“Growing 4 Life”

A Class Project by the
Grade 3 Bilingual Class of the
Lycee Francais International Georges Pompidou School

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"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."

– Benjamin Franklin

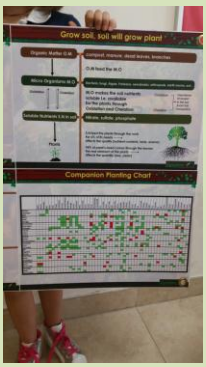
Part 1: Our Story

Our story begins in our Grade 3 French/ English bilingual classroom in September 2015. Being a bilingual classroom we get the opportunity to have one period a week where we can work together as teachers inside the classroom to create a class project. We decided it would be a great idea to create a gardening project with our two classes. Over the course of 6 weeks we would teach the children about different plants and prepare them with the background knowledge they need for our planting experiment. Together we researched what is soil, which plants can and cannot be planted together in the same box and the benefits of composting.

Living in Dubai we informed the children that we had to wait for the weather to cool down so we would have the perfect planting climate. January 2016 was the perfect temperature and the children could not be more excited to start their gardens. Each garden was split into three separate sections. The students would work with a partner and each team would have their own section where they would be in charge of planting, watering and taking care of their plants. We used rope to separate the box into three and then placed the team names inside their own section. We spent one period preparing the gardens with fresh soil and two periods strategically planting the seeds. Children planted the seeds alone with the help of the teachers and labeled the area they planted with a spoon so that they could recognize which plants were growing where. We told the students that this was a competition to see which team's plants would grow the fastest. This caused a lot of excitement and competitive spirit in the class. Every morning the children would run to the windows to see the progress of their plants.

In our garden we currently have tomato plants, basil, parsley, rocket, beans, kale and zucchini. As stated before the children had to ensure that the seeds they planted would be compatible inside the same growing area. The rocket leaves were the first plants to grow. They began to take over the garden at a faster rate than the other plants. Slowly after 3 weeks we began to see the other plants starting to grow. Every week children would draw a picture of the progress of their garden inside their Science books.

The children are responsible for watering their plants. Each week eight children are selected to be in charge of watering the plants for the entire class. There are eight boxes in total split between the two classes with 6 students growing in each box. On a daily basis we observe the plants and record any changes. Inside the planting boxes there is a water filtration



system to ensure that the plants are getting a sufficient amount of water each day. In February our school had a vacation and the school was closed for one week. The children were so excited to see the progress of their plants on the first day back to school.

Each week the students are in charge of trimming their produce. In February they collected rocket leaves and several students created recipes for the class which they presented using PowerPoint or showing a movie they created. One student prepared a salad for the class to enjoy. The students loved preparing recipes at home with their parents and presenting their hard work and ideas to the classroom. Some of the teachers at our school have also enjoyed our fresh produce at home making recipes of their own.

The goal for our project is to create small organic boxes which students will prepare, put together and sell to parents, teachers and the community. The students will put together a price list and research the "rates" of organic produce in Dubai. We are still in the early stages of this project but we hope to sell some boxes by the end of April.

Part 2: Student and Community Engagement

Students are enjoying our project as it is a fun and interactive way to learn about the function of living things which is a part of our Science curriculum. Students observe the growth of plants and construct a life cycle of the plants from the seed to plant, flower to fruit and fruit to seed. They learn about key words including: germination, photosynthesis, seed embryo, chlorophyll, seeding and pollination. They can then develop awareness about the importance of nature, taking care of plants and their environment.

We believe that involving students with the community is crucial. In November we travelled to the DEWA Sustainable Building to learn about renewable resources in partnership with the COP 21 in Paris. Students had the chance to view the top of the building where DEWA has planted several boxes as well. Students enjoyed this fieldtrip and were even more excited to start our own garden in January. We also believe that involving parents is another great way to create a link between the school and the home environment. Students have taken on the roll of "mini chefs" and created their own recipes in their kitchens at home. In March we will invite parents to come and view our beautiful gardens and have students present their recipe ideas.

We have also partnered up with the Gloria Hotel in Dubai to provide their restaurant with some of our fresh produce. Recently they have used our rocket inside their menu and their customers enjoyed the great flavour! Hopefully within a few months we will have some tomatoes and beans that we can share with them as well.

Part 3: How Happy are you with the project?

We are extremely happy with our "Growing 4 Life" project so far. Students are surprised each week with the growth of their plants and become more and more excited to see some real vegetables. Some of our students love our project so much that they have created their own mini gardens at home with their parents.

A challenge that we have faced with our garden project is the amount of sunlight the plants are exposed to each day. Due to the positioning of the garden some boxes are always covered with shade while some boxes can be exposed to sunlight for several hours a day. We have discovered that the boxes that receive the most amount of shade each day are the boxes that have flourished the most as opposed to the boxes that receive both sun and shade. We may face another challenge in a few months time with the temperature slowly rising. This has been a great discussion topic in our gardening project proving the importance of Benjamin Franklin's belief of hands on learning.

We hope to start an official "Market Day" where parents and teachers can purchase an organic box for the week. Students will be in charge of selling these boxes and will create a brand and business name. This will be a great way to create a cross-curricular project involving math, science, art and language.

We would love to have Stephen Ritz give a workshop in our classroom. Perhaps he could share his beautiful story on how he created his business the "Green Bronx Machine". As Stephen comes from a different country it would be an opportunity for students to hear another teacher's perspective on saving our environment. Every workshop is a step towards making a positive impact on changing the way students think about the importance of nature and their environment.