

Write it up!

**Case studies of sustainability education projects
from around NSW**

Lapstone Public School Living Class Room

Lapstone Public School Living Class Room project has been a collaboration between a range of stake-holders within the school and the wider community. Initiated in 2003, the program has been so successful it is now being integrated into the broader school curriculum.

By Kristin Wohlers, Lapstone Public School, 2008.



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Environmental
TRUST

Snapshot

Project aims and objectives

The aim of the project is to involve children at primary school level in growing, harvesting and cooking vegetables so that they might become more aware of sustainable living and discover that growing their own food is easy and fun.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Establish a functioning kitchen garden that will enable students to sow, nurture, harvest and cook a wholesome organic vegetarian meal;
- Create a variety of education for sustainability facilities at this primary school to expose children to the possibilities available and make them aware of the environmental challenges facing their generation; and
- Broaden students' and the entire community's engagement in learning for sustainable living.

Location: Lapstone Public School, Lower Blue Mountains, New South Wales.

Who's involved?

- Students, teachers, staff and parents of Lapstone Public School;
- The broader Lapstone and Glenbrook community;
- The Lower Blue Mountains Gardening club; and
- Local businesses.

The school has been given the full support of the local community. Blue Mountains City Council has been supportive with materials, expert advice, training and awards and the Lower Blue Mountains Gardening Club has taken great interest in the project since its commencement. They not only provide advice but also train the students in organic gardening techniques.

The partnership between the school and the garden club has also given many children contact with senior citizens of the age of their grandparents. Many children do not live close to their grandparents and through this project have been given an opportunity to experience this unique relationship, as well as to learn respect for the wisdom and life experience of the elderly. The garden club members also enjoy working with the students and the contact with young people.

Best practice education for sustainability

The multifaceted nature of the environmental education program at Lapstone Public School provides a great variety of opportunities for all stakeholders to be actively involved, contribute ideas and constructive criticism and engage in new development and understanding. The recently developed PBwiki is a result of recognising the importance of sharing information and networking through electronic media. The following characteristic of education for sustainability best fits the Lapstone case:

“Education for sustainability builds a ‘learning society’ through critical and reflective engagement, to enable the development of new understandings of the environment and our place within it” (AAEE Professional Learning Series: Write it up. *Good practice sustainability education principles* Sydney, 2007).

A values driven project

The Lapstone Living Class Room (LCR) program promotes values of co-operation, reliability, respect, responsibility, teamwork and sharing in a caring environment between students, staff and community members. Students are encouraged to follow the school’s motto:

"Explore and achieve to the best of your ability!"

Funding the project

Initially, the project received seed funding from the Lapstone Public School Parents and Citizens Association. Since then the project has received several awards and grants. Such funding is topped up with activities such as selling of plants at markets and the proceeds from recycling of aluminum cans.

Student participation

Students have been active in the Living Class Room since its commencement in 2003. Each year approximately 190 children are trained in the garden, with about 350 children reaping the benefits of involvement in the program to date. The staff of eight teachers at the school is very stable, which has helped maintain the integrity and longevity of the garden program despite the fact that three different principals have been at the helm over the past three years. Support by the parent community varies, with the driving force concentrated in three committed parents. At least one parent per class currently takes small student groups into the garden on a weekly basis.

Key issues and challenges

The main challenges for 2009 faced by the project team are:

- Integrating the living class room into the wider academic curriculum:

One teacher is preparing lesson plans for the primary classes to fit the Living Class Room into their Science and Technology, HISE or Language lessons. Infants children will continue to work in the gardens during group time.

- Finding ways to engage an entire class of up to 30 students:

Primary children will go into the Living Class Room with their class teacher at a set time each week and work in assigned groups on a 5 task roster throughout the term, covering each activity twice. Teachers will be supported by at least one volunteer.

Tasks are divided between the different stages and classes: e.g. Yr 1 – worm farming, Yr 2 – Crunch & Sip, Yr 3 – water saving, Yr 4 – paper and phones, Yr 5 – paper recycling and cartridges and Yr 6 – energy saving. In addition, each class has an assigned area outdoors.

- Building up a broad volunteer group:

A broader volunteer base of parents and grandparents and community volunteers will be built up for 2009 during term 1. Precise lesson plans and timing will make it easier for volunteers to fit in and work together with the teachers.

- Growing food in a limited time frame with limited water:

Year 6 has designed an irrigation system for the vegetable gardens, which will be installed by next year's Year 6 students in term 1.

Key project activities

Working with supervision, children engage in:

- Sowing, nurturing, watering, mulching, propagating, weeding and fertilising the garden using organic techniques;
- Harvesting produce, collecting seeds, recording which plants grow well in the area and what their needs are;
- Cooking and eating the food they have grown; and
- Choosing plants for the next season, taking into account popularity, cost, labour involved and volunteer energy available.

Lapstone Public School's story

Have you ever seen 190 public primary school children enjoying pasta with fresh green pesto?

At Lapstone Public School students grow and harvest regularly from their very own school gardens. They then use the vegetables to prepare a special feast for the entire school, a special event that is held once every term. Over the past two years, students have cooked pasta with pesto (the school's favourite!), pizza with tomatoes, basil and cheese, potato and leek soup, Asian greens with pasta, spinach parcels and lots of different salads. They use the recipes from Stephanie Alexander's *Kitchen Garden Cooking with Kids*.

The history of the project

In 2003 a group of environmentally orientated parents, the then principal Doug Pope and teachers initiated a gardening program. This group presented their ideas to the school community and in September 2003 Lapstone Public School kitchen gardens were built during a working bee with donated railway sleeper and soil paid for by the school's Parents and Citizen Association. Weekly gardening commenced during scripture time to give those children who did not participate in scripture classes a meaningful activity. The children planted a range of vegetables and herbs and took the produce home.

Word soon spread and gardening quickly became the preferred activity during scripture time. Some parents complained and gardening was cancelled as a scripture time activity. As a positive consequence non-scripture taking children were involved in the establishment of a school senate. Gardening was rescheduled during class time so that every child in the school could garden in a small group on a regular basis. During this time the gardening program was principally parent run and maintained.

The Living Class Room has evolved over the years. Initially nine gardens in a circular shape with a basic compost area, it soon expanded to include a no-dig garden and several compost bins. In 2005 a water tank was installed with a Sydney Water grant and in 2006 Sophia, the Blue Mountains marsupial dragon, was built from rubble. She provides seating for two classes and joins the Living Class Room, adventure playground and Kallaroo bush area.



The project began to embrace other aspects of sustainable living such as renewable energy and in 2006 two Year 6 students, a parent and a retired engineer developed a bicycle water pump to irrigate the uphill gardens by pedal power. NSW parliament member Karen Palluzzano visited students to congratulate them on their efforts. She is seen here with Arianne Lockhart-Smith and Tim Wohlers-Reichel.



In 2007 Lapstone Public School was awarded 'Sustainable School of the Blue Mountains' for its comprehensive environmental education program and facilities. The Living Class Room now embraces the permaculturally designed and managed kitchen garden and extensive composting area, the Sophia waste sculpture, the *Kallaroo* bush area featuring a memorial Wollemi Pine, the *Ulandi* outdoor classroom, paper and aluminum/metal recycling facilities and a Landcare site bordering on to *Dark's Common*. The school regularly participates in the activities of the Waste Watch Program and continues its now traditional once a term feasts.



In 2008 Lapstone joined the NSW Healthy Eating Program 'Crunch & Sip'. All children now stop at 10am to eat fresh fruit or vegetables and drink a glass of water while the teacher reads them a story. Hence all children are regularly involved in the daily disposal of organic waste in the composting system and worm farm.

This year the school celebrated World Environment Day on 5th June with a program of twelve rostered activities designed to engage all eighteen peer-support groups. At the end of the successful day everyone came together and shared a delicious meal prepared from the gardens by rotating student groups.



The school has also embarked on an ambitious landscaping program, redesigning the entrance into the school as a timeline starting with a Gondwana Land garden, winding through a Bush Tucker plot and then passing imported plants to an endemic Lapstone plant community. Green Corps workers have created the first two garden beds and further grants will be sought to complete the project. A recently received Landcare grant will deepen student knowledge of bush tucker plants and their traditional uses through a visit by a local Aboriginal leader.

Most recently, the principal Dianne Knight, in collaboration with the environmental committee, has developed a School Environment Management Plan (SEMP) in the format of the School Management Plan. The 3-year format is designed to secure further commitment to education for sustainability for the Lapstone school community.



For those interested in finding out more about this project, Lapstone Public School has developed a PB wiki to share their experiences and knowledge with other environmentally engaged schools and communities. The site can be found at www.ecolapstone.pbwiki.com. The site also connects the teaching of important IT skills with skills in environmental sustainability.

You are welcome to write or email us:

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