

THE GESTURE OF LANDSCAPES FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

We all live in an age where technology and life-styles are driving an ever-deeper wedge between humans and the fast disappearing natural world.

It is vital today to provide an opportunity for children and young people to be meaningfully involved in that world and to experience a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of it.

Surely all educational establishments would agree that schools have a duty to develop and foster these values along with other independence skills that will ultimately give the growing (maturing) child the skills to contribute meaningfully to society.

Perhaps unlike any other age we are challenged to redirect the aims and values of schooling to equip the future generations to live a more sustainable life style. Students in the 21st century will need to know how to create a civilisation that runs on sunlight, conserves energy, preserves biodiversity, protects soils and forests, develops sustainable local economies and restores the damage inflicted on the Earth. In order to achieve such an ecological education, based on a new found eco literacy we will need to radically transform our schools and universities

Since 1994 The Hiram Trust an Educational initiative has been dedicated to promoting that opportunity in both Steiner and mainstream schools throughout the uk

The principal aim of the Trust is to promoter Experiential learning by encouraging schools to develop a variety of Curriculum related activities within the context of the Outdoor Classroom setting.

Throughout the school this involves a renewal of the craft and associated practical skills Curriculum; the arts and science curriculum have also provided valuable opportunities to be augmented with practical activities arising out of the environment.

The Trust believes that School grounds can be developed to provide both practical and aesthetic resources. Opportunities for working and playing for the Early Years children on through to challenging environmental projects for young people being involved in he Trust Working and playing in the outdoor classroom

The outdoor Classroom in any part of Great Britain can provide a number of environmental projects and activities, from basic gardening to traditional Land Crafts and Hand Craft, from Nature & Environmental studies to working with new forms of technology, for instance building Compost toilets and using solar technology to work pumps in the school ponds. These kind of meaningful

activities and relevant practical projects can potentially engage all children and helps a school fosters a genuine ethos of 'education for sustainability'.

The Trust is based on the outskirts of Stroud in Gloucestershire. The large house, Upper Grange and particularly its extensive grounds have been developed as a model of the Outdoor Classroom and over the years different areas of the curriculum have been developed into an environmental context.

Apart from the ongoing Consultancy work, in recent years the Trust has been asked to offer Teacher Training in the realm of Practical skills. The Trust now runs a Practical Skills teacher Development Course accredited through the NOCN

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Narrator

- Young people live in times of rapid change. Working in the School Grounds – the Outdoor Classroom offers children of all ages an opportunity to discover real values and many

skills, social and practical, that will help prepare them for their role as active participants in shaping their lives, and hopefully together in society live a more sustainable future.

- Engaging children in a conscious and meaningful way with their environment will help them learn to appreciate it and to care for it. Experience and current research by such organisations as L.T.L strongly suggest that a well cultivated and used school grounds does a great deal to support the 'moral' development and well being of the child.

Wendy Titman the current Director of L.T.L. brings to our attention examples of schools that have noticed a marked improvement in the emotional well being of the children and a noticeable improvement in the Learning Curve & academic achievements of children in schools that have actively transformed the traditional tarmac surfaces of schools into imaginative recreational and educational landscapes.

- There is another area of important potential within the school grounds and that is developing where possible a

source for raw materials to support various traditional Hand Craft Activities. For example clay dug from the school grounds for pottery and kiln building.

- To balance the dominant trend in western education for the cultivation of the 'intellect' and 'value judgement' based mainly on 'materialism', the Hiram Trust supports an educational process that develops where possible real powers of perception and Judgement in relation to life and Living; - this The Trust believes can be achieved by working cooperatively and collaboratively as teaching staff across the school together at projects in the environment; - in craft activity by developing an appreciation for beauty combined with functionality at the hand of individually crafted work pieces; - and by schools providing an 'hands on experience' across its curriculum that afford pupils a sense for the intrinsic moral nature of the material world ; which will provide pupils not only with a knowledge of the material world but more importantly a sense for its ' value'.

2: DESCENT INTO MATTER - Picture

- To ensure that Project work in the school grounds and 'A practical skills Curriculum' is also to address the inner needs of the child and young person and also be sustainable in the life of the school; teachers would have to develop as yet a new context for these activities.
- The following diagram referred to by The Hiram Trust as 'A Descent into Matter' offers a coherent approach to the integration of traditional Land Craft projects and Hand Crafts related to the environment and materials.
- The diagram illustrates the source of different materials many of which can be obtained from the school grounds. Indicates processing subsidiary crafts and skills needed to process raw materials like, shearing, Felling & Coppicing and digging for Clay. Then on this side you have depicted a series of traditional Crafts, Felt making, Green work and Pottery.

- What is important in the Trusts view is to enter these activities, as far back in the process as is feasible. The modern child whether from the town or the country does not necessary know where materials come from. All too often in our culture where everything is provided or hidden from view we remain naively ignorant on basic elements of life and how things really are.
- As you progress through and handle materials from the Three Kingdoms of Nature , the child is increasingly challenged to transform materials from their natural state into a crafted object. Greater skill ,energy and technology is often needed as you engage with materials descending through the kingdoms of nature.

2:Shots of |Materials from the environment and Kingdoms of nature.

- The child's Descent into Matter starts with the tactile experience of wool at Kindergarten and early primary school years, continuing with grasses and Green woody materials in the middle years of school , culminating in fashioning

utilitarian artefacts out of seasoned wood, Clay and Metal in the senior years.

- The principal aim of The Hiram Trust is therefore to introduce this Picture, A Descent into Matter with its Natural Environmental Context.

3: V/O - VALUE OF MAKING

3: Pause: Shots of Craft from the Three Kingdoms

- It can be observed by teachers and parents alike that many teenagers today temporarily lose their way: all have to learn to cope with changes of perspective on life from earlier childhood ways to that of the emergent adult. In our age of Computer Technology _ Virtual Reality, Hands on Learning by creative exploration of natural materials can help 'ground' a young person who is too 'spacy', or offer 'inspiration' and self confidence to those that have been seduced by the trappings of a modern culture, that often exploits the natural teenage interests and pursuits.

- Recent research and documentation by the Craft Council in collaboration with three universities (Ref) have put forward a very substantive case for the re - instatement of creative practical work into the Curriculum at all stages.(Quotes from Booklets)
- Practical skills may have little place in our society today and computer technology drives much of the work that young people will be entering. So it is justified to ask what relevance is it today to ask a teenager to make a 'willow basket'
- Experience has shown that pupils can however learn valuable interdisciplinary skills, personal and social.
- Just as traditionally youth need a 'Rock Face' or a river with 'white water' for a real physical challenge so do they need to be challenged to pit their 'thinking' and their capacities for 'doing' to solve interesting and real environmental issues.
- For instance in one school a pupil commented, 'if we are to make baskets then we should grow our own willows'.

- Young people need to meet resistance with which to wrestle, they need to be challenged ‘; by bringing pupils into the environment, getting the hands out of the pockets and engaging in real creative problem solving in craft work - we offer pupils an opportunity to root their Humanity through their hands.
- If the Latent idealism of youth is not provided with outlets, opportunities for what could be called ‘practical Idealism, if their ‘will forces are not lifted up through creative and artistic ‘Practical Activity’ then these ‘will impulses’ will invert and can become impulses of a more instinctual kind (nature). Leading often to socially deviant behaviour.
- The Trust recognises that any activity within the Outdoor classroom, which is to be taken up enthusiastically and support the child’s learning most be age appropriate and perceived to be part of the Schools vision and efforts to provide an educational programme that fosters the ethos for Human and Environmental Sustainability.

- Providing Craft and Practical skills Curriculum with materials drawn from the three kingdoms of nature can provide today a relevant context for this.

- **END**

4: More of visual presentation of activities – To Music / Singing

- **FELT MAKING:**

- **BASKET MAKING**

- **CLAY OVEN**

5: Experiential Education

- With the assistance of students from nearby Ruskin Mill Further Education College the Trust developed what was a traditional town garden into a well laid out and productive Kitchen Vegetable Garden. The garden supplied seasonal vegetables to support a Practical Nutrition Course that would teach basic cooking skills and provide awareness and means for schools to achieve organic growing and basic wholesome cooking.

- An out door clay Bread Oven has been is regularly used at Upper Grange and has provided much inspiration for schools to build their own.
- The garden also contains a number of other features. Innovative use of water that is collected of the roof and stored in a sump, provide water for the garden when needed and for a large pond which incorporates a Flow form to help oxygenate and impart renewing qualities to the water. The water is recycled by a pump using solar technology.

All this has been developed over the past Four Years but the garden continues to offer new ideas for Experiential Education (work) particularly in support for Environmental Science , Art & Craft Teaching teaching.

- To achieve this the Trust has been has been supporting schools develop a variety of activities for all ages of children and pupils throughout the school and across the spectrum of the curriculum.

6: Other work of the Trust

- In order to maintain and sustain work in the Outdoor Classroom, The Hiram Trust assists schools to carry out their own School Grounds Site Survey (Ref. Genius Loci.).
- Other important areas of The Hiram Trust work is with Teacher Training Groups.
- The Trust has its own annual Summer Conference providing a focus for teachers wishing to share and gain new practical insights into various areas of the Curriculum
- It is somewhat ironical that in a land (country) traditionally famous for its garden culture all too often our school grounds are either over manicured or unkempt but in either situation not inviting and usually out of bounds to the children.

Teachers ,parents and children alike often only walk very narrow corridors within the school grounds, from the car park to the staff room and to the respective classrooms.

- In an age (time) where life styles and technology drives an ever deeper wedge between humans (us) and the fast disappearing 'natural world'; we need to provide an opportunity for children to touch nature and experience a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of the world, developing a sensitive environmental and craft programme will revive a sense for being be embedded and supported in the 'Palm of nature' and for the older child assist them in learning to read the book of Nature and develop Ecco literacy skills.