

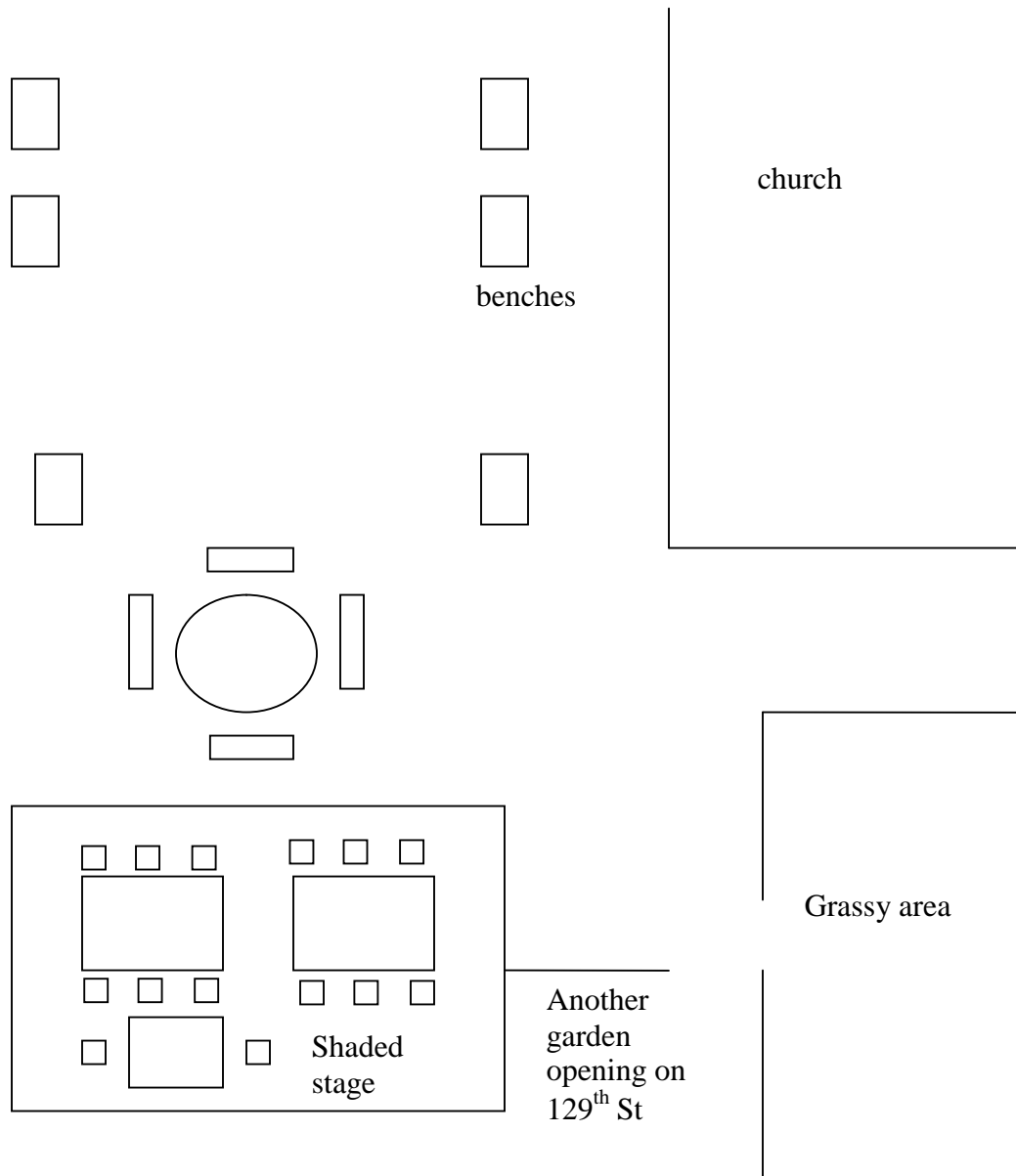
LINDA – Fieldnotes – Monday, July 9, 2007

Subject: First day of Arts and Garden Enrichment Program

Location: Christ Community Church Community Garden, 128th St (5th and Lenox Aves)

Time: 8:45-11:45

I arrive late at the Arts and Gardens Enrichment Program, which starts at 8:30am. There are several children getting dropped off when I arrive, so a young black woman is busy looking at lists and signing in the recent arrivals. A blond woman is on the phone, standing by the tables on the stage. A young black man has about 13 children in a circle, along with a white man and a young black woman.



- 91P
- 90P
- 94P
- 93P
- 95P
- 92P
- 96P
- 30P
- 98P
- 99P
- 100P

- 500
- 264
- 018
- 503

They are playing a name game. Dewayne introduces himself, and chooses a child. The chosen child says their name. Everyone yells the name together. The chosen child then chooses another, who says their name, and so on, until everyone present at the time gets introduced. Many of the girls are noticeably shy, particularly the smaller ones. One of the boys who had just gotten dropped off also hangs back from the group. During this game two white women exit the building across the street; perhaps they live here, or at least one of the women does (the other is much older, perhaps her mother).

Meanwhile the other two staff members continue with administrative tasks. I introduce myself to Ms. Joi, the black woman, who has momentarily forgotten that there will be a visitor today. I hear the blond woman saying on the phone that she is Babs Smith, so I tell her that Babs said I could come and observe. Indicating that I will need to wait, Ms. Joi explains that they are still signing people in. I watch the name game. The shy boy, whose name I later find out is Noagh (pronounced Noah), had been dropped off by a grandmother without getting signed out. Ms. Joi asked if his mother was there, and he shook his head no before offering that his grandmother was there. He told Ms. Babs that she didn't speak English. When Ms. Joi asked him to point her out, he looked around and said, "She left." Ms. Joi noted his name and wrote "grandma" in the next column. Two older women sit on benches in the garden, watching the proceedings. One of them gets up every now and then and returns.

Ms. Joi looks young to me, in her twenties. She is wearing a bright blue shirt and cropped jeans with sneakers. She has straightened hair and is dark-skinned. Ms. Babs also looks very young to me, although I find out later that she has taught for some years (could be in mid- to late-twenties or thirties). She is wearing a green shirt with a collar and gathered front with beige cropped pants and sandals. She is very fair-skinned and has poofy, curly blond hair. She is plump. Mr. DeShawn is wearing a mustard t-shirt with long plaid shorts. He looks young as well, perhaps in his twenties. He has light skin, and is thin, with effeminate gestures. Mr. Dan looks to be the oldest of the bunch. He is wearing a hat over thinning hair, a nondescript blue polo shirt, and khaki shorts with sandals. He is tall, about six feet, and thin. Ms. Sabrina is very thin. She wears a bright blue shirt with short shorts and sneakers. Of the two older woman, one is wearing a sleeveless blue cotton shirt and pants (can't remember if jeans or slacks), with a sweater or shirt tied around her waist. The other wears an orange shirt. Both are dark-skinned and heavysset.

Babs asks to speak with me, motioning me inside. She explains that "everything is crazy today," her mantra for the day, telling me that a girl wanted her bag and that they can't be alone. Once we get down into the church, the girl has already done what she wanted and heads out the door. Joi gives me a name tag. Then Babs and Joi join the circle and get introduced. I do not join the circle. Babs divides the children into three groups to be led by Sabrina, DeShaun, and Dan. She begins by asking who is five years old. Three small hands go up, and she sends them to Sabrina. Then she asks who is six, and four more hands go up. This throws her, and she consults with Ms. Joi, who says that the five-year-olds are one group, the six-year-olds another. I confirm later that not everybody who was signed up showed up (with apparently fewer 5yos than expected), so the preset groups

need to change. Ms. Babs puts the 5 and 6 year olds together with Sabrina. Sabrina takes the hands of the smallest ones, one of whom starts crying for her mother.

Babs puts the 8 and 9 year olds with Mr. Dan, three talkative boys and one quiet girl. The rest of the children, 10 and up, go with Mr. DeShaun. Everyone waits for the adults to give the signal. Noagh has brought a ball, and a little girls asks to play with it. He refuses.

To go to breakfast, which will be served at a public school whose number I do not catch, Mr. DeShaun's group lines up first. Ms. Sabrina's group goes next, in between the two older groups. Mr. Dan brings up the rear with his four charges. (A later Google search identifies the school to be PS 154.) As the children leave the garden, one of the older women gestures for me to come over. I introduce myself to Ms. Rachel, the one in blue, who asks if I am the assistant director. I tell her I met Ms. Omega. I repeat myself for Ms. Martha (or Ms. Marcelle Austin on the website?), who says that she is the president. She asks where I am from. I tell her Teachers College. Ms. Babs comes back to ask if I am coming. Ms. Marcelle says I am, then turns back to me. She asks if I am coming back, and I tell her I hope so. She says she will see me again. Ms. Babs wants to lock the gate, but one of the women tells her that she will do it. Babs thanks her and the two of us catch up with the group.

[I am hoping to meet her again at the Directors' meeting, which should be July 19. In my talk with Ms. Omega, she said that the director's membership was originally housekeepers but then they needed to take on people with additional talents such as making web pages. This apparently is the difference between Babs and these women. For these women I, too, seem to fit into the "additional talents" category, one that apparently also encompasses the assistant director.]

On the way to the school another mom drops off her daughter. She reassures Ms. Babs that her daughter is excited. She tells Babs that this is her first camp, but she's been to Head Start and so is okay with being away from home. Babs tells her that a couple of moms have warned her that their children might have separation issues, and the mom reassures her that her daughter will not be one of them.

Ms. Sabrina has to help someone tie their shoelaces. I listen in on a conversation that Mr. Dan is having with the three boys in his group, something about rides and whether or not they are scary. [Are they going to Coney Island? I think they are talking about 6 Flags.] The boys are eager to interact with Mr. Dan. The only girl in the group is quiet.

We cross Lenox and Powell, crossing 127th in the middle of the road rather than the crosswalk to get to the school, which is on the south side of the street.

http://www.insideschools.org/fs/school_profile.php?id=170

P.S. 154 Harriet Tubman School

250 W. 127th Street NEW YORK, NY 10027

Phone: (212) 864-2400 | Fax: (212) 864-3933 Principal: Ms. Elizabeth Jarrett

Parent Coordinator: Tonato Perez (347) 563-5254

Outside of the school there is a blackboard easel that lists the day's menu for breakfast and lunch. As Ms. Babs and I follow the children into the building, she tells me that she had Joi organize the food. I tell her that it's a lot of work. She says, rather defensively, that she organized all the field trips. I tell her that I meant the program, overall. I ask her how long she's been with the program, and she says she started in May. I say so this is her first time running the program, and she replies that it's the first year for all five of them (Joi, herself, Dan, Sabrina, DeShawn). I say something about it being a temporary job, over the summer, and she explains that she is a teacher.

A group of preteens in matching t-shirts is finishing up their breakfast. One of the workers, a large woman, loudly tells Ms. Babs that they are late, that they need to arrive earlier and be done by 9:15. It is now 9:10. The children stand by the tables, waiting. Ms. Joi shows up and starts talking with the lunch lady. Apparently this works; the children get herded into a line by the entrance to the food service area, where rows of Kix and Raisin Bran cereal are arranged attractively. The lunch lady repeats that they need to get here earlier, and Ms. Babs apologizes.

The children file into the area and select from carrot cake, cereal, and muffins. Just outside the area, where they had lined up, there is a small refrigerated cart with milk and juice. Ms. Joi helps the smaller children select their beverages.

Most of the children sit at one table. When it is full, some boys sit with Mr. Dan at another table. Ms. Sabrina brings the crier over to the table, accompanied by Leah, a gregarious child in all yellow. I sit across from them. Ms. Joi sits down and explains to me about the food. She says it was lucky that they were a small group, under 25. If there had been a group of 40, there would not be enough food left over since 3 other groups showed up unexpectedly. Sabrina comforts the crier, who gets distracted by her patter. The little one is crying again, and Sabrina and Leah work to comfort her. Sabrina rips out her napkin to dry tears if needed. The boy with the Afro has brought a troll, and he takes off the hair to put pieces of cereal on top of the troll's head, putting the blue hair back on.

Lunch lady comes by, noticing that Noagh is wearing jeans and a long-sleeved striped shirt. She asks in the general direction of Joi, Sabrina, and I if we have t-shirts. Joi responds that they do. She tells us that Noagh is going to get hot, that he dressed himself this morning, and that we should put him in a t-shirt. Ms. Joi asks Ms. Babs if they have t-shirts and relays the message. They decide to roll up his sleeves if he gets hot. [All the staff members, other than Dan, look incredibly young; I suppose older women think they can tell them what to do.]

Leah starts telling Ms. Joi that she dresses herself. Ms. Joi responds, and Leah continues, "On Saturday." She says that she likes to wear heels. Ms. Joi asks what color, red heels, or black heels. Leah tells her white. When Leah gets distracted, Ms. Joi says something about attention span, and I say something about this age. Later Leah and I talk about what else she does on Saturday: ballet, African, and jazz dance. She says she goes to Harlem Success. [I'm not sure if she's talking about the charter school on 118th called Harlem

Success Academy, which just opened last August. The website looks very similar to that of HCZ Promise Academy: <http://www.harlemsuccess.org/welcome>]

We head back to the garden after putting away the trash and trays. None of the children have to be told to pick up their things. On the way out we pass a large group of older kids with HCZ-shirted counselors. Their shirts are beige and read "Peacemakers." [Later I read that one of the "benefits" of Harriet Tubman is that HCZ keeps an office staffed with Peacemakers/teachers' aides:

http://www.insideschools.org/fs/school_profile.php?id=170.]

One of the little girls is wearing flipflops, and the right one keep coming off her foot. Sabrina has to keep stooping down to help her put it back on. On the way back most of the little girls want to hold Sabrina's hand or be connected to the girls holding her hand. She has to tell two to walk in front of her so the line doesn't get too unwieldy.

When we get back the group is divided into two. To two of the boys' delight, they are switched from Mr. Dan's group to the older group. The last eight-year-old boy left, Blessed, is very upset that he is not going with the older children. He complains and the eight-year-old girl says something to him. He says crossly that he is not talking to her, he's talking to "them," by which he means me and Sabrina.

The older group goes with Ms. Babs and Mr. DeShaun to do Theater in the grassy area. The younger group stays with Sabrina and Mr. Dan to do Art. Babs tells Dan that he has an extra five minutes.

The younger kids send longing glances at the older kids, who are moving around in the grassy yard behind the church. It takes awhile to settle the kids. At first, the quiet 8 year old sits by herself at the smallest table. The other kids fill in the two large tables. I get Ms. Joi to get a chair for her to sit at the foot of one of the tables. One of the girls wants to get something from her bag, and all the staffers are occupied, so I ask Ms. Joi wants me to go with her. She nods a quick yes. When I follow the girl I miss the step down from the door and twist my ankle. I hobble back to the shaded stage area. Leah is telling the other kids that she is Sabrina's sister. "She's your sister? The counselor?" the 8year old girl asks, with respect.

For Art, Mr. Dan has planned a very complicated project: to make a collective drawing for each group member. His materials aren't ready, so he talks as he fumbles to bring out paper, pencil, folded paper, etc. He folds a piece of paper in half the short way, then each section in half again. He tells the kids to gather around so they can see what he is doing. The smallest one tries to duck under his arm. When it doesn't work she ducks around the other side, and Ms. Joi pulls out a chair to make room for her.

He makes small pencil marks on several of the sections, then has two children draw something "in between" and "connecting" the two tick marks. When he opens it up, there is a joined figure. He shows them his example, which has obviously been done by an adult, with intricate figures, patterns, and swirls. The children exclaim that it looks like an

animal, and he says it is. [It looks abstract to me.] He starts folding the paper into smaller sections, counts the number of children, and says he needs 11 sections. The first four sections take up half the sheet, so he folds some of the sections even smaller. The paper now looks like a fan, as many of the children comment.

The first step is to pass out pencils and paper. Since his paper comes from a pad, each sheet must be torn out (but this is practical for outdoor work, since the sheets will not blow away). The pencils are not sharpened, so Ms. Sabrina and Ms. Joi quickly stop the fights over who is going to sharpen pencils and do it themselves (with a couple of exceptions). The children start having side conversations, and Mr. Dan has to fight to keep their attention. I decide that now is a good time to sneak away.

I go to the grassy yard, where the children are half-heartedly walking around. Ms. Babs calls “Hips! Walk with your hips!” Most look bored or embarrassed. Ms. Babs suggests that they can walk with just one hip, “be creative.” One girl catches onto a hip-swaying sashay, and the others quickly copy her. Only one is not participating, a boy with a short Afro. I ask why he is sitting there, and he shouts because he has a bloody toe. Mr. DeShaun corrects, “Stubbed toe.”

I go into the church and use the bathroom. The entry is a sort of kitchen/storage area, with a sink and supplies such as plastic cups and paper plates. Just beyond the kitchen area there are a few bags on a table, with one on a floor. Beyond that is a large empty room. The bathrooms are just inside the door. From the outside, the bathrooms look small, with a kid-sized partition separating it from the kitchen. But inside, the toilets and sink are adult-sized.

I return to the Art area, where most of the children have successfully (and probably with a lot of help) folded their fans and have commenced to drawing the little tick marks. Some of the fans are folded haphazardly, but most look fine. The tick marks are a little harder, but the children seem to understand better than I do where the tick marks go. (Or maybe they are just putting them where they want, but Mr. Dan approves most of them.) I get bored and start writing in my notebook.

The children also start to get bored, before they pass around their papers. A little girl asks to go to the bathroom, and Ms. Sabrina asks if anybody else needs to go. Soon Ms. Sabrina takes most of the girls, with Ms. Joi accompanying her. The boys start goofing around, and Mr. Dan has to cajole them into continuing their drawing. The girls come back. Mr. Dan has some of the girls trade drawings. Mr. Dan tells one of them, “In seven weeks you’ll get your picture.” I think, I couldn’t wait seven weeks! Several of the boys have taken extra pieces of paper and are drawing their own pictures. One boy draws a picture of a spiderweb.

At 10:21, before they are finished the other group comes back. Mr. Dan is clearly tired. They older children crowd around the round table and soon the younger children want to join them. They bring the plastic chairs down off the stage and near the older children.

Many of the older children are sweating. Babs sends DeShaun to get something for the water break. I help Mr. Dan clean up the tables.

Ms. Babs asks the children if they want to sit in the shade. The older girls gladly go to the farthest bench when Ms. Babs gestures in that direction. Only one of the older girls stays talking at the tables. The little kids also go tearing down the garden. Nobody moves to stop them.

Mr. DeShaun comes back bearing plastic cups. He passes them out. Each group is called up to get water, the littlest ones first. Pink shirt spills a little of her water on her way back on the stage. Mr. Dan gets me to introduce myself to him and to DeShaun. He asks what I thought and I tell him that he could have done fewer folds by splitting the children into two groups, 5 and 6. He says he considered using bigger paper, but he thought it would be simpler with smaller paper, conceding that it was not simple. I tell him the usual tripe about small kids not having fine motor skills, and that boys don't like to sit still for too long drawing. [This ends up totally untrue; as we are waiting, two boys are drawing a character from a cartoon inspired by Japanese anime. When I admire the finished one, the boy says that he's Chinese. He points to the name, and I say that the name is Japanese. I can't remember the name.] Mr. DeShaun suggests origami instead, and wants to make a fortuneteller. With a little input from me he makes a fortuneteller, which ends up in Blessed's hands. [I'm also thinking that it's younger kids who like these, not the pre-teens that he has.]

Then it's time to switch, and the younger kids follow Babs and Joi into the grassy yard. The older children sit with Mr. Dan and Mr. DeShaun. I follow Babs and Joi, who have their hands full when Anthony immediately starts tearing around. Joi later says to me, *sotto voce*, that they need to find out if he's ADHD and if they can medicate him. He's a sweet kid, certainly full of energy, and able to complete tasks. As everybody is in transition, and Anthony is bothering Blessed, Blessed hooks an arm around Anthony's neck and throws him onto the grass. I tell Blessed that's too rough, and he says, "Look, he likes it!" Anthony is smiling.

Babs tries to get the kids into a circle, but several follow Anthony's lead and tear around the yard. Joi helps her to round up the 8yo girl, Hot Pink Shirt girl, Noagh, and other stragglers. Then, most of the children gather in front of Babs instead of in a circle. Eventually only Anthony is tearing around and Babs gets the kids to warm up their "voices, bodies, and brains." They do vocal scale exercises, then pretend to be puppets on strings that get cut one by one: wrists, elbows, shoulders, and neck, finally dropping the whole upper body and swaying back and forth. Next she tells them to shake their hands and feet, counting down bingo-style (5-4-3-2-1! 4-3-2-1! 3-2-1! and so on). One boy doesn't get it the first few times and simply shouts along. The brain warmer is a tongue twister. Blessed suggests "How much wood can a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood" (that was harder to type than to say), and the kids do their best to follow along.

For the next exercise Babs has the children line up against the fence. Anthony gets a squeeze in on the hose just outside the fence, and I have to shoo him away. He runs around the yard as the other children haphazardly line up. Hot Pink shirt goes to inspect a bush sporting berries. Eventually Babs gets them lined up enough to start the activity, which is to walk around with a leading body part (this is what I saw the older kids doing). She asks who might walk with their nose forward, and several suggest “an animal?” She starts this exercise, and most of the children walk around feet first. Ms. Joi takes a girl who hurt a finger into the church, and Hot Pink Shirt asks where she is going. When she finds out, she starts picking at a scab on her left ankle. I eventually send her with Ms. Joi to get a bandaid, and sotto voce to Ms. Joi, “the love that comes with it.” Pink shirt at one point was scolded for picking berries; later she picks flowers. She asks if I want some, and I say no, the flowers die when you pick them. I pick up the flowers she already has. She tells me she will put them in water and put them in her mother’s garden.

Anthony gets benched for a time, Babs telling him, “5 minutes.” He ends up picking up rocks from the garden through the chain link fence. After telling him he’s going to need to put them back, Blessed eventually takes one. I ask Blessed to put it back, and he does, dropping it through the fence, to Anthony’s chagrin. Anthony tries to take the rocks with him to the next game, holding his hands behind him and joining the other children sitting in a circle. Blessed manages to snatch most of the rocks from behind his back. Ms. Babs insists on taking the rest. She has him be the first for the game, in which the children do something, like patting their laps, then a “leader” changes to another movement, such as clapping. The person outside the circle has two guesses to figure out who the “leader” is. Ms. Joi has Anthony with his back to the group while the group quietly decides who is the “leader.” Anthony guesses correctly, and joins the circle. The game goes on for awhile, and I get deeply involved in a conversation about who gets to pick flowers from what garden with Hot Pink Shirt. The object of her desire is an orange lily in the garden.

We return to the stage area. Ms. Joi asks Mr. Dan if they are done. Three older girls are singing the current pop song “Suicidal” to the apparent horror of the counselors. [A google search reveals the song to be called “Beautiful Girls (Suicidal, Suicidal)” by Sean Kingston. Recently the lyrics have been revised, substituting “in denial” for “suicidal.”] One of the older girls says, “Ching chong chong,” and I ask, in mock horror, if that was for me. She denies it vehemently, and I say good. The kids snicker.

One of the little girls asks after Sabrina, and Ms. Babs tells her that she was on her break. Luckily, right at that moment, Sabrina comes back. [Babs had showed me a schedule that showed Joi and Babs on break during lunch, Dan and Deshaun after lunch.] Two of the older girls perform a step routine. The boys show each other the troll’s backside under his shirt and say, “X-men.” Babs brings out an umbrella for the table and one of the boys rushes to help her. Later, she asks the children what plant they’d like, fruit or flower. She says something about anything you want, because she is going to buy it. I’m not sure if this is the planting. At some point Babs told Hot Pink Shirt that they were going to plant in the plots right next to the stage, a place where HPS had told me was hers, presumably so that she could pick the tantalizing orange lily.

I tell Babs that I am leaving at lunch, and she thanks me for coming. I say I'd like to come back, and she is enthusiastic. I say to be an extra pair of hands, but she means because today was not a showpiece kind of day. I tell her it takes a few days for the children to learn the routines and that she might even get more people tomorrow. Joi says the same thing when I say goodbye to her after crossing Powell, and I reassure her as well.

[Again, very much like school. By the end of the day, sorting has already begun: those who are possibly ADHD and violent, and those who give little to no trouble. Overall, this group is pretty well-behaved. Some do not listen to the instructors, but none of them run into the street, or go far beyond the boundaries (although the smaller ones certainly test those boundaries). None seem severely emotionally disturbed, although Blessed is certainly very physical (and seems to have a temper). Interesting that the older garden women do not seem to take much of a role in the enrichment. Perhaps they prefer more manageable one-on-one or small group time in the garden, or perhaps they will participate on Wednesday when the garden is planted.]

Children's side conversations:

-where they live, with a competitiveness about how close they live