



“Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.”

Letters to a Young Poet
Rainer Maria Rilke

Inspired by Rainer Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*, REAL School Gardens and BRIT Education facilitated “**Question the System**” a professional development event for the REAL School Gardens’ learning community at Woodway Elementary on August 6, 2009.

Ask most elementary educators about systems and they will explain, “A system is composed of parts that work together for a purpose. If you change any one of those parts, it will affect the whole system.” If this is an accurate definition and we include ourselves as parts of a larger system then each decision we make about teaching and learning affects the entire system, often in ways that are not immediately obvious. So, as educators, why do we question the system? Because by doing so we are a powerful force for giving children a better life, and because the greater community is improved because of our work.

Nearly 200 participants – 123 educators from 13 school districts and 69 schools, and 55 other members from the community – joined together to tackle tough questions regarding teaching and learning in the outdoor classroom.



In *A Garden of Writers*, Leah Rios discussed how to balance personal creativity with the high expectations of others.

In *Getting Ready to Grow and Keep it Growing*, Jennifer Fitzgerald and Jo Ann Collins helped participants understand how to launch a school garden and how to support its use.

In *Systems Theory in the Garden*, Mark Painter demonstrated that you really can teach the TEKS by pulling weeds.

Participants left inspired, more connected and full of positive solutions for sparking the imaginations of students.

I learned a lot about how to help the kids utilize our garden better.

PreK Teacher

Fantastic! Thank you for learning about writing in the garden, using all of my senses when observing nature, and making connections across the curriculum.

Kindergarten Teacher

[This was a] great opportunity to share experiences between teachers who are already teaching outdoors.

PreK-7 Math & Science Teacher

Keep bringing in experts – this helps tremendously with building background and giving more confidence as a teacher.

K-5 Math & Science Teacher

I liked the importance placed on “sense of place.” I need to emphasize that more.

K-6 Science Teacher

I will use everything I have seen – the water stations, the field guides, everything!

K-12 Science Teacher

[I am] renewed for the journey into the garden for 2009-2010.

Fourth Grade Math & Science Teacher



[I am] excited about the upcoming year --cannot wait for my class to do the water exploration.

Fourth Grade Teacher

The variety of presentation styles and content offered was great – very clear connections to the learning requirements.

Fifth Grade Teacher

Very well organized – great presentations

Fifth Grade Teacher

Districts Represented:

Arlington ISD
Birdville ISD
Burlleson ISD
Cleburn ISD
Crowley ISD

Dallas ISD
Denton ISD
Fort Worth ISD
Grand Prairie ISD
H.E.B ISD

Lake Worth ISD
Peaster ISD
Terrell ISD

Schools Represented:

Alexander ES
Alice Carlson ALC
Ann Windel School for
Young Children
Attwood McDonald ES
Birdville Elementary
Bowie ES
Bruce Shulkey ES
Burlleson HS
Burton Hill ES
Colin Powell ES
Como Montessori
Crockett ES
D. McRae ES
David Daniels ES
David E. Smith ES
Dickenson ES
Dickinson ES
Dr. Bruce Wood
Intermediate
East Fort Worth
Montessori Academy
Eastern Hills ES
Fitzgerald ES
Goodman ES

Greenbriar ES
H. V. Helbing ES
H.F. Stevens MS
Hexter ES
I.M. Terrell ES
J.T. Stevens ES
K.B. Polk ES
L. B. Johnson ES
Lowery Road ES
Luella Merrett ES
Marshall ES
McNair ES (Dallas)
Meadowbrook MS
Meadowcreek ES
Mitchell Boulevard ES
Morningside ES
Natha Howell ES
No. Eules ES
No. Hi Mount ES
North Ridge ES
Northstar (private)
Oak Lawn ES
Peaster MS
R. J. Wilson ES
Rosemont 6th Grade

Sam Rayburn ES
Sam Rosen ES
Santa Fe ES
Short ES
So. Hi Mount ES
Stonewall Jackson ES
T. A. Sims ES
The Lamplighter School
(private)
Van Zandt-Guinn ES
Veda Knox ES
W. J. Turner ES
W. T. Francisco ES
Washington Heights ES
Watauga Elementary ES
West Handley ES
Westcliff Elementary ES
Whitt ES
Wimbish ES
Withers ES
Woodway ES
Worth Heights ES
Zavala ES

Community Organizations Represented:

Austin Discovery School
Botanical Research Institute of Texas
Campfire USA First Texas Council
Coppell Community Garden & Coppell Farmers Market
Cross Timbers Master Naturalists
Culinary School of Fort Worth
Fort Worth Environmental Management Department
Fort Worth ISD Outdoor Learning Center
GPISD Natural Science Education Center
REAL School Gardens
Rainwater Charitable Foundation
Sid Richardson Museum
Tarrant County Master Gardener Association

