把课堂搬进菜园去

课本翻到植物的身体那一页，根、茎、叶、花、果实，五个词排成一列。我念了两遍，底下眼神散的散，玩的玩。我合上书，说：走，去菜园。教室里先是安静了一拍，接着炸开一片拍手声。

学校后墙有一分多地，是校办的小菜园，平日由工友老周打理，我提前跟他打了招呼，他说那两天正好间苗，叫我们别客气。四十多个孩子涌进畦沟，我给他们定了规矩：脚走沟，手看人脸色再动。先认菜。我拔起一棵香菜，从根须讲到锯齿边的叶子，再掐一小段茎让他们轮流闻。有个女孩问，香菜和芹菜小时候是不是一样。我没答，蹲下来拨开两畦苗让他们自己比，比完她自己点了头。

认到辣椒，我说成熟的转了色，红的才能摘，青的留下继续长。孩子们散开采摘。我留意平时上课最坐不住的男孩，他蹲在椒株前，捏着一个红椒左看右看，掂分量，才拧下来，动作轻得像怕弄疼它。他把椒放进竹筐，又回头检查了一遍筐底，怕红椒被青椒压着。

摘完，筐搁在讲台角上。那天的课堂练习，写一种蔬菜的身体，全班交上来的句子头一回没有重样的。有孩子写辣椒的柄是拧断的，断口白白的；有孩子写茄子身上有一层光，摸完手上紫了一小片。

放学前，那个男孩跑到办公室门口，问下周还去不去菜园。我说去。他走了两步又回头，说老师，我奶奶家也有菜园，我帮他浇过水。他说这话时腰板挺得直。

我在教案本上记了一行：这一课不在课本里，在土里。菜园里的规矩、观察、轻重，孩子用手就学会了，用不着我讲二十遍。教育反思这四个字太大，我只知道，那筐辣椒后来炒进了食堂，孩子们吃得比哪天都干净。

Moving the Classroom into the Garden

The textbook opened to the page on the body of a plant: root, stem, leaf, flower, fruit, five words in a row. I read them twice; below, eyes wandered, hands played. I closed the book and said: come on, we are going to the garden.

Behind the school wall there is a small plot, the school garden, tended day to day by Old Zhou the caretaker; I had spoken with him beforehand. More than forty children poured into the furrows. I set the rules first: feet stay in the furrow, hands move only when I say. First, know your vegetables. I pulled up a coriander plant and talked from the root threads to the saw-toothed leaves, then snapped a bit of stem for them to smell in turn. A girl asked whether coriander and celery look the same when young. I did not answer. I crouched and parted the seedlings in two beds and let them compare; after comparing, she nodded to herself.

When we reached the peppers, I said the ripe ones have changed color: only the red ones may be picked, the green ones stay to keep growing. The children spread out

to pick. I kept an eye on the boy who could not sit still in class. He squatted before a pepper plant, held a red pepper, looked at it left and right, weighed it in his palm, then twisted it off, his touch light as if he were afraid of hurting it. He put the pepper in the bamboo basket and turned back to check the bottom of the basket once more, afraid the red ones would be pressed by the green ones.

After the picking, the basket sat on the corner of the platform. The exercise that day was to write about the body of one vegetable; for the first time, no two papers in the class were alike. One child wrote that the stalk of a pepper is twisted off and the break is white; another wrote that an eggplant wears a layer of light, and after touching it a small patch of purple stays on the hand.

Before school ended, that boy ran to the door of my office and asked whether we would go to the garden next week. I said yes. He walked two steps and turned back: teacher, my grandmother has a garden too, and I have helped it water. His back was straight when he said it.

I wrote one line in my lesson-plan book: this lesson is not in the textbook, it is in the soil. In the garden, the rules, the looking, the weight of a hand, children learn them with their hands, without my saying it twenty times. Education reflection is a big phrase; all I know is that those peppers were later cooked in the canteen, and the children ate them cleaner than on any other day.