

Learning through Landscapes: An Organization's Attempt to Move School Grounds to the Top of the Educational Agenda

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*Learning Through Landscapes
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Abstract

This article describes the development of Learning through Landscapes (LTL) from a research initiative into an independent national organization promoting the widespread development of school grounds. It outlines LTL's philosophy and suggests a model for managing the process of developing school grounds. It explores LTL's innovative program of activities in some detail by describing its publications, research, and projects. It outlines its various membership schemes for the 8,000 or so schools it serves in the United Kingdom.

Keywords: [schoolgrounds](#), [formal curriculum](#), [informal curriculum](#), [hidden curriculum](#), [children](#), [UK](#)

Introduction

"There's a treasure I'd like to share with you, one that is hidden at the heart of nature. To find it, you'll need a special place outdoors where you can be alone and feel free; a place where you can see animals, hear a bird's song, and feel the wind. Perhaps you already know of such a place" (Cornell 1994).

When most people dream of special places outdoors, they think of woodlands and mountains or rambles through city parks. They do not think of schools. Yet school grounds are the first public environment of which many children have any real sustained experience. They may be lucky and escape to the great outdoors, but for too many of them it is the humdrum time spent in some of the most desultory, ill-designed, largely tarmac spaces which really matter. It was to try to change this that Learning through Landscapes (LTL) was formed in 1990 in the UK.

But LTL did not spring fully-formed into the world. Back in 1986 a research project was set up, also called Learning through Landscapes, which looked at the use, design, management and development of school grounds throughout the UK and in some other European countries. It found that there were a number of quite outstanding schools making full use of the potential of their grounds but that this number was very small, some 200-300 out of a potential of 30,000 schools. It identified the fact that there was a huge educational estate in Britain covering more than 125,000 acres and that children spent a lot of their time, possibly as much as a third of their school life, outside in school grounds.

Within the scope of the report it was not possible to analyze the effect on children of this experience, but it indicated a number of significant ways in which the learning opportunities outside could be enhanced and the opportunities for play and social interaction could be developed. Local authorities, head teachers, teachers and other interested parties were advised of the benefits of developing school grounds. The report, *Use, Design, Management and Development of School Grounds* (Adams 1990) helped LTL to persuade the British Government to publish a significant document called *The Outdoor Classroom* (HMSO 1990) and thereby to change its policy on school grounds.

The Outdoor Classroom described the range of possible educational uses of school grounds and how the necessary resources might be created and managed. It carried photographs of hugely stimulating educational landscapes (see Table 1 for a list of possible site features). It was aimed at all those involved in the use, design and management of grounds- pupils, teachers, governors, parents, voluntary community groups, inspectors, advisors, architects, landscape architects, managers and many others. It posed a challenge to everyone concerned with teaching. It suggested that school grounds were a vast outdoor classroom and that teachers ignored this fact at their peril. It drew heavily on the research carried out by the LTL project and its publication stimulated enormous interest across the world in the formal curriculum possibilities presented by school grounds.

In 1990, at the same time as this publication was launched, the LTL organization was born. With initially little more than some research evidence and some dreams, the organization has set about transforming the ways in which school grounds are seen by all those involved in education. As far as I am aware, LTL is unique. It is the only national organization wholly devoted to school grounds. It aims to promote the widespread development and most imaginative possible use of the educational estate. It is completely independent, but supported by both central and local government. It receives funding from a wide range of sources, including the private sector. Its opinions are sought on matters of policy and practice and it is seen as the key agency in its field. In 1990, I was lucky enough to be appointed to be LTL's founding Director. Our uniqueness derives not only from our focus on school grounds, but also from a set of five important principles.

Table 1. Possible site features listed in The Outdoor Classroom

General	Husbandry	Natural habitats
Sand-construction pitch		
All weather pitch		
Orienteering trails	Vegetable plots	Woodlands
Archery area	Flower beds/gardens	Trees
Survival training area	Plant containers/boxes	Scrub
Camping space	Trellis for climbers	Shrubs
Fitness circuit/trim trail	Herb garden	Spring/summer meadows
Outdoor art areas	Herbaceous border	Moorland/heathland
Amphitheatre/stage	Tree/wild flower nursery	
Spaces for drama	Ornamental shrubs	
Geological exhibits	Soft fruit	
Textured surfaces	Orchards	Play/social areas
Geomorphology demonstration area	Nutteries	Hard surfaces
Model landscapes	Hop gardens	Grass areas
Hills and valleys	Annual cornfield	Seat clusters
Different slopes and ramps	Greenhouse/cold frames	Sitting/social areas
Contours marked on ground	Smallholding	Parents' waiting area
Spot heights	Animal enclosures/paddocks	Play equipment
Sundials		Play markings
Compass		Ball wall
Large scale map		Boules/croquet
Weather station	Boundaries	Sand pit
Rock and soil profiles	Hedges	Play mound
Nature or theme trail	Hedgebanks	Rubber tyres
Technology project area	Walls	Logs
Waterwheel	Fences	Construction materials
Prehistoric hill-fort	Ditches	Tables
Iron Age hut	Shelter-belts	Cooking/barbecue area
2D and 3D shapes/patterns		Huts/tree house
Quiet area for study/reflection		Covered play space
	Wetlands	Arbours/mazes
Artificial habitats	Stream	Hiding places/den/refuge
Bird and bat boxes	Pond	Mobile play equipment
Stone/brushwood/log piles	Island	Movable furniture
Corrugated iron sheets	Bog/marsh	Walls to sit on
Carpets	Waterfall/rapids	
Compost heaps	Stepping stones	
Butterfly gardens	Damp meadow	
Dry stone walls	Wooden boardwalk	

1. First of all we believe that school grounds are extremely important places. In many areas of Britain and elsewhere in the world, they provide a last, relatively safe, refuge from traffic and adults in an increasingly dangerous world. But more than that, they have a huge impact on the development of a child's and, indeed, a young adult's emotions and outlook. Their design and management clearly affects the behavior and happiness of those who spend time in them.

2. The second article of our faith is a critical one. It is that anything that is going to happen to school grounds needs to involve children if it is to be successful. Putting children at the heart of all aspects of the process of design and implementation must not be a token, and much of LTL's work is currently being spent analyzing better and best ways of doing this. School grounds are mainly children's spaces and children assume that they have been created with their needs in mind. The extraordinary advantages of involving children are only now really beginning to be appreciated by many schools (Figure 1).

3. The third principle is that the business of developing grounds is an holistic one. Holistic is a word full of ambiguity in both the educational and the environmental sense. I use it here to describe a strong belief that school grounds, whilst clearly being very important places for children, are also a landscape to be enjoyed, developed and cared for by those who use them. So holistic in this sense means that school grounds are not the, property of any one interest group. They are no one person's pet project. The use of the word holistic in the context of school grounds development suggests the widest possible involvement and ownership in the process of developing grounds, and a wide definition of education including the formal, the informal and the hidden curriculum.

4. A fourth area of principle is really a statement of the status quo. It is that school grounds development is a multi-professional activity. It will involve children, teachers and head teachers. It is likely to involve parents, school governors, landscape architects, architects, artists, ecologists, those with a particular expertise in play and child development, and a whole host of other interested groups. This statement of the obvious is of course a hugely complex one, because these groups speak different languages, have different needs, and view children in very different ways.

5. Finally, and providing the overarching framework for all of this, school grounds need to be developed in a sustainable way. They need to survive, not in a static way, but in such a way that will bring lasting joy to all those who have expended effort in developing them.

It is increasingly clear to us that the process of designing school grounds is a complex one and that, early in the planning stage, the emphasis or style adopted is vitally important and will strongly influence the outcomes. There is one key question that is constantly, in our view, likely to lead to unsatisfactory development and it tumbles unwittingly from the lips of many adults. It normally takes the form "What would you like to have out there in your school grounds?" The answer to this is, of course: "Disney World, the largest, most colorful, piece of play equipment, the

most enormous mound of earth and the most gigantic pond." In other words the answer is consumerism. If a different question is asked, for example: "What would you like to do out there?" Children will respond very differently. They will talk of sitting, running, dreaming, imagining, climbing, being, smelling, touching and of all the important activities of childhood. From such a selection of activities, it is much easier to derive a brief for the development of the grounds which will ensure that the landscape features to be introduced will be those which will be most likely to be used, enjoyed and therefore cared for.

Figure 1. Most successful schemes aim to involve children in the whole process of change.



The process by which such principles can be translated into action is a complex one. At LTL we are constantly refining it. Consequently, Table 2 is just the latest version. There are many important stages in this, but I would like to dwell on just two of them now. A key element is Stage Two- surveying. This is a critical stage in the process and one which schools very often bypass. They assume that they know what they would like and forget to take a long cold look at what they already have. In extreme examples this has led to comparatively rare windflowers being dug up so that the school could put in a conservation area into its grounds. More importantly, the survey is a wonderful opportunity for young people to be involved fully in the initial appraisal of their site. Of course, as they spend so much of their time outdoors they have already carried out their own informal survey of what is there. They know a lot about their grounds already, what they like and what they hate, what they have and what they would like to have. A survey will produce the necessary data from which informed decisions can be taken. The way in which a school moves from surveying to Stage Three- identifying needs, is significant. Often these stages are, in many cases, actually taking place at the same time. If the needs of pupils, staff, parents, experts, and the local community are truly incorporated into the design brief at this stage, there is every chance that a

Table 2. Action plan for change**Stage One – considering the options**

Agree amongst staff, pupils, parents and governors reasons for improving your school grounds. These could include:

- scale – how do you want your school grounds to feel?
- image – what do you want your school grounds to look like?
- space – how many ideas can you fit in?
- shelter – will it be hard (fences, walls) or will it be soft (plants and trees)?
- learning outcomes – what National Curriculum and social education benefits will there be?

Stage Two – surveying the site

Find out in detail, using the *Esso Schoolwatch Initial Survey* (available from LTL):

- what you have in your grounds
- how you currently use what you have
- how you currently manage what you have
- whose permission you require before making changes and any legal restrictions applying to your site.

Stage Three – identifying needs

Find out through a variety of methods described in *Esso Schoolwatch – Making the most of your school Grounds – from Survey to Getting Started* (available from LTL):

- what the pupils, as the main users of the site, need and want
- what the teachers need and want
- what the parents, governors and wider community expects from the site.

Stage Four – proposing solutions

In the light of the needs you have identified and taking into account aspects of health, safety and land ownership, suggest in outline form, some:

- curriculum solutions e.g. formal and informal
- management solutions e.g. organization, policy
- landscape solutions.

Stage Five – producing a draft landscape masterplan

With the help of someone with design skills (landscape architect, teacher, parent etc.):

- draw up a rough masterplan for your school's proposed landscape
- obtain rough costings.

Stage Six – consulting widely

Through formal and informal meetings, displays of your plans, letters, questionnaires and interviews, find out:

- what everyone thinks, both positive and negative
- how you can absorb their ideas into the masterplan, if you agree with them.

Stage Seven – fundraising and budget identification

Establish a person or group of people with financial responsibilities to:

- identify existing budget headings from which money can be used
- raise money
- raise resources in kind.

Stage Eight – producing final plans

Produce a number of plans which will help you to manage the development of your site over the next 3+ years, including:

- a landscape master plan, with costs
- curriculum plans and schemes of work
- plans for the development of the informal curriculum, including relevant policy documents
- a maintenance plan and/or revised maintenance contract
- a clear statement in your school's Development Plan.

Stage Nine – implementing the project

Establish a group of people with responsibilities to:

- organize work parties to carry out practical work
- prepare contracts for new landscape work (if needed)
- order supplies for when they are needed
- keep a regular check on the budget and progress being made
- publicise the project in the local media
- keep everyone involved in the project informed of progress.

Stage Ten – evaluating and reviewing the project

Set up a system to:

- allow feedback from staff, pupils, parents and governors to see if any aspect of the project can be improved
- monitor safety in the grounds
- plan further stages of work.

comprehensive long-term plan will be produced, one that meets the needs of the vast majority of those who have an interest in the site. If needs are not met, then a school grounds scheme may well just be one person's imaginative whim and last only as long as they do.

In the last five years, LTL has dealt directly with more than 10,000 schools. It has evolved a program of activities designed to help all those involved in school grounds development in the UK. This program can be broken down into the following main areas:

1. advocacy
2. provision of information
3. production of publications managing projects
4. commissioning and carrying out research delivering training
5. running membership schemes.

It is the breadth of this program that distinguishes LTL from most other organizations like it.

Advocacy

I have already described how LTL's research led to the publication of *The Outdoor Classroom* and the change in the policy of the British Government towards school grounds. In many other areas LTL is also working to secure significant change. A particular example of this is our work with the Countryside Commission, one of the Government's three environmental agencies. In 1993, LTL was asked to review the Commission's role in education and produce a report which the Commission has subsequently used to convince its senior staff of the important connection between education and conservation. In key areas of research and training, which I will cover later, LTL has also been particularly influential. In a much subtler way LTL is influencing schools on a daily basis. We question each inquirer as to their project's intentions and help them to broaden the scope, where appropriate, always mindful of the need to involve children in the process.

In the public domain, principally the national press, LTL has been particularly active. In the last year, for example, there have been articles in almost all of the national papers and there is a regular flow of information through the pages of the *Times Education Supplement*, the newspaper most read by the teaching profession. It would be true to say that, in four years, a subject which was possibly of only passing interest to most head teachers has now inched its way up towards the top of their already very full in-trays.

Provision of Information

LTL's advocacy of the importance of school grounds is helping to create a climate in which teachers feel confident to make changes with children. It is, however, in the provision of information that LTL is probably most able to influence the actions of those on the ground. We are asked a huge range of questions about school grounds. We are asked, for example, how a school can get started on developing its grounds or how an enthusiastic teacher can persuade a doubtful head teacher that

school grounds are important, about where to find training, whether LTL can provide a site visit, where to get money from, how to put in a specific landscape feature, and a whole host of more detailed questions. Often callers will want information about who can provide services in their area. Sometimes specific concerns are articulated about safety, health, bullying, and a range of other complex issues.

LTL is able to answer every question it receives. Sometimes this requires us to undertake more research; sometimes it can be more straightforward. We will never tell people what to do; it is a strong aspect of our philosophy that local and regional distinctiveness is essential. But we can share good practice, recycle good ideas and show people how some processes tend to work more effectively than others.

Above all, we can put interested teachers and other staff in touch with others who have been through the experience. On our database, which lists 30,000 schools, we have invaluable information which can be shared with inquirers. A head teacher recently said to me that no amount of government propaganda, publications or direct-mail information would persuade her to do something, whereas advice from one of her peers probably would. LTL recognizes the value of peer support, case study and therefore of the existence of a national network of "demonstration" school grounds- sites which welcome visitors with teachers who are willing to talk about their projects, warts and all (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The rich variety on some sites can inspire other teachers.



Production of Publications

In a more systematic way, LTL is able to respond to the information needs of schools through a program of publishing. Since its launch in 1990, LTL has published 24 books and videos. These fall into a number of different categories and

reflect an increasingly strategic view of educational publishing. To begin with, we published research documents such as the *Learning through Landscapes Final Report* and the *Outdoor Classroom*, which have already been discussed. In the early days, we tried to help teachers make connections between the creatures they might wish to study and the habitats in which they might encounter them, so we published titles such as *Slugs, Snails and Earthworms: A Practical Guide to Their Study in School Grounds* (Feltwell 1991a); *Butterflies: A Practical Guide to Their Study in School Grounds* (Feltwell 1990); and *Beekeeping: A Practical Guide to Beekeeping in School Grounds* (Feltwell 1991b). These were very different educational textbooks for teachers more used to dealing in academic subjects.

LTL moved on from these focused titles to deal with issues such as *Recycling, a Practical Guide for the School Environment* (Feltwell 1991c) or *Trees in the School Grounds* (Clark and Walters 1992) or the *Seasons in the School Grounds* (Rowe 1992) and, in collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, *Wildlife and the School Environment* (1992). But LTL was not set up as a wildlife organization, although inevitably in attempting to transform sites into richer environments, this is a strong theme of our work. Rapidly it became clear to us that there was a hunger for information about the practicalities of developing grounds and, to meet this particular need, we produced three publications. A series of case studies called *Using School Grounds as an Educational Resource* (Young 1990) was produced, together with two videos, one aimed at the primary sector and the other dealing with the challenge of the secondary school site.

More recently, LTL has broadened its publishing activities still further and has reluctantly accepted that we need to take the moral high ground in an educational world increasingly dominated by a sometimes mistaken belief in the basic subjects. To achieve this goal, LTL has recently published four books, whose titles are quite unambiguous- *Mathematics in the School Grounds* (Rhydderch-Evans 1993); *English in the School Grounds* (Keaney 1993); *Science in the School Grounds* (Thomas 1993) and *Bright Ideas in the Outdoor Classroom* (Keaney and Lucas 1992). By covering what the UK Government describes as the core subjects in such an explicit way, it is LTL's hope that every teacher of these subjects will find inspiration and practical guidance as to how she or he might deliver aspects of these subjects in the outdoor classroom. Paralleling its promotion of the formal curriculum, LTL has continued to explore the informal and hidden curriculum implications of the school ground's development. Two titles specifically deal with this. The first *Play, Playtime and Playgrounds* (Titman 1992) and the second, the result of considerable research with the World Wide Fund for Nature, *Special Places- Special People* (Titman 1994).

Finally, LTL has recognized its role as an "umbrella" agency in sharing the good practice of other organizations by the publication of a *School Grounds Resource Directory* (Learning Through Landscapes 1994). This is probably the most powerful indicator of LTL's influence over the last four years in that it is a large ring-bound document with more than 200 resources, each of which deals with some aspect of the planning, use, development, and maintenance of school grounds.

Managing Projects

When I first became Director, I spent a lot of time thinking about the psychology of the school ground's development. It was clear that the kind of advocacy and published material support that I have already described, but it was equally clear in my mind that there needed to be an element of challenge and fun if we were to persuade large numbers of schools to become involved. To meet this psychological challenge and to engage the interest of the teaching profession, LTL has developed a number of projects which provide a certain structure to developmental activities outdoors. There are now some 14 different national projects and I would like to touch on just a few of these.

Perhaps LTL's two most important initiatives to date have been Esso Schoolwatch and the BT/LTL Urban Challenge. Esso Schoolwatch was launched in 1992 and is a national school grounds survey project. It provides materials for schools who wish to involve pupils in the business of surveying and appraising their grounds and who wish to then use that data to help them to identify their needs and plan sustainable developments. It has so far involved more than 3,000, 10 percent of all those in the UK. Information is collected by a school for its own use and also sent to LTL so that we can process it and share it again with other schools. From the data that we have, LTL is able to provide a very comprehensive overview of the ways in which grounds are being used and of the features which they contain. Currently a computer disk version of this survey is being developed and it is our dream that every school in the country will have on disk an up-to-date survey of its site, will collect data in a systematic and regular basis, and, arising from this, will have a five year development plan for its educational landscape. An interesting by-product of this project has been the creation of links between schools in the UK and in Sweden, who are both surveying their grounds and whose landscapes and cultures are interestingly different (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Esso Schoolwatch encourages schools to survey the whole site including wildlife habitats.



The second particularly successful initiative is the BT/LTL Urban Challenge. This is a grant scheme with a difference. The difference is the emphasis is on the quality of the process by which schools develop their grounds rather than on the end product. It is also, as its name implies, firmly targeted at the more difficult urban areas within the UK. To date, 46 large grants have been given to schools. The information we have gained from this will enable us to produce a handbook to help teachers who find it difficult to see beyond the sea of grey tarmac that assaults their senses every day at work.

Other projects include Green Releaf, a campaign to persuade young people in Primary education about the value of growing plants and trees. There is also an initiative aimed at the Secondary sector, supported by the Prince's Trust, which aims to work through Student Councils in promoting school grounds development, and a number of other research and development projects.

Teachers have shown that they are particularly willing to become involved in projects because of the profile that such involvement can bring their school. From LTL's point of view as many of these projects are discrete and newsworthy they are also capable of being sponsored commercially, and therefore are providing us with a much needed income.

Commissioning and Carrying Out Research

LTL began as part of a research project and it is my passionate belief that if this organization is to survive it must constantly be carrying out new research. In the last year, we have published the results of probably the most significant piece of research we have undertaken yet, *Special Places- Special People: The Hidden Curriculum of School Grounds* (Titman 1994). This research grew out of a two-year collaboration between the World Wide Fund for Nature, an international environmental organization, and ourselves. It focused for the first time directly on children's own views of school grounds.

Essentially it was driven by one overarching question: "Does the physical environment of school grounds and the way they are managed affect children's attitude and behavior and if so, how and why?" Within this broad question there were many elements. For example, how does the environment affect and influence children? Do certain types of places produce consistent responses from them? What factors influence these responses? What sorts of places do children value and why? Surprisingly, there is virtually no research relating specifically to children's use of school grounds. Equally, we discovered no reliable research methodologies that did not either trivialize, oversimplify or become adult intrusive. Wendy Titman, our coordinating researcher, therefore created a new means of accessing children's views of their grounds using techniques derived from the science of semiotics and involving collage boards with detailed questioning. There is not time here to explore the findings of this research in detail, but it might be helpful to summarize some of the main issues.

Firstly, it is becoming clear from LTL's research that the design and management of school grounds affects the behavior of children. This is a critical, qualitative

observation that any educational manager ignores at his or her peril. We found, not surprisingly, that children read the external environment in the same way that they read a book. They read the environment as a reflection of themselves and their own needs and what that environment signifies to them. So, for example, it is possible to generalize and to say that children dislike dirt, pollution, rubbish, litter, damaged things, unnatural colors, tarmac, places which offer little to do, places without shelter, seating or places to hide, places that are "boring," and places that are "too open." On the positive side it is clear that children welcome natural color. They like trees. They like woods. They like places with different levels, shady areas, leaves. They like big, wilder, grassy areas. They like animals. They like and want places where they can climb, hide in, explore, and make a den. They like challenging landscapes, complicated landscapes, and landscapes that are hosts to wildlife. Clearly such lists can only give a taste of much more complicated responses, but the point is inarguable- as one child said "Tarmac and concrete are boring, like seeing a film ten times."

Figure 4. Most children love to climb, hide and make dens.



In the early part of this article I commented that school grounds as an external environment have become even more important to children in contemporary society and, in this context there are a number of obvious ways in which those who manage schools and their grounds can improve the educational environment. Specifically they can recognize how children think and feel about the outdoors and promote the kind of activities and features which are likely to produce positive social interaction and learning opportunities. Through the publication of *Special Places- Special People: The Hidden Curriculum of School Grounds*, LTL has maintained its commitment to a holistic development of the educational estate, covering the formal, the informal and hidden aspects of the school curriculum. This research has been very influential and I intend that more of its kind will be carried out in the near future with young people in the Secondary sector. It is here that the educational experience is at its most fragmentary (Figure 4).

LTL is also undertaking research, in a number of other significant areas. These include a survey of Special Schools in the UK, with a view to producing a guidance document sharing good practice in this important area. We are also conducting a national survey into the different ways in which various professional groups work with young people in the process of designing school grounds. This research will take a close look at different methodologies and practices which landscape architects, artists, and other interested people are adopting, and will include an analysis of their likely outcomes.

Delivering Training

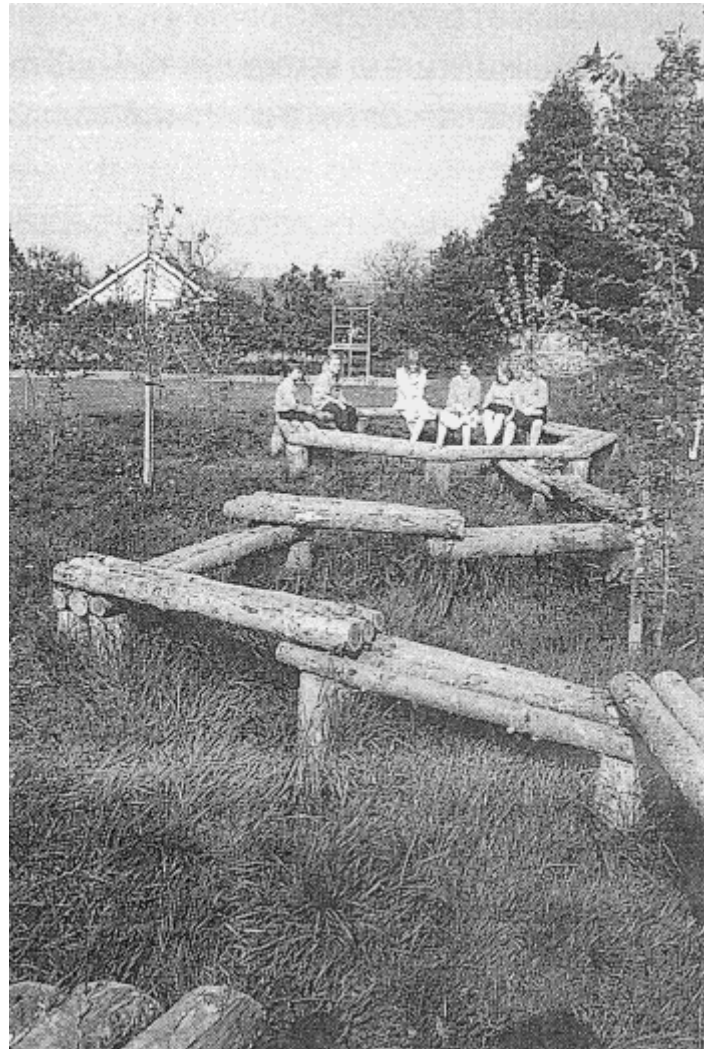
In the last year LTL has developed a strategy for promoting training on a national basis, for it is through this medium that we believe that teachers can be supported and encouraged to teach outdoors and to have the confidence to develop their sites. We have a number of different training initiatives but the one which has been the most successful recently, Grounds for Change, has involved a team of LTL staff traveling the country to run an introductory day event. This deals with the philosophy of LTL, shares the research findings already described in *Special Places- Special People* and takes teachers and head teachers beyond the first step of accepting that developing school grounds is a good idea into the next area of undertaking such a process. Over the next five years we intend to focus on the initial training of teachers in colleges and universities, on the complex needs of teachers' continuing professional development, on the needs of landscape architects, and on a number of other important groups.

Running Membership Schemes

To keep a growing number of people informed about developments in the field, LTL established a membership scheme four years ago and this has grown steadily. It caters for the needs of individuals, schools, organizations, and, in the UK, Local Authorities- the governmental agency which has responsibility for groups of schools in a region. Through membership, we can communicate the successes and initiatives of our many friends. Each member receives a copy of newsletter, *E-scape*, on a termly basis. There is an increasing international family of people who care about school grounds. For these people the phrase "learning through landscapes" has become synonymous with an attitude of mind that puts children's

needs, as far as the school landscape is concerned, very high on the educational agenda (Figure 5).

Figure 5. This seating was designed by children to meet their own needs.



LTL's membership schemes are supported by a national network of some 200 local groups spread throughout the UK. These aim to provide services such as site-visits, landscape advice and conservation expertise, and to publicize LTL's activities in a particular area. There is much work still to be undertaken to ensure that schools can not only be inspired, but also receive practical help and advice of the highest quality.

In promoting the development of school grounds LTL has recently explored two particular areas of interest. These are children and gardens, and children and farming. In recognition of these special issues, I end this piece with some brief observations on them.

Children and Gardening

The notion of a school garden is not of course a new one, as the following extract, which I make no apology for including in full, makes clear:

The school garden is becoming increasingly important as a focal point for other school subjects, adding interest and reality to the general training of the children.

The garden is as important for the urban as the rural schools, helping to bring about a better understanding between town and country, and a keen power of observation and interest in things alive. Incidentally, the school garden may also serve as a valuable object lesson to the neighborhood, and has often played a large part in overcoming the bias frequently found in rural areas against modern methods of cultivation. The work in the garden also provides a means of obtaining the sympathy and interest of the backward child, and, quite apart from the manual work, much instruction can be conveyed in a more easily assimilated and concrete form.

The Teacher

The educational value of the work done in connection with gardening is usually far greater where a teacher on the staff of the school can give the instruction. If this is impossible the class teacher should be in attendance when the lesson is being taken, to maintain discipline and to make possible the satisfactory linking of the subject with other school work. In this connection it has to be remembered that it is not necessarily the best kept garden, or the one that produces the finest produce, which is the greatest educational value. The school garden is not attached to the school for vocational training; it is therefore preferable to have inferior gardening technique and a thorough correlation of the subject, rather than a fine garden and nothing more.

The teacher should attend courses of instruction in school gardening whenever this is possible, and make the fullest use of the county organizer, or county horticultural staff.

General Scheme

The actual lines along which the work is developed are a matter for the teacher to decide, depending very largely on local conditions, but under all circumstances the work should as far as possible be that of the children and not the teacher, and, as opportunity occurs, alternative methods of planting, manuring, sowing, etc., should be adopted and a careful record kept of all operations and results. In some counties facilities for the work are greatly improved by the provision of artificial manures and fruit-tree sprays for each school garden, the distribution of sets of fruit trees on standard Malling stocks, the opportunity to obtain cuttings of flowering shrubs, herbaceous plants, etc. Where all these things have to be obtained from the annual grant, or the sale of produce, the development of the garden is often a difficult matter and sets a limit to the scope of the teacher.

The Garden

It is always an advantage to have the garden near the school, in fact much of the value of the garden is lost where this is not so. In urban districts this is often impossible and a gardening centre used by a number of schools is provided. There are obvious disadvantages in this system, and in a great measure the satisfactory coordination of the work depends on the teacher responsible for the gardening class at each school.

The garden should be in an open situation which is well drained or where draining could easily be accomplished. Heavy clay soils are always difficult for children to deal with at the start, and also need better weather conditions to enable cultivation without fear of damage to the texture; where possible, therefore, light, easily-worked soils should be chosen.

The layout of the garden should provide for plots for the children either "single," "dual," or "common," according to circumstances and the ideas of the teacher. It is an advantage for the children who have been taking gardening for two or three years to have individual plots, that they may work on their own ideas and see the results of their own work. Provision should also be made for a fruit plot, an experimental plot, a nursery bed for propagating young plants, cuttings, etc., and flowers.

Where there is plenty of ground and a suitable class, the garden may be laid out on more ambitious lines with some attempt at landscape gardening. In a small garden the best effect is always obtained by a very simple arrangement of beds and paths.

(Gresham Publishing Company, 1930)

It is astonishing to consider that this was published in 1930. Much of its advice seems to be as relevant today as it was 50 years ago!

In the UK, gardening has a mixed pedigree. At certain times in our history it has been associated with outdoor schooling for the physically frail, so too, in the Sixties and Seventies, it was unfortunately associated with less-able pupils as a practical activity in which it was felt such pupils could succeed. As the impact of the conservation movement grew in the eighties, one of our government agencies, English Nature, introduced a scheme called School Nature Areas. These were essentially small, wild gardens in school grounds. In many ways this was a welcome initiative, however, it had the disadvantage identifying "the garden" or "the nature area" as a small entity only within the grounds. In some cases they were even sited at the very edge of a playing field in the least attractive, least accessible part of the school landscape.

In viewing gardening now, LTL recognizes a number of important issues. Firstly, it strongly endorses the importance of gardening. Specifically we believe that it is important for children to experience, at first hand, the seed-to-seed cycle, the joy

of the harvest, the taste, touch and smell of fruit, vegetables and flowers. It is also important for the children to be aware of the variety of things which they might grow, and which of these are wilder and which more cultivated.

Secondly, it is important that the garden and gardening are seen in the context of the overall development of a school site. We would now advise schools not to necessarily isolate a garden within their site unless it is for the very understandable reasons of constrained space, security or curriculum access.

Finally, we recognize that there is an important debate to be had between the benefits to wildlife which certain plants provide and broader cultural issues. To this new end a new publication, *People, Plants and Places* (Agyeman 1995) will be available next year. It will make connections between a multicultural society and plants from all over the world.

LTL and Farming

It is a paradox that in much of our work to encourage schools to develop their own sites it is often necessary to take teachers and pupils to experience other spaces. Recently, LTL has been asked to review an interesting scheme introduced by the Countryside Commission, whereby schools use their local farm for field work- the Education Access Initiative. There is often very rich cross-fertilization of ideas when teachers and young people visit farms and other countryside sites. As one farmer put it: "We wanted to give young people the opportunity to enjoy seeing the insects, plants and wildlife we remembered from our childhood."

International School Grounds Day, 3 May 1995

As I asserted when I started this article, it is my fervent wish that every one of the 30,000 school grounds in the UK contains many special places for children to enjoy, use and care for. Increasingly, however, the importance of school grounds across the world is becoming more acknowledged. To this end I am delighted to be able to encourage all readers to join with us and a number of other national organizations in taking part in the first international school grounds day on 3 May 1995.

We all owe it to children to ensure that their first experiences of outdoor environments at school are as positive as possible. LTL intends to continue to play its part in ensuring that school grounds remain at the top of the educational agenda as we move towards the millennium.

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