

GROWING ● together



How the seed
of an idea
grew and
blossomed
during COVID-19

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The Pandemic Practice

We learned, we grew, we changed

How do you maintain connections with your school community, even when you are apart during a global pandemic?

I was new to Jessie Wowk Elementary School, having just arrived at the beginning of February, and I wanted to find a way to connect with the community that had welcomed me so warmly. When I thought about our newly-created outdoor learning area, I envisioned a cycle of planting and growth that could create a connected and shared experience. We decided to invite families to grow sunflowers at home and then bring them back to school to grow in our garden. From Kindergarten to Grade 7, every family got involved, imagining the time that we would spend learning together, and the welcome sight of plots of sunflowers come September.

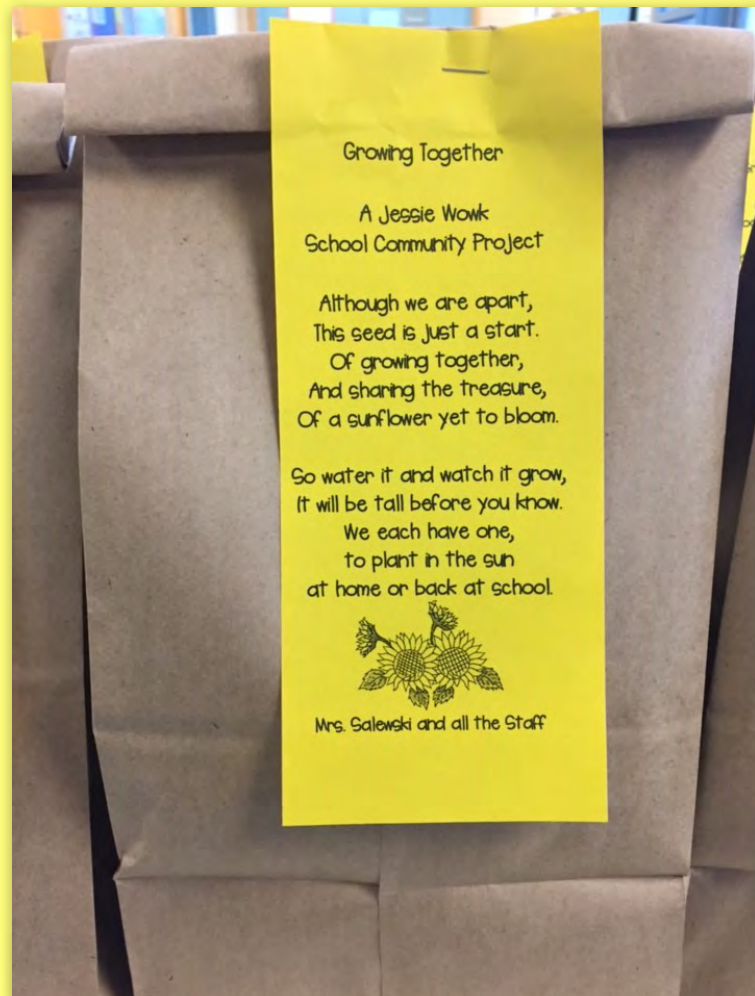
More than 200 seeds were planted, and my staff and I connected personally to each student and their family by bringing them their own gift bag that included a planted sunflower, a booklet to document learning and an inspirational chocolate sunflower already 'planted' in the pot.

Every student would have a sunflower to care of and, at some point, that sunflower would be brought back to school and planted in the garden plots in our outdoor learning area. Many students ended up planting their sunflowers in their own gardens, while others did come back to school to plant theirs in our school garden. We filled the remaining plots with sunflowers that were planted by students who came back to school on June 1st. Although during the pandemic we were apart, we were growing together and felt connected.

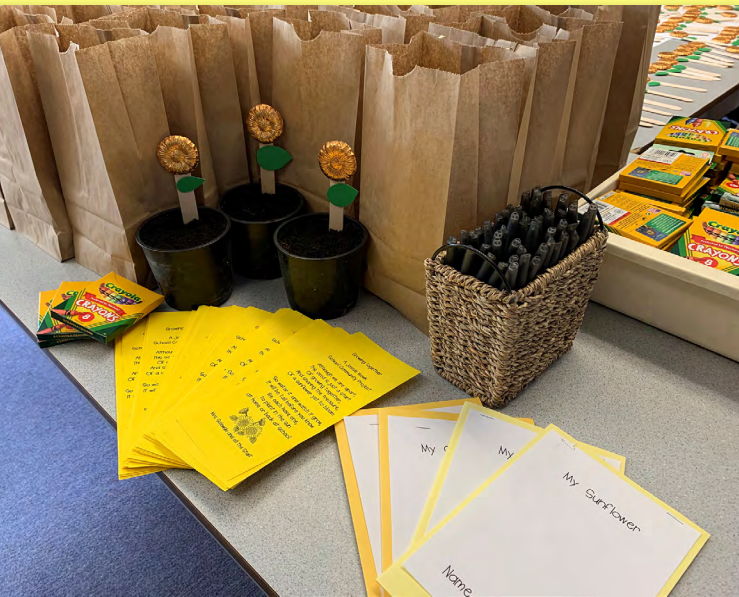
To give the project continued life, I posted reminders and activities on our website each week asking students to measure their sunflowers, document the changes, and take photos of themselves with their sunflowers. I was overjoyed at the number of photos and kind comments sent by our families. When I returned to school after delivering the sunflowers, my inbox was already filling up with many positive comments about how touched families



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Watch the sunflower project video



were to have a bag filled with a learning opportunity, delivered right to their door by teachers and the Principal, and how this project brought them a feeling of optimism.

As the weeks progressed, the project took on a life of its own as everyone was eager to contribute. Families asked to share their learning and to be featured in the 'Wowk Weekly'. One teacher – an avid gardener – created videos that detailed transplanting and caring for sunflowers, and these were posted on our website. Another teacher – a retired music teacher – wrote a song about the project, taught it to students via Zoom and then recorded the students singing. He then surprised me with a video, complete with students' art, and I posted it online as our year-end celebration. Intermediate students painted signs that are now in our garden. Articles were written about our project in the two local papers. During this summer holiday, families have even offered to water the garden.

It melted my heart to see how one seemingly small initiative could connect an entire school community, and will continue to do so as we enjoy our plots of sunflowers well into the Fall.



To find out more about the sunflower project, visit wowk.sd38.bc.ca

