

Allotment gardens as a place of learning: Creating networks – the Brême model

A growing use of media and the changing nature of leisure are having more and more of an effect on the environment in which our children grow up. This trend is particularly detrimental to a direct experience with nature and free games. Therefore schools have the important mission of compensating for this lack of direct contact with nature, and to give our children an education focused on the future.

Brême's network of educational gardens

There are numerous allotment gardens near nursery as well as primary schools. This means that the allotment gardeners and teachers have the opportunity to set up partnerships so that the children have contact with nature and natural cycles. To this effect the Brême association of allotment gardeners set up a framework in 2003 using its FlorAtrium and the adjacent educational garden, which allows it to act as an expert partner for all questions concerning education on the environment and to create a lasting structure for an urban network of educational gardens. Thanks to financial backing from two senatorial bodies, it has been possible to create a project office that is manned by qualified biologist Dr Sylke Brünn. As project manager she creates networks of associations and educational establishments, runs workshops and ongoing training, carries out projects adapted to their needs, visits all the educational gardens and evaluates the work.

The importance of monitoring

The key to the partnership's success is the monitoring of the educational garden carried out by associations. The majority of schools are simply overwhelmed with the work of maintaining a garden. They not only lack of the time but often also lack the necessary experience. A spirited alliance between the children and the allotment gardeners forms the basis of the partnership. The network also has the advantage that all of the members can exchange ideas and learn from one another. The acquisition of third parties is much easier if there is a network structure in place rather than one association alone.

Green classrooms in allotment gardens

The national federation undertakes the role of coordinating the network, but each local association develops its own educational garden and partnership autonomously:

- The Tannenberg association plants seeds and plants with the children but also offers different educational activities such as walking barefoot through spirals of herbs, bean towers etc.
- The Schmugglerweg association offers a garden next-door to the nursery school with very different types of plants: garden peas, beans, cucumbers, pumpkin and Brussels sprouts ripen over time to allow the cook to harvest them and use them to prepare the children's meals.
- Etc.

More information on the project can be found in the *Lerngarten-Netzwerk* leaflet on www.gartenfreunde-bremen.de (service, publications)

