

Write it up!

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

What's in a label?

"Environmental education is just good education"
Angelina Galang – AAEE Conference 1996

Harwood Island Primary School and the story of the School Learnsapes Trust.

By Helen Tyas Tunggal, Learnsapes Planning and Design, 2008



our environment *it's a living thing*



What's in a label?

"Environmental education is just good education."

Angelina Galang - AEE conference 1996

How did one small school's homegrown language program evolve to be recognised as a best practice model of environmental education?

The Learnscapes program aims to provide meaningful student learning opportunities efficiently and effectively, while also improving the look, function and use of the school grounds for all living things.

More than twenty years of action research and development has resulted in a participatory learning process that can be undertaken by any school. The following case study, based on Harwood Island Public School's experience in Northern NSW, traces the evolution of this innovative and holistic approach to education for sustainability.



1998: Harwood Island Principal, Helen Tyas Tunggal, with students in front of the tree house.

Fresh beginnings

– change is in the air

The newly appointed principal arrived at the beginning of 1988, inwardly vowing that any necessary change would be taken slowly and in manageable increments. Having come straight from various curriculum consultancy positions involving work with staff in hundreds of schools in Sydney and the NSW Central Coast, it was immediately obvious that the small school was sadly lacking in essential facilities and teaching resources. It was only years later that education department authorities confided that the school was being run down with a view to closing it in line with 1980s 'economic rationalism'.

Located adjacent to the Pacific Highway, the large flood prone grounds were predominately a grass monoculture with a few large, historically significant fig, plane and camphor laurel trees and no play structures or games courts.



In addition to the responsibility of managing the school, the principal was required to teach the upper primary class consisting of 28 students from grades 4, 5 and 6. The class worked in silence and there was a reliance on graded text books - the same text books that had been in use when the principal was a student decades before! The children worked methodically through the exercises and then marked their own work from the mostly correct answers listed in the back. Regardless of their ability, the students were all reluctant writers not wanting to have to make too many arduous 'corrections' to their work. It therefore became a high priority to find ways to encourage greater enthusiasm for reading and writing.

Of most concern to the new principal was the use of the weekly 'class tests' results to determine classroom seating arrangements for the following week. Some students had been seated in the back row their entire time in primary school, while there was an expectation from the parents of those competitively vying for the front row positions that the weekly tests continue.

Preparation for change

– a collaborative effort

It was obvious that something had to be done. A 'needs analysis' was undertaken with the staff, resulting in a wish list of thirteen required facilities including such essential items as "a staffroom, an office, a principal's office, more student toilets, a library, filing cabinets, a computer and enlarge the classroom to standard size." The heritage buildings were consequently renovated by the Public Works Department to accommodate school needs. Quite a challenge during class lesson times!

A similar exercise with the parent body saw "getting rid of head lice" as their highest priority. (Interestingly this was achieved to the envy of other schools through perseverance, co-operation and good communication.) They were also keen to organise a working bee to build some play structures.



Six months later in July 1988 the students themselves were asked to describe what kind of school they would like to create. Their ideas included "a welcoming entrance, a nice place to be, different gardens, a forest, places to feel like explorers and pathways to connect the different areas." Very different to the utilitarian, practical suggestions of the adult community members!

Over months of meetings the school's mission statement developed to read:

Our desire is:

- To maintain an atmosphere which fosters independence as well as involvement, co-operation and support within the school community; and
- To provide individuals with educational opportunities which are relevant, meaningful and enjoyable.



Peer support 'family' groups were established to include students from across the grades K- 6, with each group having a senior student as their leader. After working co-operatively through a series of moral dilemma activities, their first major task was to collaboratively decide on an appropriate set of school rules.

The facilitated process (strongly influenced by Howard Gardner's philosophy around the notion of multiple intelligences and looking beyond the narrow confines of the dominant discourses of skilling, curriculum, and testing) was assisted by the school counsellor and took a whole school term to complete.

The agreed rules were simply expressed in positive language and covered six themes: respect of self; respect of personal property; respect for others; respect for the property of others; respect for the school and respect for school property. A process for exploring individually negotiated logical consequences was included for those who chose to break the rules.

The school community was also influenced by Howard Gardner's ideas on "What kinds of minds we will need to cultivate in the future". Student learning opportunities were designed to encourage the development of the disciplined, the synthesising and the creative minds as well as the respectful and the ethical minds.

Multiple Intelligence theory was used as a learning tool to promote high quality student work acting on a value system that maintained diverse students can learn and succeed. And that learning is exciting.

Learning with a purpose

– and bringing back nature

As well as having a strong student welfare focus, the peer support groups became actively involved in deciding how the school grounds would be managed. Each group selected an area of the school as their responsibility for the year and through a teacher facilitated "horticulture" program had regular opportunities to plan and implement improvements to the gardens in their chosen area.



Student 'committees' were formed in the senior primary class to stimulate writing with a purpose, within a whole language approach to learning.

Students were encouraged to take on real projects within the school environment and of course they were eager to get outside! So it was all about learning with a purpose, actually getting students involved in making choices about their learning while at the same time transforming the bare grounds into the paradise that they wanted.



While working in groups, students developed a range of co-operative planning and project management skills to assist them carry out their committee responsibilities. Meeting procedures, needs assessment, group decision-making strategies, action planning, record keeping, reporting and 'thinking out loud' problem solving were some of the techniques modelled through whole class activities.



Each student committee performed a specific role within the school community. The Greening Committee focused on improving the functional and aesthetic environment of the school grounds. The Gardening Committee set about growing and selling seasonal vegetables to the parents. The Recycling Committee researched and set up a profit making business for the school community (in the days before council recycling collection). The Tuckshop Committee provided a full food service one day each week, additional to the one day a week service provided by parents.



The resulting holistic literacy and numeracy programs related to the Peer Support group activities and the Student Committees group activities were received a NSW Director General's School Achievement Award in 1991. Although the nomination was for "quality teaching and learning programs that provide real life learning with a purpose utilising students' daily existence in the environment as the medium" the award was

given for "outstanding programs in environmental education."



So, what's in a label?

The Environmental Education label caused some consternation at the time, as the school didn't yet have an environmental education policy, let alone "outstanding" environmental education programs. The 'learning with a purpose' programs, however, continued to develop and take on an environmental learning life of their own.

Life is the teacher

- with some interesting consequences

It was not long before the students were required to go beyond their immediate environment and communicate on a level that they had never previously been challenged to reach, in order to find solutions to the problems they found themselves faced with.

They also found enterprising ways to use some of their projects to raise funds for a trip to sing at Sydney's Opera House. The notion of making money to further other ideas on their school 'wish list' was a big motivator along with a sincere desire to "improve their environment".



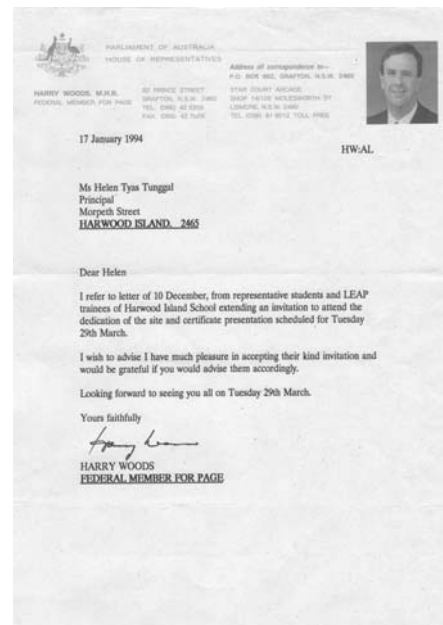
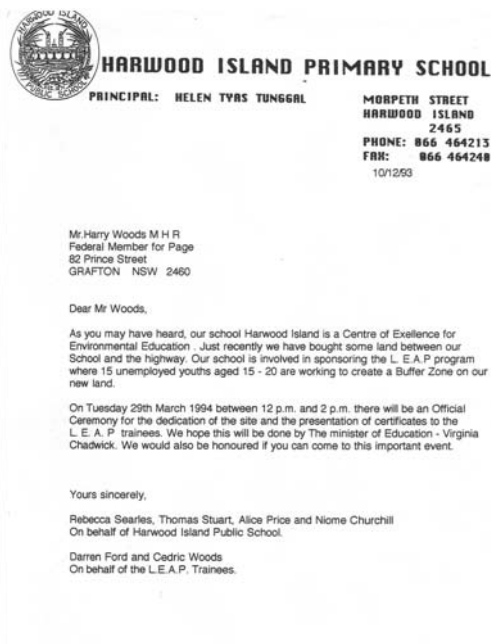
- The Greening Committee found funding support for their projects through successfully writing various grant applications;
- The efforts of the Recycling Committee saw the school waste collection bill reduced to nothing and the students able to use the allocated waste collection funds for playground projects of their choice;
- Learning to better deal with the ongoing problem of weeds led the Gardening Committee to research and consequently adopt permaculture techniques to help better manage their gardens;
- Students were able to reduce the school's energy bill by 2/3 and use the savings from regionally allocated funds to support their playground planting and improvement projects; and
- The Tuckshop Committee's efforts to provide healthy food were recognised with the first North Coast 5-Star Healthy Canteen Award in the Eat To Be Fit competition from the Department of Health.

Junk food is out with Harwood students



Daily Examiner 1993

An important part of each successful step was to celebrate achievements along the way. Students creatively and efficiently organised a wide range of celebration events from impromptu forms of recognition at school assemblies through to carefully stage-managed official functions with invited dignitaries.



The student's ability to not only research and report on their projects, but to also successfully manage and fund them, led to the next logical step where the students became teachers:

- Final year teacher trainee students from Southern Cross University visited the school twice yearly to participate in workshops facilitated by the primary school students;
- The local council appointed recycling contractor made an appointment to meet with the student Recycling Committee to seek information and advice about available markets to sell the various recyclables collected;

- Annual "Open Days" were planned, advertised and facilitated by the students, with assistance from their teachers. Educators from across the region came to find out how the student run programs worked.



- The departmental auditor, after initial concern that students were keeping their own "books" for the canteen, was impressed by their logical explanations of how they kept the accounts and the inbuilt checks they had devised for public accountability; and
- Students were regularly invited to perform a range of their original performing arts works at the North Coast Greening Schools Annual Awards and at the NSW Gould League Environmental Awards functions at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and Taronga Park Zoo.

Harwood Island kids rapt in eco-message



Harwood Island Public School students get into the rap of their winning song during a practice for day's performance. They are (back from left) Mathew Petrie, Niome Churchill, Bobbie-Lee Bright, Becky Searles, Marika Tyas Tunggal, Jacqui White and Emily Searles with (at front) Trent Anderson and Tom Stuart.

Finding better ways to do things

- action research, action learning

In the meantime the school teaching staff were developing resources that would complement the student-centered projects and also allow the grounds to be more widely used for a range of curriculum outcomes.

K-6 Environmental Activity Cards for each of the 6 Key Learning Areas were written for learning stages 1,2,and 3. The self directed cards, designed for small group or individual student use, were so popular with visiting teachers that they were made available for purchase electronically for easy adaptation to other school situations (in the days when floppy discs were actually floppy!)

Each time a teacher or trainee teacher visited the school a senior student would work through a curriculum activity card with them and then using the format, the visitor would write an original activity to add to the collection.



As the grounds improvement projects became more ambitious there was more that could go wrong and it did. There were a lot of challenges, and mistakes were made - thankfully none of them too expensive but sometimes disheartening and very time consuming.

One of the problems arose from accepting free dirt without knowing it was dead and so the plants wouldn't grow. The students and teachers began to realise that appropriate research and planning were crucial before actually starting to dig and plant. A valuable lesson was learnt, and over the years the soil was enriched with compost and become healthy and fertile.

For another project the students had successfully gained a grant to build a shade house. After careful consideration, what they thought was the best location was chosen. They researched and costed the most economical and efficient watering system, then spent many lunch times digging a trench to connect and install the water, only to have the plants die because the prevailing hot August winds hadn't been considered. The shade house had to be relocated to a site not affected by the winds.

Years later such unexpected hiccups became known as 'learnscape moments'! Now it is understood that learning through doing means accepting that mistakes will happen and valuing these mistakes as opportunities for learning.

Rather than regularly seeking expert advice about how to fix up 'mistakes' it became obvious that it would be more time efficient and cost effective to enlist professional support in the planning stages, and to incorporate a research, planning and design phase and budget for each new project. At various times either a local project manager or landscape architect were enlisted to work with the students, teachers and parents in the project planning stages.

Some large projects were undertaken and the results were amazing both physically and educationally. For example between the school and the highway a raised, flood free buffer zone was constructed to reduce traffic noise. A mound was created from more than 30 truckloads of soil and hundreds of native species of trees, bushes and ground covers were planted in themed areas of outdoor classrooms.



In an Australian first, the school successfully gained a federal government grant to sponsor a Landcare and Environmental Action Program (LEAP) for training unemployed young people. The primary students were involved in the project research, the grant application. They worked with the media to advertise for eligible young people to apply to work on the project.

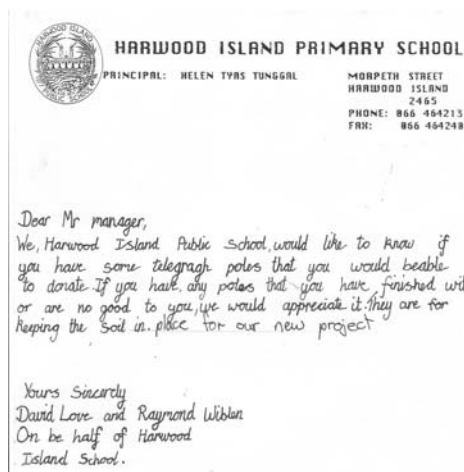
As part of a second LEAP project a polluted drain and weed-infested gully adjacent to the school were transformed into a vibrant wetland ecosystem. Ponds were bulldozed and exotic plants were removed and replaced with a diverse range of indigenous native species. In addition a classroom was built into a tree in the playground and the rainforest gardens and food forest orchard were expanded.



Independent evaluation of the school's programs **- reveals some dramatic changes**

Comparison of the school's results in the annual basic Literacy and Numeracy skills testing showed some interesting trends of improvement, with the most significant student test score increases in the areas of measurement and of spatial awareness - scores that were consistently much, much higher than the state average. This trend continued in each subsequent year.

A New South Wales Department of School Education Quality Assurance Review of the school was conducted in 1994. The school had already been recognised as a centre of Excellence for Environmental Education since 1991, so there was a conscious effort to have other priority areas reviewed in the context of the school's innovative and practical learning programs designed to integrate environmental education across all Key Learning Areas.



In consultation with staff and parents the focus areas chosen for review were:

- Teaching and Learning of Mathematics and English
- Student Welfare; and
- School community liaison

The Quality Assurance Review recognised the effectiveness of the learning with a purpose programs in achieving a variety of outstanding student outcomes, particularly acknowledging the following strengths and achievements:

- “The dedicated staff who support parents and students in all areas of the school’s activities.
- The progressive educational initiatives collaboratively implemented which have resulted in formal acclaim by educational leaders, peers and visitors to the school. This recognition is a source of great pride to the school community.
- The balanced curriculum supported by specific programs addressing the social, academic, physical and emotional developmental needs of students.
- The integrated welfare program which enhances the small school environment providing a wide range and variety of activities which cater for the needs of all students.”

The review went on to state:

“In the teaching and learning of Mathematics and English focus area the school was strongly commended for its integrated approach which provided a purpose for learning with the individual needs of students met very effectively.”

“Observations noted the leadership opportunities presented to students and the role models older students provided for the younger students. Parents noted that even kindergarten children were given the opportunity to lead groups. This has resulted in a responsible, aware student body.”

“The review found strong recognition that the school provided a supportive, non-threatening, secure learning environment and provides for the needs of all students by catering for their individual needs and providing opportunities for all students to achieve success.”



“In the area of school community liaison there was a widespread agreement to the beneficial effect of the many opportunities for community members to participate in a wide range of school activities.”



Refining, documenting **- and sharing the model**

With a growing interest in what was happening at the school a video titled “*Harwood Island Primary School: Pathfinders in Environmental Education*” was collaboratively produced by the school and the North Coast Department of Education in 1993. Featuring the integrated approach of the school’s student-centred programs, it was used by the department to promote the benefits of such an approach to other schools.

An increasing number of visitors to the school would ask about the process of initiating environmental projects and related education activities. Many teachers indicated that they were seeking practical guidance and user-friendly resources. As a result, a project was conceived to complete and expand the existing resources and facilities so that they might be shared with a wider and more diverse target audience.

In 1995 a team of North Coast environmental educators was awarded an Environmental Trusts Grant from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority to write learning programs based on the school's environmental features. Work began early in 1996 on the development of a package containing environmental education teaching units and a support video for use by primary and secondary schools, teacher training institutions and other community environmental groups. The program is designed to turn the school environment into a learnscape and can be applied in any school context.

The authors of the programs were practising teachers who aimed for:

- A minimum sequence of learning experiences which satisfied the NSW Department of School Education Environmental Education Curriculum Statement Years K-12;
- First hand experiences in the child's environment, "knowing our land";
- Understanding of the big ecological picture, "How does our planet work?" and
- Sequential and cumulative units of work for each learning stage.

The units are linked to a range of curriculum outcomes and have a particular focus. Stage 1 is Environmental diversity; Stage 2: Environmental interactions and cycles; Stage 3: Environmental change over space and time; Stage 4: Measuring environmental quality; Stage 5: Environmental design; Stage 6: Environmental care and repair; Stage 7: Evaluation tasks for teachers.

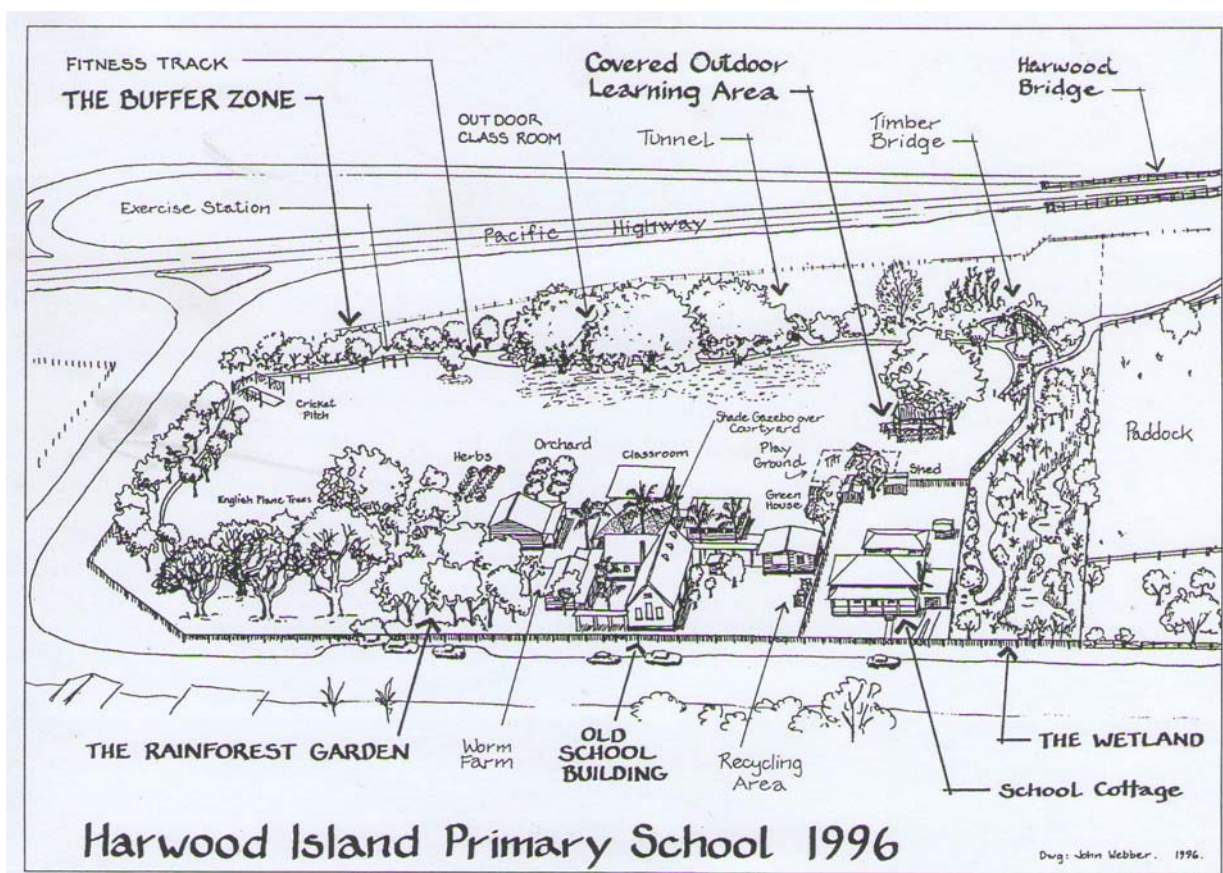
The student centred teaching and learning activities are all based on an adaptation of Blooms taxonomy (which attempts to subdivide or categorise our thinking or learning processes into levels moving through from lower order to higher order skills). For each learning stage the themed sequential tasks have been designed for students to: Gather Information; Process Information; Analyse, Interpret, Evaluate; Apply Findings; and Explore Values.

The overall focus of the package was to promote and extend environmental awareness and understanding, with an emphasis on the conservation principles, concepts and values students would need to manage land sustainably in the future. Harwood Island Public School was used in both the teaching units and the video to demonstrate what can be achieved by those who are prepared to make the effort and as a model for others to follow.



The *Hands On Learnsapes* resource package showed many teachers for the first time the richness of an outdoor setting for teaching a range of subjects including Mathematics, English, Arts, Technology and Design. A quote from the package sums up the process:

“Learnsapes are places where a learning program has been designed to permit users to interact with an environment. Learnsapes may be natural or built, interior or exterior and may be located in schools, near schools or beyond schools. They may relate to any or many key learning areas. The process of developing learnsapes encourages a whole school curriculum approach while at the same time providing strategies for integrating environmental education across the curriculum. This is developed in conjunction with a collaborative planning and design process for school grounds.”



Taking it further

- refining the learnscape process as a resource

Whilst recognising the many excellent examples of school grounds developed for learning, the lack of accessible and affordable expert advice has often resulted in many poorly conceived, amateur designed 'environmental' tree planting and garden projects with little or no relevance to the curriculum or to future generations of students and teachers.

Questions regarding the longevity of such projects were raised following research such as the NSW Government Quality Assurance Review of Environmental Education, 1994, where it was found that the success of such projects has usually relied on the enthusiasm and dedication of a particular teacher or parent. That person 'moving on' often lead to the eventual abandonment of the project.

The need to allow schools easy access to a specialist design service, which would improve project quality and encourage more participation and ownership by stakeholders, was recognised by the group of NSW North Coast environmental educators who had developed the successful Hands on Learnscapes resource package.

To address this need, in 1997 *Hands on Learnscapes Inc.* (HOL Inc.) was established as a non-profit association incorporated in NSW to access public and private sector funding to assist schools to develop their grounds to enhance student learning. In 1998, with funding from the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust grants, *The School Learnscapes Trust* (SLT) was established to promote and develop the concept of learnscapes and to refine the learnscape planning and design processes.

Initially, three public schools – two primary and one secondary - participated in a pilot program which contributed to the development of processes and strategies which were designed to help schools avoid potential problems.

Later in 1998 the NSW Department of Education and Training provided funding for 9 additional pilot school projects with 6 more in 1999.

In 1999 the Learnscapes Program was nationally recognised when Helen Tyas Tunggal received the Banksia Award for Environmental Education and Training and also the Gold Banksia Award for “depicting the importance of empowering young people to become competent caretakers of the planet in the next millennium.”



“How worthwhile has the Learnscapes project been and why?”
- part of an independent study

The pilot projects undertaken in NSW during 1998 received varying degrees of support from the School Learnscape Trust consultancy team. While some were involved in a fully facilitated process, others received funding from the NSW DET Environmental Education Unit to do their “own learnscape thing”.

Representatives from each of the 18 schools were however brought together in August 1998 to share the planning process and lessons learned from the initial pilot projects facilitated by the SLT consultancy team.



Achievements of the different schools and the skills, understandings, attitudes and values developed through the projects varied greatly. The Department engaged independent consultants *Renshaw, Hitchen and Associates* to evaluate the initial introduction of Learnscapes planning in NSW primary and secondary schools. The publication “*Critical success Factors in Learnscapes*” outlines the review findings, some of which are summarised as follows:

- **Teaching and learning**

“The teaching is truly student centred and learning is more purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the students. Whilst students are learning new skills and developing life skills, the teachers are developing skills and applying different methodologies to their teaching.”

“Doing learnscapes has opened up opportunities for integration and widened the scope of teachers and parents thinking about teaching beyond the classroom.”

Students said they “have learnt a lot more skills and the learning is more fun.”

- **Community / collaborative involvement and ownership**

“Learnscapes is a creative process of involving the whole community where, with students across all ages, everyone can work collaboratively and co-operatively to create concepts and actively solve problems.”

“It has significantly increased community involvement and interest with positive responses from the corporate, community and government sectors. It provides a real opportunity for parents to be co-operatively and actively involved with their children’s education.”

- **Affective domain**

“Throughout the planning, discussion and learning students are put at the centre of the process and as such are empowered to dream of possibilities and achieve beyond the expectations of school staff.

“It has created a pride in the school and been a catalyst for a change in attitude and values in the whole school community.”

Students have expressed “amazement in what they have achieved and an awareness that they have done something really important for the school” as well as “an increased enjoyment in the school.”

- **Process of learnscapes and environmental education**

“Has given the school a planned and structured focus in which everyone involved is aware what needs to be achieved. Because it demands that students are actively involved in the whole process, it is uniquely student centred.”

“It is a process by which parents, teachers and students can be involved in understanding and impacting on their environment. It is a worthwhile and inspiring project”

“It has helped the students understand more about the playground and caring for their environment.”

Lessons learned

- why learnscape?

The innovative *Learnsapes Planning and Design Process* provides a transferable model that, if followed, will ensure successful and effective improvement of the school environment and positive community building as the focus moves from “I” to “we”.



The most important lesson from the case study is that it was the students who were deciding what they wanted, how to get support and then actually doing it.

Other key findings include:

- School grounds when imaginatively developed can become a vital resource for learning.
- Constructing environments can only work in groups and members of a school community can achieve it by working together.
- With real contexts for learning and real life issues and problems to solve, students have had to learn how to use their language effectively and develop practical calculation and problem solving skills.
- Learning is a self organising system that students can competently manage for themselves – fault tolerant, meaningful, connected, fun and purposeful.



- The purposeful parts of primary education can happen on their own, without being imposed from the top down. When empowered to do so, children in groups can instruct themselves. Learning by doing is as much also by watching and listening within the group.
- When students are able to make choices about their learning it gives everyone with every learning style the opportunity to be involved in completing rich and meaningful tasks.
- Infinite benefits arise from using Learnsapes as an umbrella for a variety of learning programs: from the formal to the informal curriculum (including social learning and student welfare) and the hidden curriculum (messages and meanings students indirectly receive).
- Research has shown that learning in this way can lead to a wide range of bio-psychological, developmental, personal, social and academic benefits for students.
- Learnsapes contribute strongly to students' understandings of environmental issues and the sustainable management of the schools resources.
- The development of a school environmental management plan is intrinsically and logically linked with the development and implementation of learnscape master plans for school grounds.

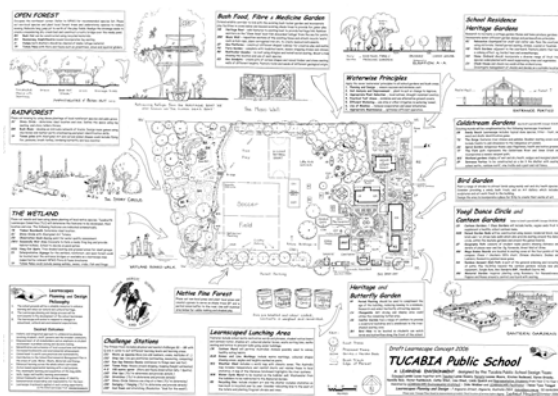
Postscript

- sustainability of the learnscapes program

Following the initial pilot projects, the School Learnscapes Trust facilitated projects with more than 60 schools in three states, providing opportunities to further analyse and refine the learnscape planning and design process.

Since 2001 Learnscape Planning and Design Workshops have been facilitated in hundreds of Australian primary and secondary Government, Catholic, Steiner, Montessori and Independent Schools.

The majority of these schools have developed learnscape designs for particular focus areas with many, including Tucabia Primary School, also completing learnscape Master Plans for the whole school site.



The learnscape planning and design process continually supports the principles of transformational education.

There is now widespread recognition that intelligence has multiple aspects. However, these different aspects or abilities are not independent intelligences, as was initially suggested. Human intelligence is a function of the combined operation of all our faculties. To express this more complete notion of human intelligence, Andrew Season PhD uses the term “Deep Intelligence”.

Dr Seaton suggests that in order to prosper through connectedness with the world, education in school needs to lead to six transformational outcomes or key abilities for the future: Understanding; Multi-literacies; Problem Solving; Creativity; Self Management; and Community Participation.

The Key Abilities Model advocates explicit provision of Four Curricular Forms, and their associated pedagogies: Focused Learning Activities; Real World Investigations; Personal Interest Projects; and Community Enrichment Projects.

Learnscapes is a tried and true program that fits the bill for this current view. It continues to be implemented across Australia and beyond. Up to date details about Learnscape Planning and Design can be found at www.learnscapes.org

A media record of the Harwood Journey

The development of the program at Harwood Island Public School can be followed from its initial stages to its most exciting achievements by perusing the dozens of media cuttings collected by the students over the years. More than 40 headlines documented the phenomenal learning curve the whole school undertook together. The following are a brief selection:

School a Credit to Pupils

Daily Examiner, Grafton August 1988

After a critical study of Harwood Public School and its grounds pupils constructed a number of new gardens and cleaned up untidy areas... The children of Harwood Island have come out on top once again impressing judges in the Maclean Shire Tidy Schools competition with their enthusiasm and planning... The judges were amazed at the way in which the children went around the project...



After a critical study of Harwood Public School and its grounds pupils constructed a number of new gardens and cleaned up untidy areas. Working with continued enthusiasm are pupils (from left) Ben Dalrymple, Jade Tyas Tunggal, Felicity Hockey, Luke Searles, Mathew Jacques, Clare Dephoff, Erica Dines and Jason Baker.

Island School a Learning Model

Coastal Views, Maclean October 1992

At 3.30 on an unseasonably hot spring afternoon most children are taking relief in the shade of trees... except for two senior girls. In the corner of the now deserted classroom they quietly work at a computer. They write a letter, have it printed out and without fuss put one copy in a large project folder and prepare the other for post.

The letter they wrote was to the Green Smile Day Committee which had accused Harwood Island School Greening Committee of not paying its account. The students reply stated that not only had the committee paid, but also the date and cheque number... Such small incidents are an everyday occurrence at Harwood where students have a large say in projects their school undertakes and an even larger part in implementing them.

At a recent seminar students told teachers from throughout the region how they managed their role in the school and why they enjoy their education... Visitors gave high praise... "The responsibility, skills and confidence your children demonstrated clearly justifies your approach."

"It is obvious that this program is not contrived but is clearly child centred with students having a real input and autonomy. The teachers are facilitators, guides and arbitrators so the students have ownership of their ideas, plans and ventures. It is truly inspirational."

Co-operative Learning at its Best

NSW School Education News, NSW DET 1993

Students... are learning to cope with the demands of the future through a unique learning approach encouraging self direction... The students are completely self motivated and are developing an array of work related competency skills... working quietly in committee groups set up to help run the school which... are organised by the students and run like well oiled machines.

The students are learning efficiency skills. They write letters, send faxes, make phone calls, answer enquires and generally ensure their areas of responsibility are managed effectively.

The basic thrust of the school's philosophy is learning with a purpose and in everything the students do they are striving for a tangible result. If they write a letter it is a real document related to a real issue and it will be sent to the person concerned... There is an emphasis on problem solving and creative thinking and the development of personal and interpersonal skills.



A proud crew

Harwood School takes a Leap

Daily Examiner, Maclean March 1994

A public ceremony... will mark the dedication of the first school based LEAP (Landcare and Environmental Action Program) undertaken in Australia... The project utilising more than \$100 000 of funds and a staff of unemployed young people, involved construction of an environmental buffer zone... Apart from guaranteed on-the-job training and income for six months, participants undergo an education program which includes conservation concepts, job seeking skills, business calculations and communications.

"Tomorrow's dedication day has been organized by senior students at the school. This project belongs to the students. They have been greatly involved with the grant application, writing letters to businesses and organizations seeking support and planning how they would like the new area developed." A committee of students was formed to manage their side of the project and keep an accurate record of progress.

Eyes of the World on Island School - NSW at world first for children

School Education News, October 18 1995, by Deborah Arentz

Students from Harwood Island Public School (HIPS) have been selected from thousands of applicants to attend the world's first international environmental conference for children "Leave it to us" to be held in England.

British selectors were impressed by the school's approach to environmental education both in the classroom and throughout the community.

The three day conference has been organised in partnership with the United Nations Environmental Program and unites 800 children aged between 10-12 years representing 200 countries.

The students will lead the conference sessions and present their own projects. They will discuss controversial issues such as sustainable development, endangered species, waste disposal and city living. The audience will include many leading environmentalists who will be called on to debate the issues.

Life is the Teacher at Harwood

Acres AUSTRALIA (National Newspaper for Sustainable Agriculture), March 1996

What would you say about a school where the students are responsible for large parts of the program, and which has an architect designed tree house the size of a normal classroom? "Cool" might be one response. "What?" might be another. Such a school does exist.

The school is now almost surrounded by plantings and environmental enhancements of one sort or another...

"Learning through life" involves the real world, and real situations...

It might mean applying mathematics, oral skills and group participation skills in balancing the books of the canteen which the students run one day a week, or using a whole stack of mathematics, science and language skills to research and plan various environmental activities for which the school has become recognized throughout Australia.

The school is now developing a freshwater wetland and a pond has been created and stocked with a variety of native fish species...The wetlands project... is being helped by a \$2800 Rivercare grant.



Australian native fish breeder Guy Callander releases native fish into the school's Wetland ponds with assistance from students (L-R) Michelle Ryan, his daughter Shirley, Brendan Broadhead, Jack Russell and Kathleen Werry.

Gold Reward for green achievements at Harwood

Coastal Views, 24 October 1996

HIPS takes out gold in this year's Rivercare 2000 Awards. The school rehabilitated a low-lying storm water retention area into a functional wetland. The project included an extensive site clean-up, removal of exotic weeds and grasses, excavation of a shallow pond and landscaping of the surrounding area. More than 100 species, selected for their durability in all climatic conditions were planted.

Students travelled to Sydney to receive the prestigious award... which recognises the work of community groups and individuals who are dedicated to achieving clean, healthy and productive rivers by the year 2000.

"A multiple award winning school"

- 1990 Gould League / Sydney Morning Herald 80th Anniversary Special Award to students for designing and implementing a recycling management plan for the school and its community
- 1990 School named as a NSW Centre of Excellence for Environmental Education for outstanding programs and positive approach to education and the environment
- 1991 NSW Director Generals School Achievement Award for outstanding environmental education programs that provide learning with a purpose utilising students' daily existence in their environment as the medium
- 1991 Federal Environmental Achievement Certificate in recognition of the significant contribution made towards the protection of the Australian environment through environmental enhancement and rehabilitation.
- 1992 "Harwood Island Primary School: Pathfinders in Environmental Education" video produced by NSW DET
- 1993 Gould League / Sydney Morning Herald Project Environment Award with the student devised 'Save Our Endangered Species' rap
- 1994 North Coast Greening Schools Awards Winners in 6 categories
- 1995 Students represented Australia in the UK at the United Nations 'Leave it to us' International Children's Conference on the Environment and reported back as guest presenters for Totally Wild children's TV
- 1996 Featured in Eco Kids documentary for Asian Television networks
- 1997 Rivercare 2000 Primary Education Gold Award for the rehabilitation of a wetlands ecosystem in a disused gully on the school site
- 2000 Rivercare 2000 Primary Education Gold of Gold Award



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