other students to each grab Summer Blossom seeds and the bottom part of a plastic water bottle that has been cut in half. As the whole class is planting and watering their seeds, then placing the water bottle "green house" on top, Barbara says, "What a great idea.

"It's so neat," responds Kate.

Barbara turns to face the entire class, "What agriculturally talented and creative students we have."

The students in this class may have felt encouraged by the words of the garden teachers. It also appears that Kate and Barbara may be experiencing proud feelings towards the students' accomplishments and ingenuity. Additionally, when Kate, Barbara, and Casey asked student to perform some task, it was usually followed by a caring remark along the lines of:

"...my dear;" "...for me please;" and "...it would be much appreciated."

While a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class was planting squash, I spoke with their teacher and Kate about a student who felt constrained within the regular class room, but as his teacher explained,

The students are growing a vegetable for their classroom while in the garden. It is an additional project that students would do for her class while also participating in the regular garden activities.

The teacher elaborates, “He is doing so well. He really should be out here with you guys. The classroom is too constrained for him. Here, he thrives.”

She continues, “You know, we expect so much from our kids, and they really don’t have to know everything to be happy in life...”

Kate adds, “I know, but that’s why we love them all here and they can come and hang out and learn and thrive the way that they want.”

In this example, both the regular classroom teacher and Kate display an ethic of care. They seem to have an understanding that not all students will be able to participate in a formal class setting where rules and regulations are emphasized. Although some students may not perform well in a traditional and formal class setting, they deserve to be loved, to be cared for, and to experience happiness. Additionally, these teachers appear to recognize that all students make contributions and that teachers just have to find out what students are good at and tap into it. Although some students may find the restrictions of the classroom to be frustrating, the garden setting may be a place where students have skills that are useful and valuable. They appear to display an inclusiveness of all members that is typically found in *gemeinschaft* concepts of community where all of the members’ contributions are valued. Students appear to be able to experience loving and caring relationships despite factors that may cause frustration and separation in those relationships.

Furthermore, caring and loving relationships are fostered in Heron’s garden between students themselves. For instance, the garden teachers often have an activity for younger students which they call “Sowing a seed of kindness.”

The 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students are sowing lettuce seeds. Kate suggests that they each, “Sow a seed of kindness by saying something great about yourself and something great about one of your classmates.”

The students each take a turn saying things like:  
“I am a great artist and [another student] is really fast.”  
“I can dig holes fast and [another student] is really good at writing.”  
“I am very calm and [another student] is really nice to everyone.”

On another occasion, Barbara and a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class had just finished making four new garden beds.

Barbara asks the three groups of students, those getting compost, those mixing it with soil, and those forming and leveling the garden beds to give each other compliments after they started getting competitive over which group was the fastest. The students stated to one another,

“You guys are great at digging.”  
“You guys are great at shoveling.”  
“You guys are great at getting compost.”  
“You guys are great at working together.”

These examples serve to illustrate how caring relationships are fostered among students with the help of the garden teachers. These activities that occur in the garden may shape students perceptions about respectful, collegial, and caring relationships.

The students at Heron’s garden also illustrated these ideas without coercion from the teachers. Head Start is a program that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Local Head Start schools visit Heron Academy for the opportunity to experience the school garden. On one such occasion, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were given the opportunity to serve as tour guides for a class of 1<sup>st</sup> grade Head Start students. The teachers provided some structure for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to follow when giving the tours. They recommended that the students set up several “stations” which had various activities for the Head Start students including identifying plants and bugs, making a necklace with materials from the garden, and exploring on their own. While not all of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade

students were enthusiastic, the overwhelming majority took on the roles of friends as well as tour guides. Many of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students asked questions about the personal lives of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade visitors. They engaged them in discussions about plants, insects and chickens. Both 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys and girls played games with the Head Start students. They also talked about all the “fun” things to do in the garden including feeding insects that could harm the plants to the chickens, getting dirty and playing in the soil, and exploring the surrounding lightly wooded areas.

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from Heron were able to show care for and acceptance of the visiting students. They seemed to display those *gemeinschaft* ideas of nurturance and caring that are embodied in the relationships they have with their teachers and classmates at Heron’s garden as well as what is fostered in such activities as “Sowing seeds of kindness.” Students appear to reiterate the “fun” that they have during their own experiences at the garden to visiting students. They also appear to recognize their privilege for the opportunity to experience the garden and a level of pride by showing visiting students all of the “fun” and exciting thing to do in this setting. The students at Heron’s school garden may also have a sense of pride that may come from the collective successes of building and working on the school garden. Additionally, exploring the garden for its “fun” activities requires a certain degree of freedom and independence that may be found in the school garden which the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students may want to share with visiting students who are restricted by traditional classrooms which do not afford this opportunity for independent exploration and observation.

### *Independence*

The informal atmosphere and environment that is present at the organic garden allows for a sense of freedom and independence which could foster autonomy, self-determination, and competency. In the aforementioned examples of students' and teachers' experiences in the school garden, there are numerous instances of students' independence and autonomy including the ability to choose which vegetables to plant and how, the initiative to water plants and remove harmful pests, the opportunity to experiment, and the creativity in exploring topics like the "greenhouse" effect. Additionally, students are afforded opportunities to inquire about their personal interests and curiosities as they arise in the garden. If students notice a bug, plant, or animal that piques their curiosity, they can seek answers from peers, as in the case of students asking for the identification of the tomato horn worm, or from the garden teachers.

Similarly, when 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were asked to show a technique for gardening that had not previously been explored, a group of two girls came up with the idea of making biodegradable flower pots. These students had the opportunity to lead the class by becoming instructors to other students and peers. The two girls showed their class how to roll up newspapers and create small flower pots that could be used to germinate and grow young seedlings. They further explained that the flower pots are great because we reduce the amount of newspaper trash that goes into the landfill, and because newspapers decay rapidly, they can directly plant these flower pots into their more

permanent spot in the garden. In this creative way, students seem to hold some power over what they contribute to the class and may gain a sense of knowing information that is valuable and that others are interested in; students have something to offer, which may further validate them as people. Further, these students may gain a sense of confidence and competency by exploring and acquiring knowledge independently and sharing it with others who may find it useful and valuable.

Students may also gain a sense of competency in their abilities by being included in decision making at the school garden. They are frequently surveyed about which plants to include in the garden beds, the designs and organization of the garden and the chicken coop, and how to proceed on certain occasions. Take the example of an incident involving two large dogs, the chicken coop, and 26 chickens.

I arrived at the school today and noticed that the expressions of teachers' faces looked sad and worrisome. Barbara filled me in that the chicken coop had been constructed with a plastic panel roof that did not have much support. She explained that the decision to put this kind of a roof was based on practicality and utility. This is why the 7<sup>th</sup> grade class that constructed it chose to use corrugated plastic as it would be easy to put up and it provided sufficient air flow for when the chickens would be locked in the coop at night.

She continues, "Two large-breed dogs from one of the houses that neighbors the school escaped from their fenced pen and came onto the property." She explains that the dogs swam over the pond and were drawn to the coop, probably because of the smell of chickens and their chirping. The dogs jumped on top of the roof and collapsed it killing most of the chickens. Now, my facial expression matched the garden teachers'. A group of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students come out to the garden. Kate and Barbara sat them down.

They begin by explaining that there was an accident and that two dogs came to the garden. The dogs were most likely excited by the sounds and smells coming from the chicken coop, and while trying to further examine the chickens, they jumped on the roof. Because the roof was only made of plastic, it collapsed under their weight and the dogs' instincts took over because their senses must have been in overload. Barbara explained that the chickens were making lots of noises and there must have been feathers flying everywhere, so the dogs defended themselves against a perceived attack and killed the rest of the chickens which had not died from the collapse of the roof.

As the students look on in sadness Barbara adds, “Now we all loved the chickens, but now we have a problem, so now we need a new plan. I mean, you guys like the chickens right? You want to still have them?”

“Yeah,” several of the students respond.

One student explains, “I feel sad for the chickens.”

Barbara continues, “Me too, but that’s why we have to make the rest of them safe.”

Another student adds, “I wanted them to stay alive. Why did the dogs do that?”

Kate responds, “Well what do you think?”

A student answers, “The dogs are mean.”

Kate continues, “I don’t think the dogs are mean...” and again stresses that the dogs must have been in a panic themselves, and that instinct to play or defend may have been involved.

One student explains, “I really miss Eggbert [chicken] because he was my friend.”

Barbara agrees, “I will miss him too. Everyone will.”

She continues, “What kinds of plans can we think of to make this better?”

The students begin by suggesting feeding chocolate to the dogs, having them taken to the pound, and fining the owner, but turn to ideas on putting the chicken coop on stilts and reinforcing the roof.

In this example, students are afforded an opportunity to express their individual emotions and feelings. Garden teachers sympathize and mourn with students while creating a sense of caring for the loss of the chickens. They try to comfort the students and allow them to experience and vocalize their frustrations and emotions. Their painful feelings become a way for the garden teachers to encourage students to come together and problem-solve to protect the remaining chickens. Because the teachers are soliciting ideas from students, students may learn that their ideas and thoughts are valued. This tragic example also serves to illustrate how garden teachers give students hope for the future in the presence of a conflict or detriment to the garden. The teachers reminded students that while this incident was a blow to the garden community, life must go on and students can participate in creating new plans that will improve the situation. Towards this goal, the chicken coop roof was reinforced, and more chickens were later procured.

It was quite clear from this example that the chickens, just like all the plants and other wildlife, were part of the larger community. The chickens did not merely represent a loss of “livestock,” or a commodity, but were loved and cared for like any other member of the community. Students exhibited a sense of generosity and wanted to help the chickens and contribute to their well-being.



## *Generosity*

The crisis with the chickens was not the only example of students exhibiting a sense of generosity. As mentioned previously, there are numerous garden opportunities for students to demonstrate self sacrifice and generosity for others as in the examples of the Head Start students who visited the garden and the students who voluntarily weed and remove harmful insects.

On one of my visits to Heron's school garden, Barbara explains that the previous day, almost half of the students in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade class chose to skip recess time and instead asked to be allowed to come to the garden and pull weeds or water the plants. Recess time may be useful to the extent that students can get physical exercise and that they can socialize and bond with peers. However, by volunteering to help do work that will benefit the entire community which utilizes the garden, students may be generously sacrificing individual interests for shared interests.

On the last day that I visited Heron's school garden, Kate and Barbara were just meeting up with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class who for the last few weeks had been involved with "Team Survivor." For this contest, the class was divided into four teams which competed in various garden challenges. Although this activity was competitive, all of the teams that successfully completed the challenges would receive points, often resulting in multiple teams getting the maximum points allotted to the "first" place. On this particular day,

The garden teachers explain to the 6<sup>th</sup> graders that they can gain points towards “Team Survivor” by competing to see who can collect the most air potatoes, an invasive species. In addition, they give the student two other options. They can go play soccer, touch football and have recess time, or they can help to chop down a Brazilian Pepper tree.

The students divide themselves into three groups with about 1/3 of the students placing themselves into each of the three groups.

In this example, the students are afforded three options. They can either gain a prize in the form of points toward “Team Survivor,” they can experience play, or they can work at removing an invasive species with no external rewards. The rewards for playing a game and gaining a prize are immediately realized. But are there no rewards for the students who choose to remove the Pepper tree? In fact, there may be, but they are much harder to spot as these rewards are often intrinsic and moral in character. It may be that students who chose to remove the Brazilian Pepper tree are participating because they may learn something about cutting down a tree or about identification of this invasive species thereby gaining a sense of independence that comes with gaining valuable knowledge, or mastery in achievement and competency of doing something that may be more difficult to accomplish. These rewards are intrinsic in that doing something may be rewarding in itself. Students may also be able to feel a sense of belonging and generosity that may drive them to into doing work that will benefit the larger community of the school garden. These rewards may be moral to the extent that students may be doing work that is a common goal for the community. Because shared goals and purposes are constructed in a communal form, they often appear to be “good” to the members of that community. Insofar as students may believe that the shared goals are “good,” students may feel rewarded in moral standing as a result of performing tasks that will benefit the entire community.

Additionally, if students believe that collecting air potatoes is beneficial to the larger community, the rewards for this contest may be external as well as intrinsic and moral. Being that two-thirds of the class freely and independently chose to remove invasive species and contribute to the benefit of all of the members of the school garden community, instead of having recess and playing, the students at Heron's school garden appear to feel a sense of generosity towards working on shared goals of the larger community. They sacrifice their own interests with immediate rewards for shared interests whose rewards are not instantly realized.

Students may also come to realize that generosity sometimes works in a full circle. They not only try to exhibit generosity to others, but also benefit from the generosity of plant and animal life. During the course of the semester, plants often fruited and students were rewarded with nature's generous bounty of cucumbers, tomatoes, green beans, and other fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the garden teachers often encouraged students to share these yields with their classmates and to bring extras to class so that others could enjoy them. Further, students extended this idea of generosity to many of the benefits of some insects that kept pests away, butterflies and bees which helped to pollinate the garden, and worms that helped to create the compost. While some pests may be problematic for the production of fruits and vegetables, they often have a place in the larger eco-system which eventually does benefit the school garden.

Additionally, some students display self-sacrifice for others outside of the garden and even the school. Take for example, the case of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader.

A group of students are sitting around the log circle and chatting. One girl gets the attention of Kate, Barbara, and me.

She explains, “[student] is growing his hair long to donate to cancer patients.”

Kate replies, “Cool. I did that. Locks of Love is an organization that collects hair to make wigs for cancer patients.” She explains that some cancer patients have to undergo chemotherapy where chemicals that fight the cancer are injected into their bodies, but that it can make patients lose their hair.

In this instance, a student wants to recognize the unselfish behavior of one of her classmates. The freeness of discussion at the garden allows for the public opportunity to talk about others in kind and supportive ways. Kate reinforces this idea of generosity by explaining that she too, has donated hair to a similar cause. These examples of generous behavior may foster ideas of duties and obligations for the common good of the larger community within students and teachers.

Further, by participating in activities that will benefit others such as weeding garden beds and watering plants, over “fun” activities that may only benefit the individual student, students may come to feel that their work is more significant and meaningful in the context of community goals for the garden. They may see a larger significance in themselves and in their contributions to the garden. Individually, students can contribute what they have to offer, but as they come together to work in meeting communal gardening goals, students’ work can become synergetic. Additionally, students’ contributions are not always in the form of labor. Students often pull their ideas together, analyze together, and can create new things collectively which are then shared with others and the larger school community.

In conclusion, the relationships which I observed at Heron’s school garden are often meaningful, significant, caring and loving. Furthermore, competition is de-

emphasized and students are afforded the opportunities to share in their common success. Students are included in the planning and execution of garden work and come to feel that they belong in the community. Additionally, students can experience confidence in themselves by exploring and learning about concepts and ideas that may arise in the course of garden work. They can succeed collectively because they work towards goals that are shared by their peers and teachers. Students are also afforded an opportunity to explore the things that peak their own curiosity, and can come to feel that they are competent and capable individuals. Students may also experience generous feelings and conceptions towards plants, animals, and the school garden. They demonstrate these ideas by identifying with animals and plants, and protecting them. Additionally, when students show a willingness to sacrifice immediate gratifications like play and prizes in order to contribute to the efforts and goals that will benefit the larger community they may come to have a better understanding of their position in the community or the larger society. The ways of relating, working, and living that are presented in Heron's school garden seem to favor a *gemeinschaft* rather than a *gesellschaft* concept of community.

While some may argue that I have painted a very rosy picture of the garden, all of the experiences at the school garden are not ideal. In fact, many tensions arise that may conflict with *gemeinschaft* conceptions of community. How are these tensions negotiated by teachers and students? How do students and teachers solve problems and address discipline issues? What can students learn from these experiences? In the following chapter, I examine these questions in order to obtain a richer and more nuanced account of the school garden and the form of community that is fostered and embodied at this school setting.

## **CHAPTER 6: Tensions to Community**

The Heron Academy organic garden appears to be a place that promotes a more *gemeinschaft* set of values which provides a setting for student exploration, decision making, and sense of belonging to a larger community. However, not all students take advantage of such an opportunity. In this chapter, I focus on the tensions that arise which may potentially conflict with *gemeinschaft* concepts of community. In particular, I will explore how these tensions are negotiated by teachers and students; how students solve problems and address discipline issues; and what students may learn from these experiences. I examine these ideas in order to obtain a richer and more nuanced account of the organic garden and the form of community that is fostered and embodied at this school setting.

The *gemeinschaft* concepts of community may be threatened when tensions and conflict arise. Tensions can create separations amongst community members and the community goals, norms, and values. The teachers at the organic garden may negotiate these tensions by fostering a sense of governmentality among students. When students are able to experience a shared, bottom-up authority, they may reassess their own behavior against the norms of this community. One place where tensions challenge the boundaries of the kind of community that teachers try to establish in Heron's organic garden is discipline.

## *Discipline*

Discipline problems arise at all schools and school settings, and they can cause tensions between students and teachers and between students and their peers. The ways that schools negotiate discipline problems are important displays as students' perceptions may be shaped by these experiences. Sergiovanni (1994) explains that schools which adopt *gesellschaft* discipline strategies attempt to "manage" students using rules, regulations, procedures, and rewards and punishments. *Gemeinschaft* discipline strategies, on the other hand, are designed to encourage students to respond to shared norms, standards, and commitments. They attempt to teach students what is right and wrong for the community, what community members can expect from others, and what they must give in return.

By and large, there are not many discipline problems that present themselves at Heron Academy's school garden. The students that are involved in these incidents are the exception and not the norm, but may represent those students who are having the most trouble fitting into the type of community that is found at the school garden. Insofar as these students challenge the *gemeinschaft* concepts of community, they become particularly interesting examples of the attempted socialization into the *gemeinschaft* norms that are found at this site.

One might expect a heavy-handed approach for socializing these students in emphasizing the importance of the group or how students' behavior and involvement is

critical to the overall goal of the garden. Instead, the garden teachers responded in ways that even I found unexpected, surprising, and puzzling. For instance, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class was asked to transplant watermelon and cantaloupe seedlings from germinating trays into the main garden beds.

Barbara is telling a group of students that to transplant the seedling into the ground they would need to dig a small hole with their trowel and fill it with water before putting the root ball into the hole.

As she transplants a watermelon seedling as an example, she explains, “You only need to make the hole big enough to fit your fist in. And we also want to make sure not to shovel the soil out of our garden beds and into the walkways.”

As the students begin digging, several of them dig wide and deep holes, and are shoveling the soil from the holes in their garden bed onto the previously graded trenches that serve as pathways between the garden beds.

Barbara continues, “OK guys, I must not be giving good enough directions. Let me try to explain it a different way. We made these beds with rich soil and added our compost. We want to make sure that all of those nutrients can get to the plant, so we want to make sure to keep that soil in the garden bed. Plus, we don’t want make our pathways messy and lumpy because someone could get hurt.”

She looks to me and quietly explains, “I wonder if all the students have gotten enough sleep last night because they seem to not be able to follow directions.”

A student who was close to Barbara and me adds, “I got enough sleep last night.”

Barbara and I look at her cantaloupe. The student’s transplanted plant appears identical in quality as Barbara’s example.

Barbara responds, “Wow, you really did, and you did a great job!”

Here, some students are not following Barbara’s instruction yet she does not respond as an expected authority figure might. Instead of scolding or other punitive repercussions for the students, Barbara opts to blame herself. Her response seemed to be carefully calculated as she provides the students with the larger, shared rationale for why she had asked them to keep the soil in the garden bed. The plants will need the nutrients so students should try to keep the soil in the garden beds. The pathways should remain free of debris and obstruction so that students and teachers do not get injured. She uses this



teachable moment to give students additional insight into the safety of others and the value of the composted soil. In providing this rationale, Barbara gives students the reasons behind her instructions which may allow some students to better understand why to follow them.

More strikingly, when Barbara was met with the tension of students not following her instructions, she had a choice of many responses and could have viewed the dilemma from many perspectives. She could have viewed the students as challenging her authority, a perspective that often accompanies a reassertion of the authority hierarchy. Instead, Barbara appeared to de-emphasize her own authority, and focused on mending the apparent communication breakdown. Further, by explaining the context of the instructions and not demanding that students simply follow them, Barbara offered the opportunity for students to reassess their own behaviors and to begin to take responsibility for them.

The process whereby subjects govern their own actions and behaviors is described by Foucault (1978) as governmentality. Governmentality allows for self-discipline and socially appropriate ways of behaving without the need for an authority to enforce those behaviors (Raby and Domitrek 2007). In that governmentality allows for students to be independent and share common ideas of appropriate behavior, the concept appears to fit well within the *gemeinschaft* concepts where students subscribe to and share the norms, goals, and values of the larger community.

Additionally, the method by which these gardening teachers allowed for a decentralization of authority and student governmentality may be vital in moving towards these goals. Carol Gilligan's well known and often cited research, *In a Different Voice*

(1982), examined the moral development of students and found that there exists a sex-bias towards two distinct moral orientations. Gilligan posits that while men most often demonstrated a morality based on justice, including following hierarchies of power and authority, women were more likely to demonstrate a morality based on an ethic of care (Larrabee 1993). Gilligan is careful to explain that while both moral orientations are useful in their own right and can be demonstrated by both men and women, women were more likely to examine moral conflicts with particular focus on network connections and the webs of relationships that are sustained by processes of communication (Larrabee 1993). The “feminine” ethic of care allows for “a different voice” or perspective when dealing with tensions that attempts to mend network connections that could be compromised from the incident.

Barbara similarly focused on how to strengthen the connection of the students to the community goals and towards the betterment of the garden. She appeared to embrace students by appealing to their understanding of how not following her planting advice might undermine the students’ own work hard work in the garden. The garden is a reflection of all the students’ efforts, and not following her advice could hurt others in the garden as well as minimize the bounty of the garden. A rift or separation between the garden teacher and several students was instead mediated by embracing, caring and loving values that did not rely on authority hierarchies. Instead, using caring values may have allowed students to better understand the instructions and how their own actions would help the garden. If students are able to understand that the instructions are oriented toward communal goals, they may be more likely to follow them.

How Barbara dealt with student behavior problems was not an anomaly at the school garden and was commonly paralleled by the actions of other garden teachers. Take the example of Casey who was in the fenced in area of the chicken coop with a group of pre-kindergarten students. The fence encloses the chicken coop and allows teachers and students to observe, feed, and hold the chickens. Casey had previously attached a portion of a nylon bag of chicken feed which had a picture of a small chick, to the gate of the fence. She also drew a human hand supporting the chicken from underneath and added the phrase:

“Handle baby chicks with care.”

When the pre-kindergarten students first entered the garden,

Casey explained, “Please be careful when holding the chickens and make sure you support them from underneath. Also, please don’t run because you don’t want to step on any baby chickens.”

Some students are a little afraid of the chickens at first, but soon enough they are holding them, naming them, and petting them. One student still seems a little timid but he is trying to pick up a chicken. He manages to corner it and grabs the chicken with both hands by its wings. The chicken chirps.

Casey tells him to “let it go,” and the chicken lands safely on the ground. She elaborates, “Anytime that you hear it crying like that it means that it’s painful, so if you just let it go the chicken will land safely. But you shouldn’t hold chickens by their wings because you can hurt them. Think about how you would feel if someone picked you up by your arms like that.”

In this example, the timid student has not managed to follow Casey’s instructions on how to handle the chickens. When Casey speaks to him, however, she does not punish the student. Instead, she uses the incident as a teachable moment and explains that “cries” from the chicken indicate that it may be in pain and what to do when that happens. She then relates the experience of the chicken to the student by asking him to place himself in the chicken’s position. By empathizing with the chicken, the student

may be able to gain a sense of what is right and wrong, what is hurtful and helpful, and how to govern oneself in the garden and the chicken coop.

The reactions of these garden teachers to disciplinary issues do not appear to be strict and punitive. Instead, the teachers attempt to use these incidents as moments to explore different ways of connecting with students and explaining to them the reasons behind the instructions that garden teachers give. By providing these explanations, teachers emphasize the common norms and goals of the garden community. The chickens are there for the benefit of all at the garden, and if students harm them, they may be taking away from the entire community. Casey attempts to prevent future harm to the chickens and shows care towards the student and the animal. Garden teachers appear to be concerned with the connections and relationships between teachers and students, and students and animals, in this case. They attempt to mend the rifts and tensions to these relationships by explaining to students how other community members may experience the incident.

Similarly, garden teachers extend an ethic of care towards students when they are disruptive. Consider the occasion of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade class that was gathered around one of the garden's outdoor classrooms which consisted of two picnic tables and a whiteboard for writing nailed to a tall tree. Two girls were giving a presentation to Kate, Barbara, and the other students in this class. The two girls brought in small pumpkins for the other students to examine and discuss different varieties of pumpkins, growing seasons, and world records pumpkins.

A male student interrupts the two girls by asking Kate and Barbara, "Can we bash the pumpkins? Can we have recess?" Without waiting for an answer, he walks away to the picnic bench.

Barbara asks, “Why ask questions if you don’t want to wait for an answer?”

He responds, “Cause I know the answers will be no.”

The two girls pass around markers so the students can decorate their pumpkins, which most do with a Halloween theme.

The same student who had previously interrupted the activity asks, “Why do we have to do this?”

Kate responds, “No one is going to grade your pumpkin, so you don’t have to do anything.”

Here, the student challenges the authority of the garden teacher and the two presenters.

But instead of punishing the student and enforcing authority, the garden teachers point out that he is not being forced to participate. It is his choice what he does and if and how he participates. The student is placed in a position of choice and responsibility for his actions, and gains an opportunity to self-govern.

As the presentation and class period end, the students begin to pack their things up and leave. Kate asks the boy to stay behind so that she and Barbara could talk with him.

Calmly, Barbara asks him, “How come you’re disrupting the class?”

He responds that he does not like to “sit and listen to stuff,” and that he would rather “do things in the garden.” He also acknowledges that he understands that he was disrupting the class and that he “should not do that.”

Kate explains, “There is plenty of time to do garden work and garden work is great, but sometimes we have to respect other students and not complain so much.”

Barbara gives him a hug and he leaves to join his class.

While there may be a host of psychological explanations for this boy’s behavior, what does seem to be apparent from a more sociological perspective is that this boy did not seem to subscribe to the school garden’s community norms and values which include selfless behavior and thinking of others before oneself. This student did not meet the duties and responsibilities that are expected of members of a *gemeinschaft* community.

The student wanted his own needs of “recess time,” “bashing pumpkins,” and even attention, to be met. He did not consider the community goals until later when he acknowledges that he “should not do that.”

The garden teachers, on the other hand, appear to display care for this student. They speak to him calmly and address his need for physical activity by explaining that he will have plenty of opportunities for that, but that other traits are important as well, including respect for other students. Instead of asserting authority and punishing the student as a means of controlling his behavior, the garden teachers displayed care and respect for him, and they attempted to remind him of the care and respect that he is expected to show to other students. They also remind him of the self-discipline, independence, and self-control of his conduct that is expected of him. The student is allowed an opportunity to reassess his behavior when asked to express his view of what happened. He is allowed a voice of his own which enables him to be a person who has desires and wants. The teachers appear to show him that these desires and wants are recognized and supported when Kate acknowledges that his desire for garden work “is great.”

The teachers explain to the boy that other students’ contributions are valuable by asking him to respect the girls’ time to present. The responses of the garden teachers to acknowledge this student’s contributions and reinforce care and love in the form of a hug may further work to strengthen a sense of belonging to a community where members experience love and care but that they are also expected to treat others similarly. In this example, the garden teachers were able to allow this student a degree of independence and governmentality by using an ethic. They asked the student for his own perspective

on the incident. This care may have allowed the student to think of connections with other community members when assessing his own behavior. The feminine attribute of a moral orientation that focuses on relationship networks then allows students to self-govern. In this manner, the student is socialized into the garden community values of caring and nurturing.

As explained in the previous chapter, teachers often express care for students at Heron's garden. It appears that in the examples above that they continue to be caring towards students when faced with disciplinary issues. This type of a response seems to parallel Gilligan's (1982) work on feminine moral orientations that emphasize an ethic of care and places importance on the networks of relationships. This showing of care also appears to undermine students' challenges to authority as teachers de-emphasize authority hierarchies and punitive repercussions in exchange for better understanding and explanations of the shared goals and norms in the school garden. The garden teachers present a particular image of themselves that disciplines through care and makes it difficult for students to see them as the enemy with more power than themselves. When students challenge the authority and are met with a response intended to repair the relationships instead of separate them further, they are forced to pause and reflect on their behavior. They must think about their feelings towards the garden and other community members in the garden including plants and animals. Students may even reconsider their "deviant" actions when presented with explanations and context of how these actions are threats to the collective goals of the garden and the animals, plants, and people found there. Furthermore, the feminine moral orientation of the garden teachers in dealing with these tensions and challenges focuses on mending relationships and connections and

allowing students to experience independence and governmentality. Students are encouraged to conduct themselves and take responsibility for their own choices and behaviors, and may learn to self-monitor their own behaviors.

Similarly, as Kate is working with 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students in the main garden, a student starts to run through a garden bed with freshly transplanted plants.

Kate asks, “Why are you running around in the garden beds...[pause]... my dear?”

Here, the student has violated a shared norm that plants should not come under harm as they are valued by the whole community. Kate allows the student to know that running through the garden bed is a violation of this norm while at the same time reinforcing that she cares about this student. She responds in a way that appears to remove blame and implied that the student had simply been absent-minded instead of intentionally harmful. She presumes that the student is “on the side of the garden” and not that the student does not care about the garden. The embracement and framing of the behavior as unintentional allow the student’s image as a good person and caring member of the community to remain intact. This can give students the message that they are presumed to be a member of this community, that they belong, and that these relationships should be strengthened.

Additionally, Kate allows for an explanation by asking the student rather than issuing a demand to stop running. By posing her response as a question, Kate allows the student to reassess his/her own behavior and to begin to take responsibility. Instead of punitive responses, the garden teachers’ tactics may allow for students to self-govern their actions and behaviors. Hickey and Keddie (2004) explain that it is precisely this



shift from an emphasis on punitive intervention to student responsibility and governmentality that may alleviate disciplinary problems in schools and allow for further sense of groupness to emerge.

I also observed students at Heron's school garden that managed disciplinary issues amongst themselves. Darier (1999) explains that Foucault's concept of governmentality suggests that when members are "normalized" into certain values, ideas and norms, they may engage in acts to also normalize others who do not subscribe to these norms, the abnormal or challengers. At Heron's school garden, students often engaged in acts that resembled normalization of other students. For example, because the garden is an open, outdoor environment, students are often excited to be there and can get careless. When some students run through the plants in the garden beds, others will often remind them of the norms of the larger community, and may say things like:

"Hey guys, no running in the garden."

And,

"You might step on the plants."

I often observed that students seemed to respond to these calls without argument, and would heed their peers' requests as if they knew that this behavior was not beneficial to the garden.

Similarly, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students were lining up at the end of their class' period in the garden. They had observed young chicks in the log circle and were given the opportunity to hold the chickens. Some students were so excited to hold them that they lagged behind as other students were waiting for them to go back to their classroom. The garden

teachers and the class' regular teacher did not discipline these students or invoke their authority. Instead,

Another student explains, "Hey, you're not supposed to be picking any more of them up."

Barbara responds, "Thank you for doing the right thing."

In these examples, students who are being careless and possibly damaging plants in the garden and the students who are not lining up are not following the norms of the garden community. However, these students are not disciplined by an authority figure such as a teacher. Instead, other students are taking the initiative to manage discipline and be responsible for these challengers to the community norms. The students take the lead and invoke the community norms while Barbara simply reinforces them by explaining that it is "the right thing to do." She validates the students' right to monitor their peers' behaviors and rewards them. Barbara assumes some degree of authority herself in reinforcing the authority of students who are monitoring their peers, but her authority is nevertheless minimized. Specifically, she could have easily asked the students who were holding up their peers to "please line up." Instead, she waits long enough for other students to use their own governmentality and challenge the behavior of the lagging students, and simply reinforces the "right" community norms. In this way, the garden setting appears to represent a site where authority is shared among members instead of the traditional top-down approach.

It also appears that the students who are attempting to manage the challengers may see how the common goals benefit themselves and others. They may come to understand that some actions are consistent with their own goals of seeing the garden thrive and getting to experience the garden. These students hold a stake in the garden and

see it as belonging to them. Consequently, they do not want to see the garden come under harm when others are not following the community concepts of proper and safe behavior.

However, even these students who manage disciplinary issues of their peers do not appear to want punitive punishments for them. Similarly to the garden teachers, they may offer a rationale that explains that running in the garden may cause harm to the plants. The students who become responsible for others appear to want to reconnect the challengers to the community goals of having a thriving garden for the benefit of all. These students appear to learn to borrow the talk of the teachers as a way to monitor each other. Similarly to the garden teachers, they seem to exhibit an ethic of care that focuses on relationships to the garden and to others instead of hierarchies of authority that would punish those students who broke the community norms.

Sometimes there are significant events in the school that extend into the garden. On one occasion, a difficult problem emerged with a student in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Although this event did not occur in the garden, the following day Barbara seemed to be significantly affected by the incident. She explained that a student brought a pocket knife to school and that at some point during the day, he brought it out in class. She iterates that she is not clear whether he just wanted to show it off to other students or if he was threatening others. Barbara continued that because of the severity of the offense, the administrators had to respond in a firm manner. But instead of expelling the student, which would mark his permanent educational record, the administrators allowed the student to withdraw from the school.

While telling me this story, she began crying and explaining that the student was somewhat of a “loner” and that she felt he was not a “bad” student. She explained that he often “got in trouble” in the classroom but when he was in the garden, he loved working hard and did not cause problems. She also spoke of students who may feel constrained in a regular classroom setting, and how sometimes that structure is too much for them. Here, Barbara shows an ability to provide a larger context for understanding this student’s behavior. Rather than assuming that he is a “bad” person, she tries to understand the student and feels compassion for him. She also recognizes that the garden provided a different setting that evoked a different set of behaviors from him.

In this example, Barbara presented a version of herself that was often found in all three of the garden teachers. When presented with a conflict or tension that undermines the norms at the garden, these women often display a moral orientation or reasoning that emphasizes care, concern, and connection with others.

While in the course of regular garden activities, the garden teachers present themselves with multitudes of traditionally “masculine” attributes including constructing garden sheds, cutting down trees with chainsaws, and shaping the terrain of the garden. But in their interactions with students, these teachers appear to invoke “feminine” traits that allow them to respond in unexpected ways to students who challenge the garden community. These teachers often present themselves as patient, loving, nurturing, and embracing when confronted with tensions and discipline problems. Instead of the impersonal, formal, and punitive responses to challenges of authority, they often show a care for maintaining and strengthening the relationships and in fact de-emphasize authority hierarchies. In doing so, the teachers remove the authoritarian hierarchy that

students are challenging in the first place allowing for a shift in students' focus toward their own behaviors. It may give them pause to reassess and reevaluate their behaviors in contrast to their own goals as well as those of the community. This process appears to have the potential to further socialize students into the gemeinschaft concepts of community that are embodied and fostered at the school garden.

### *Solving Problems*

In a setting that encourages free and independent exploration, problems may arise. Some problems are relatively simple. In the school garden, plants can fail and students often speak of their sadness as many come to believe that these plants are as much a part of the community as the students themselves. Garden teachers often use these teachable moments to explain that the plants will be replaced by new and different ones, perhaps some that are better suited to the current seasonal climate. When students are weeding in the garden and misidentify a vegetable like squash for a weed, garden teachers use the moment to help students in differentiating between the two plants. Additionally, when a student complained about getting dirty, similarly to other garden teachers,

Kate explains, “You know what? Life is OK because we have a hose right over there.”

It appears that when teachers are presented with these problems, they display caring relationships by helping students to understand the situation. They are also better able to manage students by utilizing the ethic of care. This attribute is often devalued in gesellschaft communities which emphasize efficiency and standardized procedures for managing tensions. But these teachers take great patience in understanding the contexts of the tensions and challenges, and respond to them in carefully conceptualized and tailored ways that may further strengthen the connections between community members.

Similarly, during a planning session with students on what “challenges” they would play during “Team Survivor,” a 6<sup>th</sup> grade girl sneezed and explained that she might be allergic to the hay that was next to the picnic tables.

Barbara responds, “Oh, you might be. There is often mold in the hollow part of the hay. Let’s move to the other side of the garden so she doesn’t have to keep sneezing.”

Here, Barbara uses this problem as a moment to explain to students how the hay could be affecting the girl because of its mold. Additionally, she asks the student to help solve the problem by moving to another part of the garden. She validates that the student’s health matters and that Barbara and the other students care about this girl. The other students seemed to show a kind of generosity towards this student, and without complaint they move to the opposite side of the garden.

Additionally, when a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student was stung by a bee, Kate first asked whether the student was allergic to bees and then quickly applied tea-tree oil to the student’s hand. Moments later, the student remarked that she did not feel pain anymore. Students are in an environment that can be dangerous, so they learn to be careful, attentive, and vigilant of their surroundings. Additionally, they may come to understand that others will care for them if they do come under harm. Admittedly, garden teachers attempt to remove some elements of the garden that may be harmful including Morning Glory vines that could cause severe eye irritation. But even in these moments, the garden teachers demonstrate the ethic of care by playing the nurturing, motherly role of caretaker and protector. They watch over students’ well-being and safety and present further evidence of the importance of significant and caring relationships and connections.

In conclusion, when tensions arise in Heron's organic gardens, the garden teachers respond by presenting an ethic of care towards students. When students challenge the authority of the garden teachers, the teachers de-emphasize authority and attempt to allow students the space for reflection as a way to reassess their own actions. They allow students for self-governance. In this way, students can then contrast their own goals and desires to communal goals as a way to address any incompatibilities.

The methods by which these teachers respond to tensions certainly appear to have "feminine" moral perspectives. Specifically, they examine the contexts of the conflict or challenge and respond in ways that attempt to repair and strengthen relationships and connectedness. Certainly, they abstain from punitive punishments that reassert hierarchical authority structures where students are always at a lower standing than teachers. This sharing of authority may further strengthen the self-governance of students and at the same time diminish the concept of challenging teachers' authority.

It appears that students who challenge the *gemeinschaft* concepts of community are met with an ethic of care by teachers. These teachers appear to carefully and masterly de-emphasize their own authority and allow for student governmentality that may further socialize students into *gemeinschaft* community goals, values, and norms.



## CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

*...You see, Mersault, for a man who is well born, being happy is never complicated. It's enough to take up the general fate, only not with the will for renunciation like so many fake great men, but with the will for happiness. Only it takes time to be happy. A lot of time. Happiness, too, is a long patience. And in almost every case, we use up our lives making money, when we should be using our money to gain time.*

(Camus [1972] 1995: 43)

In Albert Camus' *A Happy Death* ([1972] 1995), the young protagonist, Mersault, is faced with a proposition of ending an older, wealthy man's life in exchange for a large amount of money. The older gentleman explains that because of the shame of someone else taking care of him due to the amputation of both of his legs, he wishes to end his life and has no use for the wealth. He further encourages Mersault to agree by explaining that what he is really offering is an opportunity for time. He explains that time allows for exploration of life, and a unique happiness. It gives people the opportunity to find connections with others which are not contractual. It allows people to place events in perspective and not react impulsively. Time can even allow for physical acts that make one truly happy, instead of physical labor as a means to make a living.

While Heron's school garden does not emphasize money, the nature of the garden inherently allows for its own time. Nature is its own keeper of time. It follows the seasonal climate patterns and cannot be hurried. The students, in turn, are afforded lengthy opportunities to explore plants and animals. They can follow that butterfly to find out which flowers it is attracted to and observe how the lizard catches insects. Students can experiment with planting and watering methods, and can even construct a

chicken coop that they helped to design. Students are able to learn science and math at their own unique paces. They are not pressured for efficiency and productivity as there is no fixed goal for vegetables from the garden that students are measured against. The goals are elastic and bending and can change from season to season.

In addition, students are afforded opportunities to interact with garden teachers, other students, and plants and animals. They can develop strong and meaningful relationships with others through collective experiences and gain a sense of belonging. They may even come to have generous feelings towards others as a result of shared connections and the intrinsic rewards of working hard towards collective goals. In this way, the school garden becomes a setting that allows for *gemeinschaft* concepts of community to emerge.

At the school garden, teachers appeared to enlist an ethic of care when confronted with these tensions which requires its own time for patience and reflection. It becomes particularly interesting to focus on students at the school garden who challenge the boundaries of the *gemeinschaft* community as they may begin to reveal how students are socialized into this form of community. Erikson (2005) explains that early Quakers often believed that deviants would be better able to reintegrate into the community if the response to their offenses allowed them for space to reflect on their actions. This model proved to be more successful than others which focused on discipline and public punishments of deviants. Erikson argues that models that focus on discipline may have only served to re-inflate and distance the deviants from the rest of society.

Similarly to the Quaker approach, the garden teachers often de-emphasized their own authority in an effort to force students to reflect on their own behaviors and to

contrast them to community norms. The teachers patience allowed them to confront these tensions by focusing on how to mend relationships instead of distance them. They allowed students time to reassess their behaviors and to see how their behavior compares to the communal goals. Students were able to be independent and self-govern their own behavior, and other students often monitored and managed their peers. The opportunity for self-assessment and the caring relationships that teachers embodied may have allowed students to better understand how they fit into the larger community. This bottom-up approach to authority and interaction seems to reinforce the concepts of inclusion and connectedness. In this way, time seems to allow for students' personal growth and maturity.

However, there are some limits to how far the community is challenged as seen in the example of the student who brought a knife to school. Even if this violation had occurred in the garden, the infraction was too serious and he still would have been asked to leave. There was certainly sensitivity here on the part of the administrators by not placing the incident on his permanent file but rather seeing it as a temporary blemish. Interestingly, even in this severe offense, the garden teachers considered how a relationship had been severed as a result of the incident rather than rationalizing how this student was a "bad" person. The incident also showed that there still exists an ultimate authority here. However, from my observations, it is pretty rare that it is used and only in what appears to be very extreme cases that could potentially harm students and teachers quite seriously.

Heron's school garden appears to be a place where students learn and are socialized into a *gemeinschaft* concept of community. By giving students the space to

pursue their interests with the confidence that their interests will accrue as they pursue them, students are afforded opportunity to learn and build strong and caring relationships. However, there is a different approach to socializing students and getting them to learn through their own self-reflection here. The teachers downplay their own authority in the interests that students will on their own reassess their behaviors in comparison to the community norms.

Be that as it may, this research is but one case study. Heron's school garden provides an example where gardening seems to work to allow students to experience a different kind of community, but it should not be seen as a model. Schools often adopt new fads that are quickly discarded. Instead, schools must find unique ways to utilize the garden to suit their own goals. With the increasing momentum of the garden in schools, especially even with our First Lady breaking ground at the White House for an organic garden, it becomes particularly interesting to expand the literature with data from other schools. What would the school garden look like in a non-charter public school, an inner-city school, or one without an overall emphasis on the environment? How can schools utilize garden work to fulfill other goals? What other qualities can students take away from garden experiences? These questions become particularly interesting in consideration of what many see as the failure of many schools to prepare students to take their position in the future directions of this country.

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