An Evaluation of the Junior Master Gardener® Program in Third Grade Classrooms.

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Abstract

Studies have shown gardening to have the potential to influence students in several positive ways. The hands-on and informal learning that occurs in these outdoor areas can be incorporated into all areas of the curriculum, fostering environmental awareness and increased interest in science. Junior Master Gardener (JMG) was chosen to be evaluated in 14 Indiana third grade classrooms as little formal classroom usage data exists for the program. It was hypothesized that the use of the program could help improve agriculture awareness and knowledge in youth. Quantitative and qualitative instruments and observations were utilized in an effort to evaluate knowledge gain and change of attitude towards the topics covered by the JMG curriculum; science, horticulture, and the environment. Student pre and post test results indicated overall significant gains in knowledge and attitudes. Performance was not attributed to student age, gender, race, or location of the school, although those schools with a garden achieved more positive gains in attitude and specific performance varied according to classroom. Qualitative data also indicated that the students enjoyed the program, shared what they learned with others, and wanted to participate in more JMG and gardening type activities. Teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the program in their classrooms and planned to reuse their JMG materials for future classes.
