



Effective ESD teaching and learning in an inner city primary school

An entitlement for all children

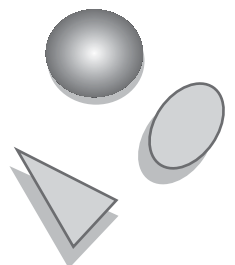
This case study explores the purpose, difficulties and benefits of an Education for Sustainable Development focus in an inner city primary school. It describes the processes through which sustainability issues were gradually introduced to staff, pupils and the wider community and, in a high-density area, the vital role of school grounds developed for people and for biodiversity. Innovative ideas are shared about raising support and funding, and reaching out into the wider community.

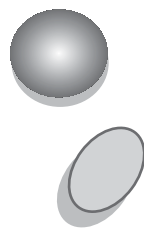
Background

Shacklewell is an inner London, two-form entry primary school, with approximately 450 children and over 40 teaching and non-teaching staff. The level of social deprivation and diversity of cultures within the local community is reflected in the school; for example, 20 mother tongues are spoken in the nursery and over 70 per cent of pupils throughout the school qualify for free school meals.



A 'Children for Change'/
Watch Club celebration





Aspirations

The staff were keen to develop an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) project which would integrate core ESD issues (for example, waste minimisation, energy, water, transport, consumerism, biodiversity/nature conservation, development education, global citizenship) into relevant areas throughout the curriculum from Nursery to Y6. We also wanted to relate these issues to pupils' daily lives and to the running of the school. WWF's 'Making it Happen' scheme – which offered funding, training and consultancy to support schools in their ESD journeys – seemed to offer us a stepping stone.

Through an ESD approach to teaching and learning, we hoped to encourage critical and independent thinking, class and group discussions, democratic decision-making, and a sense of personal 'sustainable responsibility' among the school community. We also wanted to enable children to relate their newly developed knowledge and skills to local and global environmental issues – and to suggest solutions.

We felt it was important to follow learning with practical action, and we therefore planned to develop the school grounds into a pleasant environment in which children could socialise, play and learn, and which parents and the wider community could contribute to, use and enjoy. We also planned to provide areas within the grounds, managed by children, parents and staff, for nature conservation, the increase of local biodiversity and organic food growing. In this way we hoped to raise awareness of environmental issues and to influence the environmental attitudes and behaviours of children, parents and the wider community.

Constraints and difficulties

The constraints and difficulties we faced are typical of many schools, particularly in inner city environments. A reduction of LEA services has meant that schools have been left without specialist advisers and no 'official' support or encouragement for initiatives such as ESD. Within the school there are some 'challenging' children. The National Curriculum and literacy and numeracy strategies have imposed constraints, and teachers often feel too overloaded to take on 'new outside initiatives'. High staff turn-over and low levels of awareness of environmental issues can lead to 'uninformed' attitudes and lack of interest in ESD. Many children and parents are preoccupied with problems such as crime, poor housing and health, litter and graffiti, and other social factors, which they feel powerless to deal with. This sometimes makes it difficult to interest and involve them in wider environmental issues and other aspects of school life.

Research has pointed to the fact that "concern about the environment relative to other social issues was significantly greater among students from non-disadvantaged areas... this suggests that socio-economic grouping and living situations can exert an influence upon the degree of young people's environmental concern."
(Rickinson, 2001)



So why bother to teach ESD in environments such as this?

The rate of environmental degradation taking place requires urgent action. Much of the onus falls on educators to inform and influence the knowledge and actions of others, particularly those of future generations. Indeed, a number of research projects “report school as being the second most important source of young peoples’ environmental information” after television (Rickinson, 2001). We feel strongly that all children have an entitlement to the knowledge which will enable them to make informed choices about their future and the future of other species on the planet. The teaching of ESD empowers children to take responsibility, and to become active citizens, aware both of their rights and the constraints upon those rights in a local and global context.

It is possible to use problems in the local environment as a starting point for looking at global issues. This helps children to understand that:

- most local problems are related to issues of sustainability
- the solutions usually have both local and global implications
- everything we do has an effect on the world in which we live.

We feel that these local/global links should act as a catalyst, not only to change children’s attitudes and behaviour, but also to influence that of their parents and other adults within the school and wider community, and to encourage closer involvement in school life. And although often ‘challenging’, it is our children – in the main energetic, ‘feisty’ and undaunted by class and status – who particularly benefit from and excel at this kind of teaching and learning. It enables them to become critical, independent thinkers and more active, effective learners which inevitably helps to raise the overall ‘quality’ of learning and achievement in school.

Finally, it is our belief that the teaching of ESD encourages teachers to exert some professional control over the content and methodology of delivering the curriculum. And support is out there – in the shape of the local community and voluntary ‘environmental and development’ organisations, as well as many national ones, which are an invaluable help to us in teaching issues of sustainability.

How did we begin?

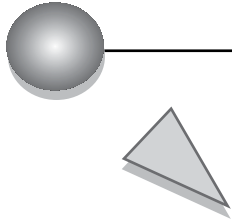
Our initial plans included the development and improvement of the school grounds, so that both children and adults within the community could be given the opportunity to experience and enjoy ‘a green space’. We also wanted to use the school grounds as a teaching resource to raise awareness of the impact of human activity on the natural world, and of the contribution school grounds can make to biodiversity and therefore to sustainability. A first step was to extend the remit of the school post-holder for School Grounds Development, Humanities and the Environment to cover ESD. We also involved parents and staff in a voluntary group to work on the school grounds, with a stated aim of ‘improving them for educational, recreational, social and conservation purposes’.



The cultural garden

To support the work, we set up a children's after-school environmental 'Watch Club' – part of a national network of clubs supported by local Wildlife Trusts. We also decided to seek support and information from local and national non-governmental/voluntary organisations who give enormous support for many aspects of environmental, development and citizenship education.

Another important element of our initial plan of action was the decision to seek funding from a variety of sources: many educational organisations, trusts and private companies have money specifically allocated for environmental and educational purposes. And to keep the momentum going – and attract further involvement and sponsorship – our initial plans included making our work as high profile as possible: sending out newsletters to parents, holding both social and 'work-day' events, giving assembly presentations, organising whole school projects, and becoming involved in local and national developments and award schemes which might also attract publicity.



"The nursery children and parents enjoy the environment of the woods, pond and planted areas of the school. They provide stimulation and enhance the children's access to the curriculum."

Nursery Teacher

"Morris and Schagen (1996) reported that environmental behaviours were significantly higher for students from schools in which there was a designated environmental education coordinator and/or staff thought to be expert in, and strongly motivated towards, teaching environmental education. The same effect, though, was not evident for schools simply having an environmental education policy or senior staff in support of environmental education. This leads them to argue that 'it is the beliefs and practices of environmentally motivated teachers which are the most significant elements [in school] in prompting young people to undertake environmental action'."

(Rickinson, 2001)



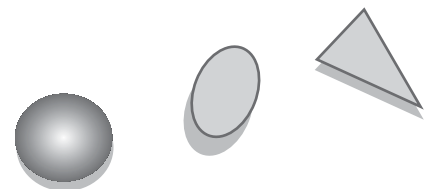
Policy, paper and practical initiatives

This is how we set about achieving our goals:

- The Humanities/ESD coordinator began work on a Humanities scheme of work incorporating environmental and development education issues, and a school ESD policy covering both the curriculum and school management.
- In order to involve all the school community, a competition was held among families to produce a logo and amongst staff to come up with an acronym for a school grounds improvement group.
- A landscape architect from the Trust for Urban Ecology (TRUE) was employed to hold grounds improvement consultation sessions with children and staff.
- An after-school meeting was held with parents at which they were invited to make 'post-it' suggestions for future developments on photographs of the grounds. These suggestions were then incorporated into a master plan by TRUE.
- As a result of this meeting, GOSH (Gardeners of Shacklewell) was established and drew up a constitution, a set of aims and objectives, and a resolution to work to the school's Equal Opportunity Policy. This enabled us to gain charitable status.
- Applications were made for money to fund work in the school grounds, initially to organisations from lists provided by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and Learning through Landscapes (LTL).
- High profile funding was awarded from the 'My Place – Our Place' and 'Business in the Community' schemes. These attracted local publicity, valuable contacts, an invitation to an event at St James's Palace hosted by Prince Charles, and a strong base for beginning our work and applying for future grants.
- Environmental experts such as TRUE, BTCV and a local nature reserve were involved/employed to advise on and oversee our projects.
- Weekend workdays and after-school sessions were held to develop raised flower beds, a multicultural garden reflecting the diversity of cultures within our school community, a wildlife pond, and the regeneration of a small indigenous woodland area within the grounds, with a tree and habitat trail.



"I feel we have transformed the school grounds and increased parental involvement in Shacklewell, although it is still way short of what we would like it to be. We still have much to work on." *From a founder parent member of GOSH*





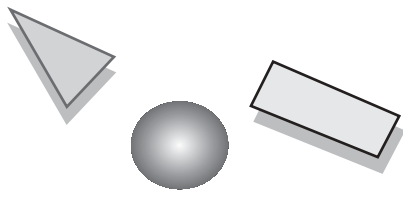
The health and fitness trail

- A health and fitness trail was built by a commercial firm with murals alongside it, designed and painted by Year 6 children after working on aspects of 'healthy living' as part of the 'Healthy Schools' initiative.
- A local artists' group was employed to make wooden seating and 'sensory' planters for infants to care for. These divided the infant playground into 'zones'. Staff allocated new equipment for children to use in each zone, helping to improve the children's playtime experience as well as their behaviour.
- Successful discos, summer fetes and sponsored activities were held by GOSH, with support from other parents and staff, raising both funds for and awareness of our work on the grounds.
- INSET was held, including: a WWF introductory session to raise awareness of issues of sustainability; a session on the outline of the new Humanities scheme of work, when teaching staff were able to view critically, discuss, raise concerns and choose new resources from a range of NGO and commercially produced books and packs; a twilight session to raise awareness of how the grounds could be used to support the curriculum, especially ESD.
- The Watch Club became involved in 'Children for Change', a national pilot scheme to demonstrate how children can choose and direct a project which brings about local environmental change. They decided to take the lead in setting up a high-profile recycling scheme in school for paper, textiles, cans and cartons. With staff and parental support, they took part in a 'design and make' project for recycling and composting areas in the grounds.
- Other Watch Club activities have included artwork, environmental games, gardening and visits and residential to the 'Mission Earth' environmental programme at PGL, the Centre for Alternative Technology, marine environments in Dorset, and the Earth Centre. These broadened the children's experience and made them more environmentally aware (as well as being fun!).
- In May 2000 four children attended the Millennium International Children's Conference on the Environment at which children from all over the world met to discuss projects going on in their countries.
- The Watch Club children have also been involved in extensive pro-active 'environmental campaigning'. They have written to and taken part in a deputation to the local council, and lobbied the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Central Government on issues surrounding waste minimisation and recycling locally and nationally. They also took part in GLA strategy consultations and a London Youth Parliament.



Children with mayor Ken Livingstone and Bill Oddie at the launch of the GLA biodiversity strategy

- They have initiated an adopt-a-species project, leading research with each class into a chosen species of indigenous wildlife, to understand and develop the conditions necessary to attract them to the school grounds and increase biodiversity.
- We set up an Eco-Schools Committee consisting of children, parents, staff, a governor/local councillor and a representative from the Environment Agency. The committee initiated a plan to apply for the Eco-Schools Green Flag.
- Using 'mock election' procedures, a junior School Council was set up. Its main achievement so far has been to consult with classes to begin to improve choice/equipment in the playground and ultimately to improve behaviour.
- A school grounds open day was held to raise awareness of our developments among parents and the wider community, and to recruit more people to our group.



Our successes

The following approaches worked well for us:

Fundraising and communications – virtuous circles!

We applied for funding from many different sources – educational, community and environmental organisations, local businesses and charities, city firms and trusts, as well as applying to major awards that help to promote ESD, for example London in Bloom, the RSPCA Animal Friendly Award, the Tree Council, LTL and BTCV. Successful applications and projects were followed up by maximum publicity, achieved by, for example, inviting local dignitaries, councillors, MPs and the local press into school. This helped to raise awareness and to attract further funding. Fundraising, sponsored and other events popular with children and parents, such as discos and fetes, also helped to raise awareness of our work and involved parents who are not necessarily interested in the school grounds work.

Making links and looking outwards

We strive hard to apply ‘joined up thinking’ to our curriculum planning, ensuring that, as far as possible, there is a wide and varied curriculum – especially in Science and Humanities – and that every opportunity is taken across the curriculum to draw out relevant ESD issues, supported by appropriate resources to extend both pupil and teacher knowledge.

We also joined in with the regular celebration of events to raise awareness of issues of sustainability/development education, for example Black History Month, Refugee Week, Tree Week, Environment Month, School Grounds Week and involvement in special projects offered by organisations such as LTL, Waste Watch, WWF and others offering ‘virtual’ sustainability programmes and internet debates.

Beyond the school, we also engage in constant lobbying of the local council, government departments and other agencies to get ESD issues recognised and promoted locally and nationally.



Our local MP at the opening of the recycling centre which children helped to design and make

Airing views on litter, waste and recycling at a Tidy Britain meeting



Sharing skills and knowledge

We made a point of becoming involved with other local and national environmental and development groups and schemes. We swapped skills and knowledge, and sought help, advice and support by, for example, inviting them to come into school to give assembly or class presentations, INSET sessions, or to work with classes to increase pupil and teacher knowledge and awareness. Parents with particular 'expert' knowledge and skills were also targeted.

We also capitalised on the skills and enthusiasm of the children, encouraging them not only to work within the school but to become involved in wider environmental issues, and to lobby and campaign on the issues they consider important.

Difficulties we have encountered – and how we are overcoming them!

Parents from our gardening group leaving the school and difficulty in persuading new parents to join GOSH

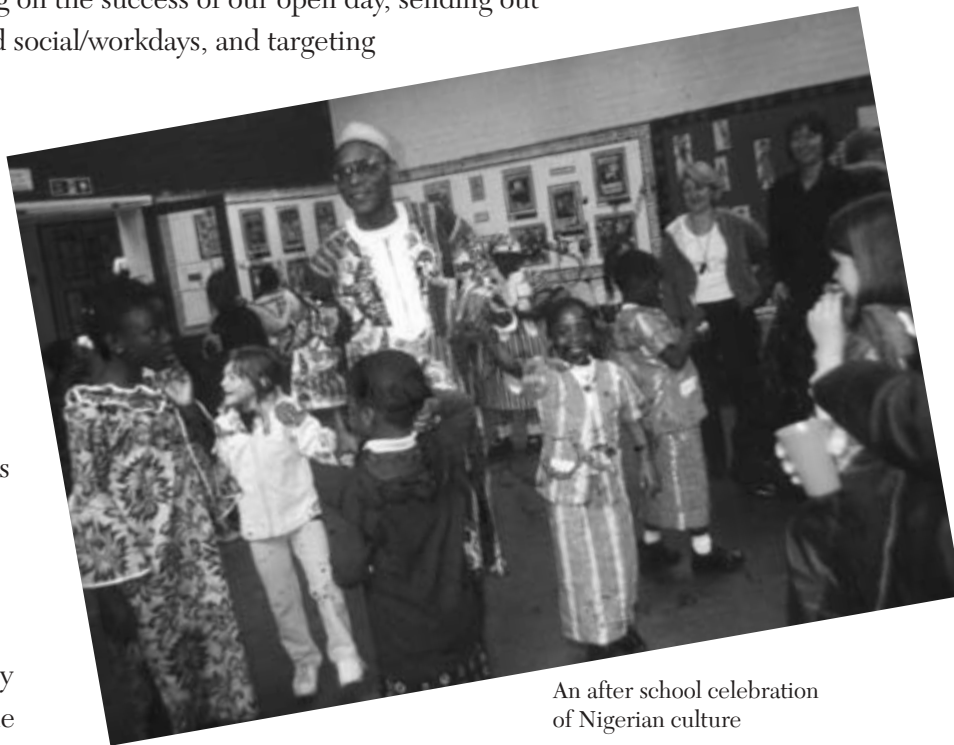
Encourage more parents to join by building on the success of our open day, sending out newsletters, holding more social events and social/workdays, and targeting parents new to the school.

Failure to interest parents in contributing ideas for plants and artefacts in the cultural garden

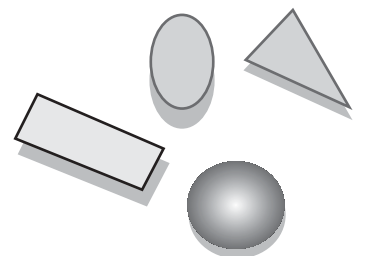
Work with the school's Ethnic Minority Achievement Scheme (EMAS) teachers to hold targeted cultural celebration days, which include garden consultations. We have held two very successful Nigerian days and have begun plans for similar Turkish celebrations.

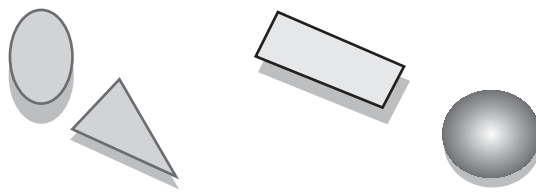
Lack of teacher time and knowledge

Ensure that ESD opportunities have mainly been identified through existing areas of the curriculum, minimising extra time needed, and that resources are available to increase teacher knowledge. Involve all staff in a dedicated ESD INSET day and all classes in the adopt-a-species project, making each year group responsible for their own raised planters. Devise an ESD induction process for new staff.



An after school celebration of Nigerian culture





Lack of support from the local education department

Adults and children to continue to lobby local/national politicians and council officers to make them aware of how we want our project to progress and of the importance of ESD in schools. Continue to be involved in local environmental initiatives, for example the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and 'advertise' the fact that the school grounds have been declared a 'Site of Importance for Nature Conservation' by the GLA.

Lack of wider school community awareness of environmental issues

Send out newsletters, hold in-school displays, curriculum evenings and assemblies, and more grounds 'open/activity' days, etc.

School Council meetings not taking place as frequently as originally planned

Hold a high-profile election process in the new school year. Designated teachers to deal with meetings and issues arising, with time out of class and a small budget. School Council training for both staff and pupils to be arranged.

A reduction in the amount of recycling and composting

Work with our local recycling groups. Offer environmental incentives, such as Watch Club Gold Award Badges, trophies for the classes who recycle most and certificates for individual environmental achievement.

The future

We plan to:

- introduce a 'Playground Partners' scheme, initially in the junior playground, involving teams of specially trained children to help ensure the better use and enjoyment of playground equipment and games, solve minor conflicts and support children who are lonely, upset or the victims of bullying
- finalise the development of beds where each class will have a 'strip' for growing vegetables and fruit trees using organic methods, increase the amount the school community composts, and design an interpretive fence for the compost area to make it more 'attractive and acceptable'
- work with artists helping parents and children to make murals
- employ a story-teller/wood carver to design and make a 'story-tellers throne' in the quiet garden
- design and make willow structures to improve the aesthetics of the grounds, provide shade and make children aware of a traditional craft
- obtain funding and planning permission to have a 'sustainable' outside classroom/after-school club room built using renewable energy, etc
- order more seating so that we can all sit back and enjoy the grounds!



Celebrating Tree Week

What's this got to do with Education for Sustainable Development?

Values and attitudes

- concern for and appreciation of all living things, their needs and interrelationships
- concern for social justice globally, now and for the future
- respect for and valuing of human and biological diversity
- empathy and awareness of the points of view of others
- a sense of responsibility for personal and group actions
- a belief in a positive future to which they, working with others, can contribute
- a willingness to act as a responsible citizen.

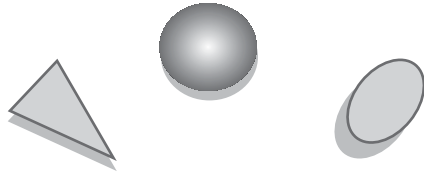
Skills

- cooperative working
- critical thinking
- ability to discern patterns of interrelationship
- ability to distinguish between wants and needs
- problem solving
- reasoned debate
- informed decision-making
- creativity, an ability to envision alternatives
- research, data handling and communication.

Knowledge and understanding

- the environment and the human condition are inextricably interrelated
- how biological systems operate, support life and are affected by human activity
- there are basic human needs that are universal
- the earth's resources are finite and access to them is unequal
- how their own lives and actions connect with the environment and with the lives and actions of others – locally, nationally and globally; past, present and future
- how the economy, society and the environment are interdependent
- how school, home and community can be managed more sustainably
- how the processes of decision-making work, and how to take part in them
- quality of life is not just dependent on standard of living.

"Environmental Education is important because it makes us aware of the world we live in and the people and animals we share it with. It makes us aware of our environment and how we should treat it. We're growing up on this planet and will live on it for the rest of our lives and so we need to take care of it for ourselves and for future generations." *Y6 pupil who has been a member of Watch Club since the beginning, four years ago*



Key success factors

We recommend:

- starting with things that can be done easily and make an instant and noticeable difference: for example, create a quiet area with seating, provide recycling bins, plant fast growing shrubs to improve an ugly area
- going for small grants to get your project going quickly
- using local groups/crafts people who become familiar with the project
- using your local press as much as possible
- taking plenty of photos of your project – and using them for grant applications, publicity, education, increasing support and keeping a pictorial record
- always offering incentives to come to events, such as refreshments, raffles and prizes, and things that children enjoy, for example bouncy castles and face painting
- don't give up – changing environmental attitudes and behaviours is a long, slow process. Keep chipping away gradually and lead by example.
- ENJOY THE PROCESS – it's hard work but worthwhile!

Resources

Mark Rickinson, *Learners and Learning in Environmental Education: a critical review of the evidence*, NFER, 2003

The WWF Schools' Case Studies Series

This case study forms part of a series designed to capture the work of schools as they journey towards Education for Sustainable Development. The case studies come from schools working at all levels – from Early Years to Secondary, but we hope that the principles and ideas are transferable. Free copies of all the case studies are available from WWF Education at the address below, or you can download them from the Resource Bank: Case Studies section of our dedicated ESD site, www.wwflearning.co.uk

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