

Analogies of a Gardner

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Kitchen Table Wisdom, is a book about stories in everyday lives, written by Naomi Remen. One quote I particularly enjoyed was, *No gardener ever made a rose. When its needs are met a rosebush will make roses. Gardeners collaborate and provide conditions which favour this outcome. And as anyone who has ever pruned a rosebush knows, life flows through every rosebush in a slightly different way.*

For some reason I immediately think of teachers. Teachers as gardeners? This gardening metaphor certainly suits me because I am an avid gardener. I enjoy seeing that the time and effort I put forth in my garden enables me to enjoy the fruits of my labour. Student success also requires time and effort. The sweat and tears put into this endeavor are well worth the outcome. However, I also believe that any garden metaphor should take into account more than just the teacher as the master gardener, but the whole ecosystem in which the garden is located.

With any healthy garden designed for student success, the parts of the ecosystem are interdependent: the soil, weather, plants, and animals all rely on each other--each part affecting the other--just as the parts of the school community--students, families, society, and school--effect each other. Students in our garden are represented by young plants. To reach their full potential, they depend upon critical elements within the ecosystem. However, these young plants are not only passive participants; they are fully included and have a stake in their own growth and development.

The family may be represented by the soil in which the roots of the young plants first take hold and begin their growth. In a garden, the soil provides the nutrients that the plants need to survive. It is part of the ecosystem through which the plants take in water providing strength and security. The quality of the soil is a large factor in determining the quality of life for the young plants.

Society may be represented by the diversity in any good garden. We see small animals, various forms of vegetation, and certainly a wide variety of colour. They are all a necessary part of every garden just as the diversity in the garden ecosystem supports the young plants. Think of all the diverse things in society that may support the success of a child.

The weather is another critical force that nurtures growth, and is a vital part of any garden. We may talk about schools as being represented by the air, sun, rain, and atmosphere. Schools are one of the primary forces we charge with the education and development of young people. However, schools only work effectively in tandem with healthy families and a healthy society to nurture youth.

Young plants represent the children in my garden. These young plants may grow in conditions where one or more of the elements are missing or are weak or ineffective, and they will probably not thrive. They will have limitations and may encounter some

dangers. I feel that if one part of the school community is dysfunctional, or even less than optimal, it puts our youth at risk.

So in my garden I see young plants thriving within the nurturance and protection of a diverse, healthy, complete garden environment with a nurturing weather system. Every part of the garden has a vital role to play, and each part is dependent on the other for its health. Each part requires the support and collaboration of others to be effective. This is also true with our young people. It takes healthy schools, families, and society to ensure success. Children will thrive and reach their full potential within the nurturance and protection of a diverse, healthy, and complete environment. May God's grace and daily miracles continue to help you in the cultivation of your garden.