Growing a Healthy Childhood

THE VALUE OF CULTIVATING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH GARDENING USING DESIGN

MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS PROJECT
BY SARAH HOYT
Growing a Healthy Childhood
THE VALUE OF CULTIVATING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH GARDENING USING DESIGN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO LIBERTY UNIVERSITY FOR MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN STUDIO AND DIGITAL ARTS

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I would like to dedicate this book to my husband, Bradley. You have pushed me to pursue my creativity since we met, and are a daily inspiration. I will be forever grateful that God led me to you.

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I would like to give many thanks to all of my friends and family who supported me through this process. To my mom who tolerated the daily phone calls that I much needed. And to my dad, who was always kicking me out of the house as a kid, which lead to my love of gardening.

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the effects of introducing gardening as an educational and developmental tool in early childhood. Research includes an in-depth exploration of the benefits of gardening regarding physical, mental, and social health. Furthermore, the research studies why parents do not already implement gardening. The thesis delves into the power that artwork can have as a call to action. The thesis concludes with a visual solution that is intended to draw out a desire for parents of young children to introduce gardening in their home.
CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM
INTRODUCTION

One only needs to look at children’s gift catalogs at Christmas time to see that technology dominates what youth are experiencing today. The modern desire for faster, easier living in recent decades has led to the desertion of fundamental home values and activities. This thesis analyzes the beneficial effects of teaching young children to garden, both in homes and schools. The research pulls from several programs that have been instituted in early childhood education centers, such as the Edible Schoolyard Program, as well as community and family-based programs. Through the research, one main problem became clear: children can benefit significantly from the activity of gardening, but they are not being introduced to it by their parents or guardians.
The objective moving forward was to deduce a possible visual solution to the problem, one that would make parents interested in gardening with their children. Once the problem was recognized, several topic areas required further research. Why gardening is such a useful tool. How gardening can improve children’s eating habits. How gardening activities could provide an opportunity for creative thinking. Ways that gardening could serve as physical activity. These areas of research lead to the following questions: why gardens are not more commonly implemented in schools and why parents are reluctant to garden with young children. Following, how could artwork be used to convince the parents of this.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH

PHYSICAL HEALTH - NUTRITION
PHYSICAL HEALTH - ACTIVITY
CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
DETERRENTS
CONCLUSION OF RESEARCH
DESIGN
In recent years, the practice of gardening has been pushed more and more in the realm of early childhood development. The concept is implemented in schools through programs such as the Edible Schoolyard Program. Gardening has become an integral part of children’s learning, “whether it’s about science or nature or health or where food comes from.” (Severson). The possible uses of gardening as an educational tool are seemingly endless. Blair Dorothy writes in her article about incorporating gardens in schools, “The Child in the Garden: An Evaluative Review of the Benefits of School Gardening,” that “the purposes of the redesigned schoolyard are academic, behavioral, recreational, social, political, and environmental” (16). These successful programs in schools show why gardening activities would be equally beneficial in a home setting. This analysis will focus primarily on the benefits that introducing gardening to young children has on their nutrition, physical activity levels, creative thinking, and social interactions.
PHYSICAL HEALTH - NUTRITION

The act of gardening has proven in studies time and again to improve children’s nutritional health. According to Kristin Davis and Lynn Brann in their article, “Examining the Benefits and Barriers of Instructional Gardening Programs to Increase Fruit and Vegetable Intake among Preschool-Age Children” in the Journal of Environmental and Public Health, “the use of instructional gardens is a growing area of interest to enhance diet quality among children.” (6) One of the issues facing children today is the constant influx of unhealthy foods. With childhood obesity becoming an ever-increasing threat, “children need to broaden their perspective on what foods are edible and to re-personalize food.” (Blair 18) The foods that children learn to like and dislike at an early age tend to follow into adulthood, so introducing them to healthy food is essential. Helping children develop more health-conscious eating habits now that can be maintained through adolescence and adulthood might create a healthier generation in the future.

However, there is a tendency among children to have an aversion to any food that is green. Brussel sprouts, spinach, and the like are avoided and described as gross or yucky by young ones. These unfounded assumptions on the children’s part can lead to habits of avoiding healthy foods in adulthood. In her article, “The Effects of School Gardens on Students and Schools: Conceptualization and Considerations for Maximizing Healthy Development,” Emily Ozer studied edible gardens and their ability to “provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with and eat produce that they have grown themselves, an experience that anecdotally increases the appeal of eating vegetables.” (853).
Kristin Davis and Lynn Brann found that when participating in gardening, children “were wanting to eat things that when they’re presented at the table, they’re not interested in.” (4) In his article, “The impact of a school-based gardening intervention on intentions and behaviour related to fruit and vegetable consumption in children,” Michael J. Duncan concluded that “the process of growing food and tending to it in the school setting may provide benefits to eating behaviour through increases in knowledge and understanding about healthy eating as well as providing children with the basic tools to grow their own produce in the future.” (766) Gardens have been shown to speak “to the child’s need to explore nature” and provide “opportunity for children to learn from direct experience.” (Nimmo 34) These opportunities to explore and experience nature peak children’s curiosity and the five senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch. In this instance, the sense of taste can be explored with the fruits and vegetables growing in the garden. Children may be curious about how the produce they are growing will taste, and explore the different flavors and textures of the food. This research shows that the introduction of children to the act of gardening can produce a desire to eat healthier foods.
Furthermore, physical activity is vital in early childhood health. Studies demonstrate that “physical activity is an important contributor to physical and mental health in young people.” (McCrorie 2)

For children, simply being outdoors can result in physical activity. Paul McCrorie hosted a study on the levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA), and found that “being exposed to greenness for more than 20 minutes per day resulted in 4.72 times the daily rate of MVPA compared to those with nearly zero daily exposure.” (7). Once gardening is involved, with digging, weeding, watering and other tasks related to the process, that physical activity rate grows even higher. According to the article, “Your Outdoor Spaces,” one way of approaching physical activity in a garden setting is to treat it as “an alternative to their traditional playground.” (77) Allowing children to run free in the garden, exploring and working in the dirt is an engaging way to incorporate physical activity on a daily basis.

These garden activities have also been shown to assist in classroom attentiveness in schools. In her article, “Effects of School Gardening Lessons on Elementary School Children’s Physical Activity and Sedentary Time,” Erika Rees-Punia introduces the idea that “children who play and learn in these outdoor environments also display less inattention.” (959) Furthermore, Rees-Punia’s studies found that “school gardening has the potential to displace some sedentary classroom time with more physically active learning time.” (959) She suggests that increasing physical activity can be achieved by taking lessons outside and incorporating garden-related tasks to the lesson. In another article, “‘Ready, Set, Grow!’ Nurturing Young Children Through Gardening,”
Deanna Pecaski McLennan studied a school group and asked the children how lessons could be incorporated. According to McLennan, “the children suggested literacy and numeracy activities such as: adding plastic fruit, vegetables, flowers and gardening tools to the sand center so it could become a gardening center, adding restaurant materials to the dramatic arts area so children could role-play that they were preparing and eating the fruits and vegetables that they were growing, etc..” (331). Rees-Punia’s article concluded that “replacing one traditional indoor lesson with an outdoor garden-based lesson has the potential to increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviour during the school day.” (963) Sedentary behavior such as fidgeting can be distracting to other children in a classroom setting or even disruptive at home. As the common phrase goes: “a happy child is a good child.” Physical activity is enjoyable for children and is an outlet for their excess energy. The garden is a fantastic opportunity for children who are not as physically able to let out some energy as well. Sitting and digging or pulling up weeds, while not as physically taxing as running around, still provides an outlet for children to be active within their means.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

One of the problems with the development of technologies today is the impact that it has had on the creativity and imagination in children. The modern desire for faster or easier living in recent decades is leading to the desertion of fundamental home values or activities. According to Dorothy Blair, “television, video games, and organized sports have taken the place of unsupervised wandering and environmental exploration.” (17). It is important for children to experience nature, as it “provokes children’s need to comprehend and make sense of what they have experienced.” (19) Having that
physical activity and interaction with the outdoors creates an environment open to creative exploration. They can make decisions and changes and directly see the results of their actions. John Nimmo and Beth Hallet worded it aptly in their article, “Childhood in the Garden,” when they said that they “view the garden as a play environment in which children can create new worlds that use the sensory elements of the natural environment to shape drama and fantasy.” (33). To a child, a garden can be any number of imaginative places to explore: a jungle, a forest, a princess’ meadow. Allowing the child to unlock their limitless imaginations in a safe and natural environment can be a fantastic way to encourage creativity.

Another article acknowledged how invested the children were in their gardens when it stated, “the high level of excitement and interest the potting invoked in students expressed just how important this experience was for them.” (Pecaski McLennan 331) Gardening provides natural events that can invoke curiosity and imagination. In their article, John Nimmo and Beth Hallet noted that “Our garden at the center provides many opportunities for safe risk-taking that can engage young children’s curiosity, such as happening upon a small snake.” (33) This outlet for exploration and imagination can help the child develop their own identity and personality. The development of character and creative, critical thinking through gardening is impactful. “The most powerful means by which a child invests himself in an object is to create it. Creation requires the child to invest his time, energy, and even his values and identity.” (Valpreda 2)
A garden is an opportunity for a child to develop their social interaction skills. One clear example would be to develop “collaborations with rural community partners that aid and facilitate the study of local natural resources, or creating partnerships with university forestry departments, city park naturalists, and local businesses to facilitate the study of urban forest ecology.” (Blair 16). Introducing children to people with different expertise and interests can show them how to interact with a variety of people. They can experience the excitement a person might have about the topic they are passionate about, learn about how people can live and work with different areas of interest. There remains the possibility through gardening to heighten children’s awareness of social issues. According to John Nimmo and Beth Hallet, a school, home, or community garden “provides occasions, both planned and spontaneous, to discuss issues related to social class, disability, and community support.” (36). They treat the garden as “a place for many possibilities: play and inquiry, safe risk-taking, the building of relationships, and deeper understandings of diversity.” (32)
Teachers and parents can guide the children to think about social change through questions such as “Why do you think it is important to have gardens?” Studies have demonstrated that asking those questions leads children to “discuss families that might not have enough food and the importance of sharing as a community.” (Nimmo 36). The act of gardening may also indirectly develop children’s awareness of the impact of their actions on others. Valpreda found that “by providing the child with feedback during the plant’s growth process, the child has more insight into his behavior and knows what he has to change about his action in order to better take care of it.” (3) This type of evaluation and self-correcting concerning social interaction is impressive to be developed at a young age but can be introduced subtly through gardening. Like with other habits introduced in early childhood, the way children learn to treat and think about others may track into adulthood.

“BY PROVIDING THE CHILD WITH FEEDBACK DURING THE PLANT’S GROWTH PROCESS, THE CHILD HAS MORE INSIGHT INTO HIS BEHAVIOR AND KNOWS WHAT HE HAS TO CHANGE IN ORDER TO BETTER TAKE CARE OF IT.”
With all of these studied benefits, one would think that gardening is already implemented in schools and family homes across the country. However, that is not the case. A large portion of schools do not have gardens, and neither do many families. There are many reasons listed as to why they are not implemented, but one is the untidiness that is involved with gardening. According to Dorothy Blair, “the very qualities that render school gardening a potent and multidimensional experiential-learning experience, being outdoors and involved in hands-in-dirt-digging, planting, and cleanup – may render it unpopular with teachers who prefer the safety, predictability, cleanliness, and ease of the indoor classroom.” (20) That stands to be the same for parents as well; messy activities are inconvenient for them. This disinterest on the mother’s side of things may prevent children from having such a developmental opportunity. Valpreda referred to an interview that “revealed that after the school gardening program, most of the children have an interest in continuing gardening at home, but they are not always able to do that because of lack of room and guidance by their parents.” (3)

There might also be a deterrent that gardening may not be seen as beneficial on its own. Kim Severson touches on the topic with her analysis of The Edible Schoolyard, stating, “You have to think about it as integrated into the child’s learning experience, whether it’s about science or nature or health or where food comes from.” A wide variety of activities and lessons can be introduced through gardening, both personally and educationally. Gardening on its own might be just an activity, but with parental involvement, can become a learning opportunity for a variety of educational topics as well as an outlet for physical activity.
CONCLUSION OF RESEARCH

These observations lead to the conclusion that gardening has multiple uses as an interactive and educational tool that can be implemented both in the home and in schools with beneficial results. Introducing the concept of gardening to children at a young age so that the habits and ideas that are developed carry on into adulthood is essential. The garden is “a unique place between the natural environment and the social environment, one where children can create a meaningful relationship between the work of humans and the complexities and unknowns of the natural world.” (Nimmo 38).

Children are the future stewards of the earth, and there is a need for them to learn how to construct that future sustainably as a healthy community. There is a need for mothers who are responsible for the development of the children to be inspired to put these gardens and programs into place.

“CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE STEWARDS OF THE EARTH.”

DESIGN

Having all of this in mind poses the question of how to convince parents to start gardening with their children using design. An exciting aspect of a design is its potential to be good as well as do good (Simmons 3). A robust design can be inspiring, engaging, and resonate with more viewers than a design that is lower quality. Those designs can be used to support causes and reconnect them with society. Reconnecting people with causes can drive higher involvement, building community support and sustainable change.
Designers have the power to “be catalysts and make a positive impact at home, in their communities, and around the world” (Simmons 99). The problem of convincing parents to garden with their children could be potentially solved by creating beautiful designs that relate to gardening while making it seem fun and playful for children. If the parents are attracted to the designs, they could be drawn to act and start gardening.
CHAPTER 3
DELIVERABLE DEVELOPMENT

VISUAL SOLUTION
SKETCHES
DIGITIZING ARTWORK
PATTERN PROCESS
VISUAL SOLUTION

Following my investigative research, I began considering how I could apply the concepts to the artwork. The message that I hope to communicate is that gardening can be beautiful and fun for adults as well as children. This message is necessary to communicate in order to convince adults to give their children the experience of gardening. I planned to do this through a collection of patterns that would then be put on a line of products to create an entirely designed experience. I searched for products that could relate to gardening and could be used as a surface to display patterns. However, those designs should be appropriately employed to provide an optimum solution. According to Andrew Shea, “Social problems deserve
realistic design solutions... and the community will not benefit from idealistic promises” (Shea 41). Subsequently, the illustrated patterns should be applied to surfaces that could be tied to gardening. My first thought was to put the patterns directly on gardening tools. That idea expanded into creating an experiential display of a picnic table covered in products that host the patterns. Instead of the typical picnic table elements like pitchers and serving bowls, I planned to put the patterns on gardening tools such as a watering can and flower pots. Likewise, I wanted some fabric elements like outdoor pillows to tie in home décor, and matching parent and child work aprons to make the gardening experience more fun.
SKETCHES

I wanted to create sixteen repeat patterns all with individual influences from gardening. The first step in creating repeat patterns is to define all of the different pattern elements. I started by making lists of all the possible elements that would be conducive a garden pattern. For sixteen patterns, that meant sketching around one hundred elements like vegetables, hats, and tools. I sketched out each element on drawing paper, then followed up with linework in ink, which served to provide a clean line for scanning.
DIGITIZING ARTWORK

After sketching, I needed to create vector graphics of each pattern element. To do this, I scanned each line drawing with the Adobe Capture App. The app creates a simple vector of the sketch that is usable on Adobe Illustrator through the Creative Cloud Libraries. Once in Adobe Illustrator, I neatened up any errors or unappealing textures from scanning. Then, I added color to each illustration pulling from a palette I built to apply to all sixteen patterns. I chose to add a more organic printmaking style to the drawings by pushing the color past the linework in an offset fashion. Once each element was fully vectorized, they were prepared to be constructed into patterns.
PATTERN PROCESS

I wanted to use the digital illustrations to create sixteen seamlessly repeating patterns in Adobe Illustrator. To do this, I made a square box in one layer, then laid out the elements for each pattern in that box. Any shape that stuck out past the box had to be placed precisely at the opposite end of the box in order to repeat correctly. I had to plan carefully to ensure that the spacing of each pattern was precise. Once the layout was complete, I masked off the excess shapes using a clipping mask. Afterward, I took the masked off group of shapes and used the pattern tool to create a seamless repeat pattern swatch. I used this process for each pattern, creating a palette of all of my swatches that could be utilized to fill any shape at any size.
Each pattern is based on gardening as a whole, but the collection is broken into two sub-collections. The first is Healthy, which encompasses all of the beautiful, delicious fruits and vegetables that can be grown in a garden. The second collection is Lively, which showcases the act of gardening.

When the patterns were designed, I was able to start considering how I was going to present them. I had an idea of what I wanted to see the patterns displayed on: tableware, home décor, and gardening supplies. I selected these types of objects because they are what I related to my childhood gardening experiences. I remember having picnics outside and gardening with my dad. These pleasant experiences are what led me to choose gardening as the topic for my thesis. I decided to use a picnic table as the basis for my display, pulling from my memories of picnics in the garden. The table would be decorated with plates, pillows, and a table runner. The centerpieces of the table would be flower pots and hand tools instead of serving bowls and spoons, and a watering can instead of a pitcher to introduce more of the gardening concept. However, I needed to determine how to conduct that plan best. I started by researching different printers and their print capabilities for creating the objects I needed. I would be able to have several of the pieces printed, but most would require manual construction.
HEALTHY

I’M ROOTING FOR YOU

YOU’RE HARDCORE

HEY GOURDGEOUS

YOU’RE MY MAIN SQUEEZE

YOU’RE THE BERRY BEST

YOU RING MY BELL

YOU LOOK RADISHING

I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR YOU

GROWING A HEALTHY CHILDHOOD
LIVELY

BAD TO THE BUN

INSECT PUNS BUG ME

WEED IT AND REAP

LETTUCE DANCE

I WET MY PLANTS

WHO RUN THE WORLD

LET IT GROW

OH MY GOURD
PLATES

I aspired to have plates on my picnic table display to give the feel of a garden party. I thought about the picnics and outdoor birthday parties that I had growing up. I remembered that for the kids, my mom always had melamine plates that would not break. After thorough searching, I found an online printer that could provide beautiful, high-quality prints on melamine plates. I chose four of the patterns to be applied to the plates for the display.
FABRIC

I wanted to have some soft items like home décor or wearables that would have the garden patterns on them in order to bring more gardening concepts into the home. I decided fabric printed with my patterns would allow me to create some of those pieces. I found a printer that could print my pattern on nice, lightweight cotton that would work well as décor fabric and clothing. I used this fabric in five of the patterns to make three pillows, a table runner, and a parent- and child-sized apron set. I also had eight-inch square swatches printed of all sixteen patterns to hang on a clothesline to display the entire collection of patterns.
GARDEN SUPPLIES

Since I imagined patterns displayed on some unusual materials, quite a few had to be hand painted. I found some excellent quality flower pots, a watering can, and gardening tools to paint on. In order to apply the patterns to the objects, I had to develop with a process that could be rendered cleanly, efficiently, and consistently. I made sure that my patterns could be repeated correctly compared to the original digital versions. On the flower pots, watering cans, and gardening tools, I needed to apply a spray paint primer before painting the background color. Once all of the objects were prepped, the process for each was comparable. I used my Cricut machine to cut out a stencil of each pattern in vinyl, which I then used to apply the fill color of each shape to the objects. After the shapes were painted, I finished each pattern with linework in Micron pens. Lastly, I sealed each product with an even coating of gloss topcoat spray paint. This process was time-consuming, but the most efficient to produce favorable results.
GROWING CHILDHOOD

by Sarah Hoy

Gardening in early childhood has a multitude of benefits in regards to physical, mental, and social health. My research in this area made me wonder why many parents don’t garden with their children. I investigated how we can use a tool to convince people of the importance and benefits of gardening, which will lead to the creation of a collection of garden patterns with the goal of bringing awareness and encouraging people to act. Each pattern is based on gardening at home, but the collection is broken into two sub-collections. The first collection includes all of the beautiful and delicious fruits and vegetables that can be grown at home and in a garden. The second collection is likely to showcase the art of gardening.

I chose to make patterns because I absolutely love the different applications that patterns can have. I created the patterns by hand drawing all of the elements and using the Adobe, Capture app to digitize them and bring them into Adobe Illustrator. In Illustrator, I added color and arranged them into sequentially repeating patterns. I then printed the patterns for a table runner, apron, and pillows. I even found a printer that could make plans for you! Unfortunately, I’m not an object that is imagined as a pattern and could be printed on my own. Since I was unwilling to back down from my ideas, I then applied my patterns to flower pots, garden tools, and a watering can by hand. By using a Cloud machine to make a vinyl stencil, I was able to draw each pattern and then draw on the front of the water can with Mod Podge. The process took a while, but it was definitely worth it to see an idea come to life.

I would love to someday get this pattern collection printed and sold so that it could reach more people and bring them to gardening. I hope you enjoy the artwork that I have created, and that it makes you want to try gardening with your children or even on your own!
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

Through my research, I was able to articulate the importance of gardening for early childhood development and how artwork could be utilized to convince parents to support it. Following my research, I explored possible avenues for my artwork to reach the intended audience. The final artwork served as a visual representation of the beauty of gardening that could engage viewers and call them to action. While it is difficult to reach all audiences at this stage, I look forward to the potential impact this collection could have in the future.

Someday, I hope to have the pattern collections licensed for art merchandising so that they may be produced and retailed on a large scale. To work toward accomplishing this, I plan on presenting the Growing Childhood Collection at the annual Surtex and National Stationery Show in 2020, which is a renowned trade show for art licensing. I hope that parents will be more drawn to gardening with their children and be aware of all of its benefits. I plan to conduct an Institutional Review Board approved survey of parents of children under the age of ten to assess their interest in this area. My study has acknowledged the importance of gardening, and I believe that my designs can aid in convincing parents of that. I additionally hope that designers and illustrators may become more aware of the potential impact of their work, how through their work they can change minds and bring an action. I would like to see my work in this collection serve as an inspiration to other creatives to use their art to impact society with their points of view. Communication is key to spreading knowledge, and visual communication plays an active role in expanding that reach.
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APPENDIX

Approval for utilized imagery, as exhibited on social media presence, thesis publication, and corresponding thesis website, with distinct attention to photography release.

Thesis Photoshoot

Hello Joshua,

Thank you so much for taking the time to support my thesis, "Growing a Healthy Childhood: The Value of Cultivating Young Minds Through Gardening Using Design." This email is to officially document our discussion regarding the copyright and reproduction of new imagery for the photography utilized throughout my thesis publication. Do you affirm and agree that I as the thesis graduate, art director, editor, and designer hold the copyright and permission to reproduce the photos taken on November 24th, 2018?

You were incredible to work with, and I would love to work with you again!

Blessings,
Sarah Hoyt

Re: Thesis Photoshoot

"I, Joshua Wright, affirm and agree that Sarah Hoyt holds the copyright and permission to reproduce the photographs taken on November 24th."

Thanks it was great to work with you as well.

The above email correspondence affirms that Sarah Hoyt maintains the copyright and permission to reproduce all photographs utilized throughout the thesis publication, initially captured by Joshua Wright.

All additional graphics and images remain original creations of the thesis graduate and maintain the same personal copyright and permission to reproduce.