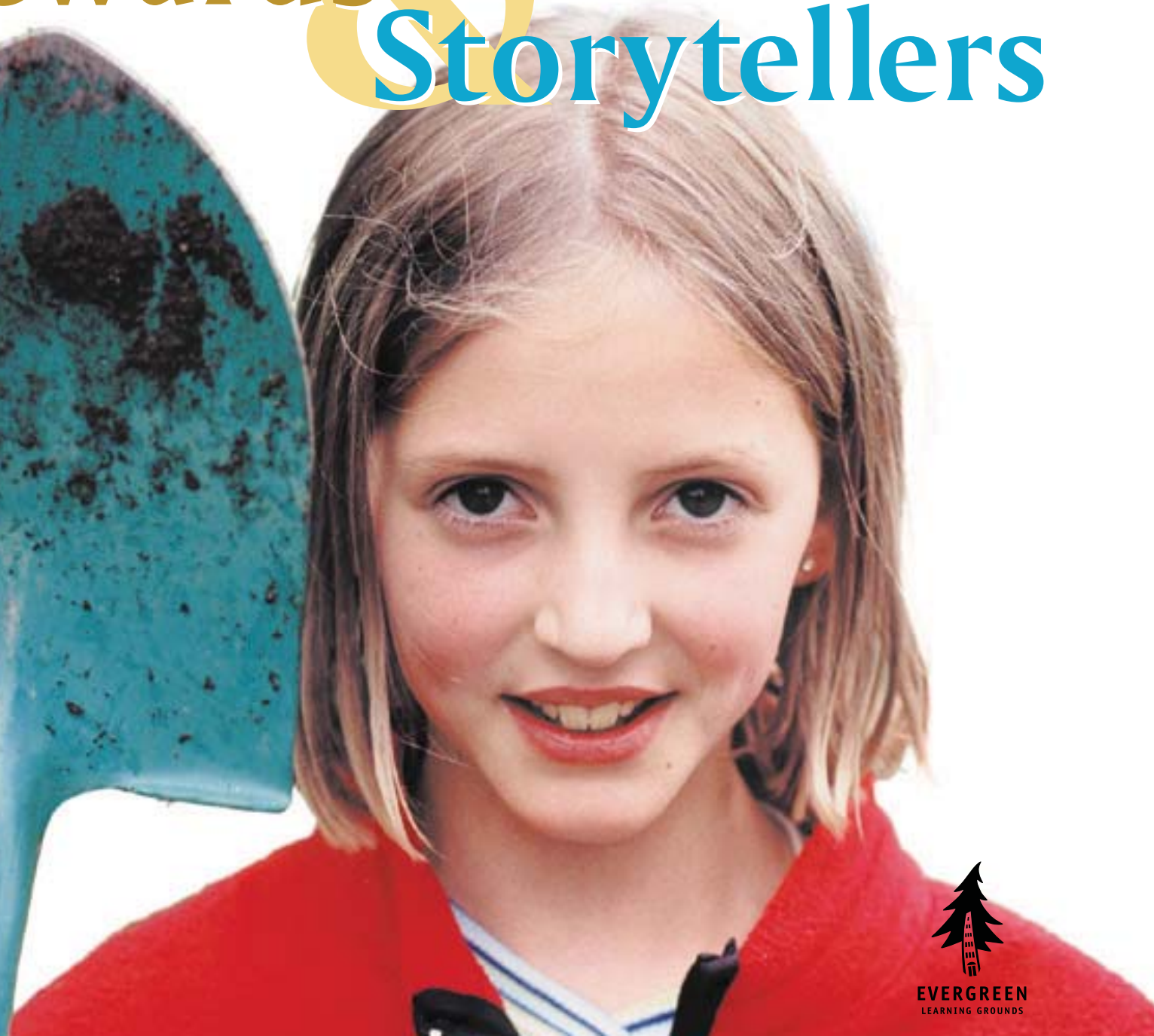


THE GREENING OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHOOL GROUNDS

Stewards & Storytellers



EVERGREEN
LEARNING GROUNDS



Evergreen & Learning Grounds

Evergreen's mission is to bring communities and nature together for the benefit of both. We engage people in creating and sustaining healthy, dynamic outdoor spaces—in our schools, our communities and our homes. We believe that local stewardship creates vibrant neighbourhoods, a healthy natural environment and a sustainable society for all.

Learning Grounds brings students, teachers and neighbourhoods together to transform asphalt and concrete school grounds into natural “outdoor classrooms” by creating wildflower meadows, ponds, and vegetable patches. Children at these schools receive a close-up, hands-on opportunity to learn in the ever-changing world of nature.

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Forward

The process of change involves risk, chance, and courage. The following stories illustrate how engaging and exhilarating this process can be. For each of the positive changes to school grounds documented in this book, there are hundreds of others in B.C. and across Canada that deserve our admiration. for their tremendous efforts to make improvements to their school grounds. Bringing nature back to school grounds is a growing movement that has captured the interest of students, teachers, and officials right around the world.

These stories stand as signposts that mark the emergence of a new generation becoming steeped in both the practice and spirit of restoration. The beauty is in the details—the adaptations and connections to local ecology, community, and culture.

In a very practical sense, we are witnessing the creation of more diverse school grounds with a greater variety of opportunities that stimulate the bodies and minds of students, while promoting positive social interactions and a sense of well-being.

It is hard not to share in the joy of those whose accomplishments we are celebrating here. It is a picture of people connecting with each other, with soil and plants, with creativity and determination, and with a process that is inherently restorative.

Here's to all those who are making extraordinary efforts to improve our everyday places.

Cam Collyer

NATIONAL MANAGER, LEARNING GROUNDS

STEWARDS & STORYTELLERS



Introduction

This is a very different kind of resource book for school communities. The storytelling format was chosen to reflect not just information, but the deeper sense of positive transformation these outdoor projects brought to the participants. The schools who were included were selected through a questionnaire and then interviewed extensively by a researcher. Information was gathered according to a framework developed by Evergreen designed to focus on the process and challenges of school ground naturalization. The story as told by each school was written up and then submitted to that school for a final review.

The case studies are intended to be both useful and inspirational. Besides the narrative associated with each project, readers can get a bird's eye view of each school, a timeline overview, and the dirt about school ground details. By finding schools with comparable profiles and challenges, schools can learn from the stories so generously shared by others. The insights and information presented here will hopefully encourage and assist other schools to undertake similar projects.

Rather than simply restoring nature, the common themes intertwining through all these stories are the inspiration and vision of the adults involved, and the joy and pride of the children at having participated in transforming their world. In a world where wilderness is disappearing, here are the stories of a few schools who have managed to weave nature into the memory of all those who pass through their grounds.

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HIGHLANDS ELEMENTARY

NORTH VANCOUVER



“It took so much effort and there was a lot of weekend stuff. It became a social group—really quite pleasant.”

Before—mud, soggy ground and drainage pipes

At Highlands Elementary School, student members of the “Earth-Shakers” group are the planners and tenders of the gardens.

Before the naturalization projects, the school grounds of this North Vancouver public elementary school were asphalt, gravel and poorly drained grass areas.

According to Jeff Philips, a parent and landscape architect who spearheaded the master planning process and the naturalization projects, “There were some painted concrete drainage pipes that the kids were supposed to climb into for play, but no one used them. These pipes were concrete, they were hard and uncomfortable, they were ugly, and it was nothing but dirt and mud.”

Planning—the stinging nettle debate

A group of ten parents started the project planning in 1996. The parent group thought the school grounds “needed a fix-up,” so plans for “beautification” were being made. Fortuitously, two of the parents were landscape architects. “Maybe,” they suggested, the school grounds could be “greener”.

It took the committee one year of planning, consultation with students and school staff, and fundraising before they were going full speed ahead. The parents were tremendously committed to the project, volunteering a huge amount of time to obtain materials, make contacts and ask for donations of materials and labour to complete the planned projects. “It took so much effort and there was a lot of weekend stuff. It became a social group—really quite pleasant,” said teacher Joyce Page.



Philips did not let the funding cuts to education dampen his enthusiasm for transforming Highlands' school grounds.

The parent committee did preliminary brainstorming, generating many different ideas for “greening” projects at Highlands, and then they discussed their ideas with the kids. One of the popular suggestions was the creation of a butterfly garden and it was agreed that the garden would be built. But one of the plants that attract butterflies as a food plant for the caterpillars, stinging nettle, also has some potentially unpleasant characteristics for anyone who touches it. This was a cause for some debate among concerned parents on the committee. But they came up with a creative solution: included with the planting of stinging nettle would be Western Dock, which is the antidote to stinging nettle.

For Jeff Philips, the opportunities for the naturalization projects are endless. Philips did not let the funding cuts to education dampen his enthusiasm for transforming Highlands Elementary's school grounds. Instead, he sees the need for parents to become more involved in the rewarding planning process for their children's schools.

Site Preparation—making mountains

The school grounds were plagued with drainage problems. But with every problem, the committee saw an opportunity for the garden projects. Unwanted water in

some areas of the butterfly garden will be redirected over time to create a wetland environment in another area of the school.

Under the direction of parent Kris Christensen, thirty truckloads of fill were dumped off at the school to make the raised areas and hills for the butterfly garden. Kris states, “The children enthusiastically volunteered their recess time to scavenge for rocks. Within 15 minutes, a hive of student activity had dug through the soil and found enough rocks to create “kid-made” rock borders for planting areas within the garden.”



Bird's Eye View

Student Population	343
Grade Level	KG—Grade 7
Special Features	Mural with native butterfly theme, garden, Chinese plant educational garden, compost bins, street trees planted and named by students, seating areas in garden
Funding to Date	\$5,500
Project Start Date	Fall 1996





Highlands Elementary, North Vancouver

Timeline

Project Started	Fall 1996
Plans Finalised	Fall 1997
Planting Started	Fall 1997



“The children decided where the garden plots and pathways should be located, and went to it.”

Planting—a huge change

Each class proudly adopted, named and planted a donated tree in planned locations around the school grounds. But it was the creation and planting of the butterfly garden two years later that really created the most exciting change in the school grounds. “It was fascinating to watch the children create the garden,” Page remembered. “They decided where the garden plots and pathways should be located and went to it.”

The EarthShakers were also amazed by the transformation they had helped make happen, “We grew the plants by ourselves and we planted them. And then one morning there was a huge change.”

Fundraising the rock and roll way

From the beginning, Highlands School's staff, parents, and students participated in creative fundraising initiatives. The parents solicited support from others not directly involved in the school. “I can't stress enough how much support we got from the community,” said parent Trish Panz. With a grant from the United Church, a donation of over fifty trees and many shrubs, huge amounts of soil, raffle proceeds, labour and the loan of a huge yellow Bobcat to regrade the butterfly garden and remove blacktop, the community pitched in to make the garden possible.

Another parent group committee also raised money for the garden through a big plant sale they organize every year in May.

During the sale a Master Gardener comes to the school to pass on her garden knowledge to a younger generation.

Another creative initiative was a “Rock Rodeo” at a concert performed by students. Admission to the concert was by donation of a large rock needed in the construction of the butterfly garden.

Community outreach and communication— “The school's never looked better”

A few mishaps informed the parent committee of the need to keep communication lines open among all parties involved with the school ground planning process. To share information, the parents started a continuing series of reports in the school newsletter. Although the parents were fortunate to have contacts in the community, they also stressed the need for the school's staff members to get involved in the process to really make the “greening” projects a success.

Parent Pam Goldsmith-Jones noticed a big difference in the neighborhood's senior's response to the “greening” of the school grounds and the butterfly garden. “The kinds of things I hear in the neighbourhood are now, ‘The school's never looked better’. Seniors now walk through the school ground and into the butterfly garden, whereas before they went around the school.”



“Every Wednesday we'd come out and have lunch and then we'd talk about the butterfly garden, and sometimes we'd plant,” said one student.

Maintenance

Very little vandalism affected the newly built garden areas. Young people who play basketball at the school after hours would leave their garbage, a tree was damaged and some picnic tables were trashed. But the EarthShakers were not too disheartened by the vandalism and were actively involved in alleviating the impact. “Each class picks up garbage around the school,” said an EarthShaker.

The parents are also involved in the garden's maintenance. During the summer when the students are not at school, parents sign up to water the newly planted areas and Philips, an arborist, does corrective training and pruning on newly planted trees.

Under the direction of parents Trish Panz and Kris Christensen, it is the EarthShakers who see themselves as the primary caretakers of the gardens. “Every Wednesday we'd come out and have lunch and then we'd talk about the butterfly garden and sometimes we'd plant,” said one student.

The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Asphalt	6839 m2	6748 m2	- 91 m2
Grass	1140 m2	807 m2	- 424 m2
Gravel	6839 m2	3506 m2	- 3333 m2
Planted area	1140 m2	3757 m2	2617 m2
Trees	15	69	54
Shrubs	25	725	700
Annual plants	—	hundreds	hundreds
Benches	—	5	5
Rocks	loose rocks	dry creek bed	—
Picnic Tables	—	2	2

Outdoor learning

The parent committee created a book specifically noting the newly planted trees and plants at the school and their special characteristics and properties. The book is kept in the library for easy access for students and staff.

Some parents would like to see more teachers using the garden for multi-disciplinary teaching. “There's such a push in the public school system to have computers and technology,” Panz commented, “We are trying to balance and support technology, but also understand that there is a natural world that we are connected to and is vital for us.”



Some connections are now being made as part of the outdoor educational program. Primary level students now take part in collecting seeds from the garden in the fall and propagating them in the spring. When the plants are large enough, they are planted into the butterfly garden. To help enforce the connection with the garden, there is a continuum to this work. Every year, groups

The teachers are also now using the garden for different class studies, art, science, ecology, poetry and other classes.



collect seeds from the existing plants they themselves have planted, and later propagate them for replanting back into the garden.

The teachers are also now using the garden for different class studies: art, science, ecology, poetry and other classes. The grade five students have mapped the plants and honed their plant identification skills. When the butterflies arrive in the garden, the students learn which plants the caterpillars and adults feed on.

According to teacher Joyce Page, “The garden really fits into the curriculum so easily. The outdoor environment is becoming more and more a part of science.”

Gold-Jones was extremely pleased to see that the garden has become entrenched in the school's environmental education practices. As part of the science curriculum, butterfly larvae are grown to maturity and the adults are released into the garden. This is something that the kids really look forward to each year.

According to Panz, “We want to teach the children that you can't be afraid of something like stinging nettle or a thistle. It's out there for a reason, and if it's

not there, then you're not going to continue that butterfly's life cycle. And if we don't have little pockets in our community where they have access to that food source, then the butterflies are not going to be there.”

Celebrating successes— "Wow, a tremendous amount happened."

In just three years, Highlands Elementary Schools' garden volunteers have witnessed a tremendous amount of change.

Page measured the success of the butterfly garden by the amount of enthusiasm the students consistently demonstrate for new projects. “Each year,” she explains, “the grade seven class leaves something for the school. Last year the grade sevens designed and raised money to paint the butterfly wall.” Other student-raised funds have purchased special trees and a sundial for the garden.

With a few parent volunteers moving on, some teachers voiced their concern for the garden's future. “These parents had the drive and the organizational skills to get other parents going,” Page mentioned, “Now there are a couple of parents who seem to want to take it over, but one has just gotten a job so I'm not quite sure what's going to happen.”

Despite this temporary setback, Jeff Philips sees the garden as a continually evolving process. “The garden's never done, it's never complete. The education should never stop.” 🌲

CARIHI HIGH SCHOOL

CAMPBELL RIVER

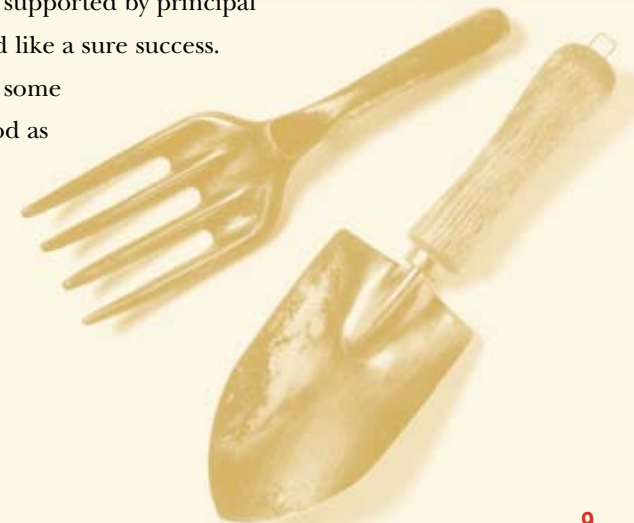


Before—a rural moonscape

Carihi High School lies in rural B.C. in the midst of some of the most beautiful wilderness area in the world, and yet the school grounds were bleak and uninspiring. The grounds “looked like a moonscape” before the garden project, according to teacher Mary Ellen Collura.

In 1997, the school underwent a provincial accreditation process. One recommendation arising from this process was that more attention be paid to both the inside and outside environment of the school. An environment committee was formed and soon the garden idea was hatched. Championed by Collura and fully supported by principal Walter Biegler, the project seemed like a sure success.

“We have a good school here and some people felt that it should look good as well,” commented Biegler.





Planning—windows on the natural world

The wall of huge windows in Carihi’s library overlooked a central part of the school grounds. The area outside the windows was a dry and desolate area, though, with brown dried out grass and mud as its main feature. Yet for all its lack of appeal, the site was still a popular hang out for students. For these reasons, and because the visibility of the area was seen as an advantage in reducing vandalism, the environment committee chose this setting to make the garden.



At this point, the project encountered an obstacle: would the maintenance union refuse to sanction the project?



Bird’s Eye View

Student Population	900
Grade level	Grade 10-12
Special Features	native plant garden, landscaped garden
Funding to Date	\$3500
Project Start Date	September 1997

Timeline

Project Start Date	September 1997
Irrigation & Ground Preparation	September/October 1998
Main Planting Event	October 1998

When the union did decide to participate, the school’s garden project got their wholehearted cooperation.

This was a serious concern since other schools and parent groups in the area had seen projects scuttled in the past because they infringed on the work of the bargaining unit.

Union concerns—being up-front

Respect for the union’s point of view played a large part in the ensuing negotiations. The Environment Committee approached the president of the union and explained all the ways the garden project would be relevant to educational outcomes and programs. They also explained that even with a project of this scope, the students would be doing most of the work and no outside contracting of paid non-union workers would be used.

“It was a big accomplishment,” Biegler noted, “That was one step, to tie it into the curriculum. The other part was being up-front about what the scope of the project was, what we wanted from them, namely, their support and cooperation. We didn’t want to do anything they would be unhappy about or would have to do or undo.”

When the union did decide to participate, the school’s garden project got their wholehearted cooperation.

Especially important was the enthusiastic cooperation of the main Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)



representative Barry Kegler, who was in charge of maintenance and landscaping and who had children in the school. He helped with planning, drew the final site plan, and as well, helped with plant selection.

Site preparation and planting— the honouring of new life

Due to the scope and complexity of the project, planning was crucial for the planting. “It was like planning D-day because it all had to be timed to the hour,” Collura remembered.

Irrigation was the important first step in site preparation. The maintenance union decided that they had to lay down the irrigation pipes and this in turn determined where the beds were going to be. From then on, “The kids did all the work.” The students moved five truckloads of dirt, laid out the underlying soil, positioned all the plant and flower-beds, put in the gravel walkways, and laid down the ties.

The school received permission from B.C. Forest Management to dig up some of the native plants in the nearby forest. The plan included using the

The young mothers decided they would plant rhododendrons in honour of their babies.

grade ten co-op class to do most of the physical labour. This special education co-op program allowed the students to do outdoor plantings and trail building, and was a perfect fit for the garden project.

Another aspect of the planting day called for students who were young mothers to plant spring bulbs such as yellow tulips. The event was so successful that the students planned a follow-up planting for the spring when



The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Grass	—	808 m2	808 m2
Gravel	—	80 m2	80 m2
Planted area	—	404 m2	404 m2
Trees	—	14	14
Shrubs	—	15	15
Native wildflowers	Weeds	72	72
Annual plants	—	100 bulbs, 50 perennials	150
Planter boxes	—	1	1
Benches	—	1	1

“By Friday afternoon it was green turf, plants in place, flowerbeds all tidied up. The transformation in that one week was astounding...”



the young mothers would plant rhododendrons in honour of their babies.

Principal Biegler, though always fully supportive of the project, was a little awestruck at its success. “On a Monday morning that area was still a patch of rock and gravel,” he said, “By Friday afternoon it was green turf, plants in place, flowerbeds all tidied up. The transformation in that one week was astounding...The neatest thing was seeing how in just one week this thing mushroomed.”

A place of remembrance

Vandalism, though initially a concern of school staff, proved not to be an issue. When a student who had attended the school was tragically killed, an anonymous mourner placed a wreath in the middle of the garden. Months later the wreath was still there. “The students have shown tremendous solicitous respect for the area,” Collura commented.

Maintenance

Collura explained that they tried to make the garden easy to look after. They put in an irrigation system so that

the garden could be watered by an automatic timer. The school also put in specially chosen indigenous plants as ground cover to make the garden more self-sustaining. This helped solve one of the concerns in planning which was to avoid plants needing high maintenance in the summertime.

The CUPE union insisted on doing what little maintenance there was to be done on an ongoing basis. In the spirit of good faith the school had cultivated with the union this wasn't a problem for either party. Biegler explained how both parties sat down ahead of time and worked out the maintenance issue. They decided to keep it low maintenance, with plenty of bark mulch to minimize weeding. This left a few maintenance tasks such as mowing, which the union agreed to take on in perpetuity.

Celebrating successes— “Wow! Look what we've done.”

The union members involved said that they were proud of the improvements. Indicative of this pride was a victory snapshot, taken on planting day, showing the grounds' foreman who is a CUPE member, standing alongside the entire class who had just helped in the spreading of the topsoil. On the Monday after the garden was planted, the students entered the library in record numbers. They lined up at the window and stared with awe and pride at all that they had accomplished.



One idea is to invite the three different First Nations communities attending the school to carve welcome poles to honour its traditions and values.

The Co-op service Education Program Coordinator John Jepson, whose students did much of the work on planting day, was overjoyed. “I remember that afternoon. We sat back and said ‘Wow! Look what we’ve done.’”

Planning for the future

The school decided to broaden the scope of the garden project and make it more meaningful by reaching out to the community. One idea is to invite the three different First Nations communities attending the school to carve welcome poles. The poles could provide a focal point at the entrance of the school to honour its traditions and values.

With the image of the memorial wreath someone had placed in the garden still fresh in his mind, Biegler talked about the sense of value and meaning the space could have in the future. “We got to thinking, ‘How many other students have died over the years?’ We still remember them. We still talk about them.” The committee’s idea was to approach the parents of these former students and ask each parent to plant a memorial tree in honour of their child.

Advice: communication and commitment

Carihi staff pass on simple, but effective words of advice to others who want to transform their school grounds.

“Be open about what’s happening and publicize it. This will help get others to buy into the project,” advised principal Walter Biegler.

Mary Ellen Collura also passed on some final advice: “You have to have a group of people who are committed and who will see it through.” 🌲



‘Iiyus St̓lul’iq̓iļ

DUNCAN



Before—some brush and a few rocks

‘Iiyus St̓lul’iq̓iļ School is located in Duncan, a rural area of British Columbia. The School is operated by the Cowichan Tribes and is a nursery and kindergarten facility with 80 students. ‘Iiyus St̓lul’iq̓iļ borders an outdoor area and parking lot shared with Lelumel Daycare and Ya Th̓y Thut, an adult training center. The outdoor area is common to all three facilities.

Principal Fran Rose and groundskeeper Mike Moses described the outdoor area before the garden as just having some brush and a few rocks. It was overgrown with broom and invasive grass. Although there was a lovely, large maple tree, it was overgrown with weeds. Generally, the shared outdoor area was unattractive and inaccessible.

Planning—a team effort

‘Iiyus St̓lul’iq̓iļ received a fax from The Evergreen Foundation publicizing a school ground naturalization grant of five hundred dollars. “We decided to give it a try,” said Rose.

To get people interested in the possibilities of transforming the outdoor area, Rose met with representatives from the three main groups sharing the space to discuss the kind of project they would like to undertake. She then discussed the plans with the children, parents and her own staff members. After the grant proposal was accepted, a committee was formed to manage the development of the



project with representatives from each of the three facilities situated on the school grounds.

Moses did most of the planning in consultation with the teachers and children. “This project was a team effort, but the hardest part was getting started,” he explained. “It takes a lot of coordinating, which is difficult when everybody has different schedules. The hardest part was getting organized to make a good presentation and plan that we could all work off of.”

“This wasn’t about moving plants, it was about getting plants that weren’t already growing in nature.”

Moses talked to the instructors and the principals about whether there was anything they would like in the plan. To them, pathways were important so that they could walk their students through.

The next step was putting together the plant list and preparing the design for the shrub borders and trails. The idea was to make the paths look natural and inviting. “When I did the research for plants that were local to this area,” Moses reflected, “I tried to pick plants that would make the area look more interesting and more natural to be around.”

The children helped in the planning process. Fran Rose took the children to the site and talked about how many

Bird’s Eye View

Student Population	80
Grade level	Nursery School—K
Special Features	Bird Houses, Stepping Stones
Funding to Date	\$500
Project Start Date	March 1998

beautiful plants there are in nature. They went for walks, and talked about the importance of not taking plants from nature, but buying them from a nursery where they are started from seed.

This lesson was put into practice when one of the teachers from Ya Thũy Thut took her students for a walk and, having the best of intentions, returned with plants for the garden picked from the surrounding area. “We realized how important it was for us all to understand that this wasn’t about moving plants,” Rose maintained, “It was about getting plants that weren’t already growing in nature.” This incident spurred the school to improve the lines of communication regarding the goals of the project and to educate everyone about the importance of leaving native plants in their habitat.

The exception to this rule was when new houses were being built on Cowichan Tribes land. In this case, the group could rescue the plants that would otherwise have been destroyed when the foundations were put in.



Timeline

Project Start Date	March 1998
Project Planning	May/June 1998
Project Planting	October 1998





'Iiyus Stlul'iqul, Duncan

Site preparation—an innovative approach

After a walk through the proposed site for the garden, the children noticed that they would need more soil for the garden. This gave them a chance to use their compost and have fun as they deepened their appreciation for creating the garden.

A strong sense of ingenuity and resourcefulness was also important in creating the garden. When the parking lot was paved and there was some extra asphalt, Moses stacked it up, making a bench. “It turned out really nice.”

Planting

Rose involved some of the daycare children in the planting, as well as the 'Iiyus Stlul'iqul classes. “With the daycare,” she admitted, “it’s a little harder because they are so little. Some of the children planted—the three and four



year olds,” she clarified, “but of course the babies didn’t.”

Working with such young children meant decreasing the size of the groups actually working in the garden. The original intent had been to have a great big planting day when everything would get planted. But it turned out a little bit different than planned with groups of one, two, and maximum three children planting at a time. Working in smaller groups also gave Moses a better chance to tell the kids what was going on, for example, why the logs were being left where they were.

Connection and community—children leading elders through the garden

The garden has been a focus for connecting the children and adults of the different facilities, and for engaging the broader community. Claudia Roland, program coordinator of the Ya Thuy Thut Training Centre noted that many adult students have children who attend 'Iiyus Stlul'iqul and the daycare. “So it would be a nice situation for them to be working with their children,” she said, “doing something really creative, productive and positive.”

The garden project has also enhanced the working relationships between the staff of the different facilities. According to Claudia, “It’s a nice way of bringing the staff together too. A lot of our staff went to 'Iiyus Stlul'iqul when they were children. It was in the basement of the old band offices. It’s been like ‘that was the best time of my life and now I’m back at it.’”

The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Asphalt	50 m2	25m2	- 25 m2
Grass	375 m2	325 m2	- 50 m2
Gravel	75 m2	50 m2	- 25 m2
Planted area	Around foundation only	100 m2	100 m2
Trees	2	7	5
Shrubs	10	22	12
Native wildflowers	—	106	106
Benches	—	1	1
Logs	—	3	3

“There’s a native medicine women who knows the plants and she’s an elder. We’re going to be having her in to walk through the garden and explain everything.”

The garden has provided an excellent reason to invite elders, the daycare, and the parents to the area. The three facilities plan to bring more people to the garden, including parent and elders groups from Cowichan. Because some of the elders are in wheelchairs, the children will help lead them through the garden. The garden acts as a focal point, something that the children can proudly talk about with others from the broader community.

Outdoor learning—a heritage link

The school made birdfeeders during the winter months. Rose described how “the children watched as Mike put up the bird feeders. Using a pulley, the children would fill the feeders and then watch for birds. They really enjoyed the bird house, and it helped everybody see that it could be a year round activity.”

“It’s hard to explain things to kindergarten and preschool kids,” Moses said. “Generally, they’re more interested in digging the holes and putting the plants in.” But he also acknowledged that “it does give them basic knowledge that there is a difference between the natural landscape and the urban landscape.”

The school easily incorporated existing curriculum material with the experiential learning available through the garden. Rose noted that one class was reading *Log Hotel*, a book about all the things living in

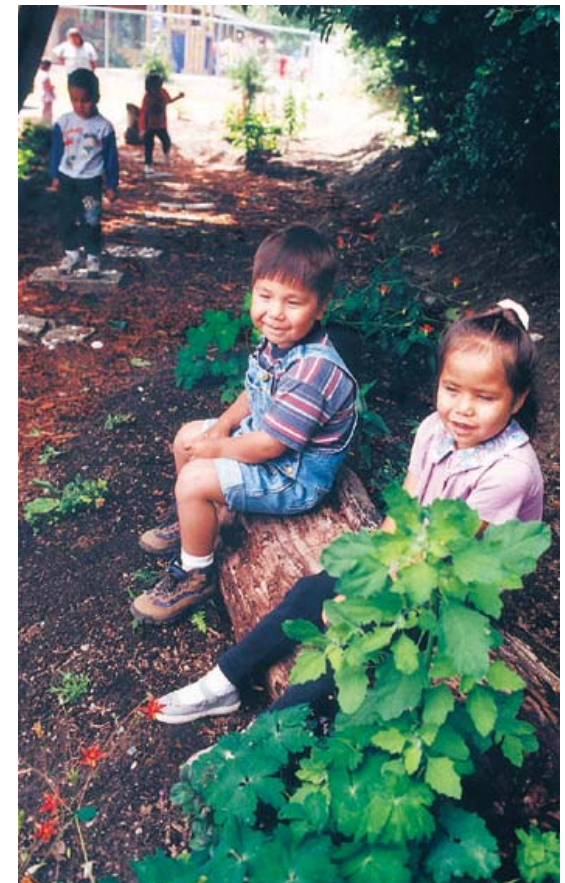
a rotting log which teaches about the complex relationships found in nature.

Rose also had plans to invite elders to explain to the children the cultural significance of the plants and “how the plants were used long ago.”

Roland was also enthused about this idea for the adult training center: “There’s a native medicine women who knows the plants and she’s an elder. We’re going to be having her in to walk through the garden and explain everything. The tribe has a book out on it which we have, but it’s so much nicer to hear it in person.”

“It’s nice,” Roland said, “when we’re doing science, the students can look and see: these are the plants that our ancestors used and it kind of brings closeness.”

“It’s right there,” she added, “a teaching tool right beside us.”





"We'll have to see what the children and the teachers want to do next."



Stepping stones to celebrate successes

Rose summarized the project's success in terms of its excellence in "bringing people together from different groups." The garden has created the link with the adult school that she had hoped for. As an example, she said, "We're meeting next week with the adult training program, and they're getting together with the kindergarten children to make stepping stones—those cement ones which you can put leaf prints or fern prints."

"We're looking forward to it!" Roland added; "I love gardening. So when I see them doing it and enjoying it with their children, it's really special. It is new and I think as the plants grow, it's just going to keep being better."

Rose agreed that the garden was special and said, "We'll have to see what the children and the teachers want to do next." 🌲

L'ÉCOLE BILINGUE

VANCOUVER



The grade-four teacher Christine Bolzner thought the school yard “looked like a jail cell before, with the gravel field and gray concrete.”



Before

L'École Bilingue, a primary French immersion school in central Vancouver, was a pioneer school in naturalizing school grounds. Parent Danaca Ackerson was told by the site's landscape architect, also a parent, that “a prison yard is actually nicer” than L'École Bilingue's school yard.

Ackerson volunteered her time at the school in order to make a difference for her children. When she took over the garden project from another parent in 1996, Ackerson became the main coordinator of the project—just in time for the planting events.

Grade four environmental education teacher Christine Bolzner thought the school yard “looked like a jail cell before, with the gravel field and gray concrete. It looked so sterile.” She was very supportive of the parents' initiative. “We as adults wouldn't want to be in a place like that for eight hours a day.”



Bird's Eye View

Student Population	360
Grade level	K- 7
Special Features	bird bath rock, bird houses, large through native garden, seating around three planter boxes
Funding to Date	\$6000
Project Start Date	June 1995

“The kids drew a map and made a wish list... then we narrowed it down to what could realistically be put in.”

Timeline

Project Start Date	June 1995
Plans Finalised	January 1997
Planting Event	April 1997

The students also had a lot to say about the state of the space before the project. “Before this was lots of concrete and stuff,” the students said.

“People were not playing there as much because there nothing to do. It was just cement.”

But in this sunny garden with light dappling through the canopy of trees, students’ minds didn’t dwell for long on concrete.

Planning—a group effort

After an Evergreen Foundation workshop with the parents’ group, four parents formed a committee specifically to work on the garden project.

To develop the garden plan, the parents consulted the school and got a copy of the site plan. They made modified copies of the site plan, leaving in the structural elements that wouldn’t change, but blanking out the space where the garden was proposed. Next, they asked the students to draw their ideas on the modified copies of the plan. From here, a parent who was a landscape architect drew up plans for the garden. Bolzner remembered the process well: “the kids drew a map and made a wish list...then we narrowed it down to what could realistically be put in.”

Once the parents submitted the plans to the school board, they ran into a few challenges. The outdoor classroom that was planned for the west side of the school called for a secure, enclosed area with seating in the middle, surrounded by trees and trellises. The school board vetoed this plan due to security



There was mud everywhere and kids asked questions until their teachers and parents were dizzy.

concerns as they thought it would be too difficult for the playground monitor to supervise. Evergreens with low canopies were another safety concern since there was a risk that the children would climb the trees. Disappointed but not defeated, the parents redesigned the plans and decided to build a smaller garden on the east side of the school.

Most of the plant choices were native. However, some non-native tree species which leaf late in the spring and lose their leaves early were chosen in order to get the most natural light into the classrooms during the school year.

Planting—bringing colour into the garden

Students grew seedlings in their classrooms for weeks. Each morning, and several times daily, every student checked on the seedlings' progress. The excitement mounted as the seeds sprouted and planting day approached.

On a rainy spring Saturday morning, many students, their parents and teachers came out to plant the new garden. Students learned how deep to dig and to put enough space between the plants. There was mud everywhere and kids asked questions until their teachers and parents were dizzy.

“The Oregon Grape are nice because they have red berries on them. This was my favourite part of the planting”, said a student.

“We planted all native plants—plants you would find in B.C.,” pointed out another student.

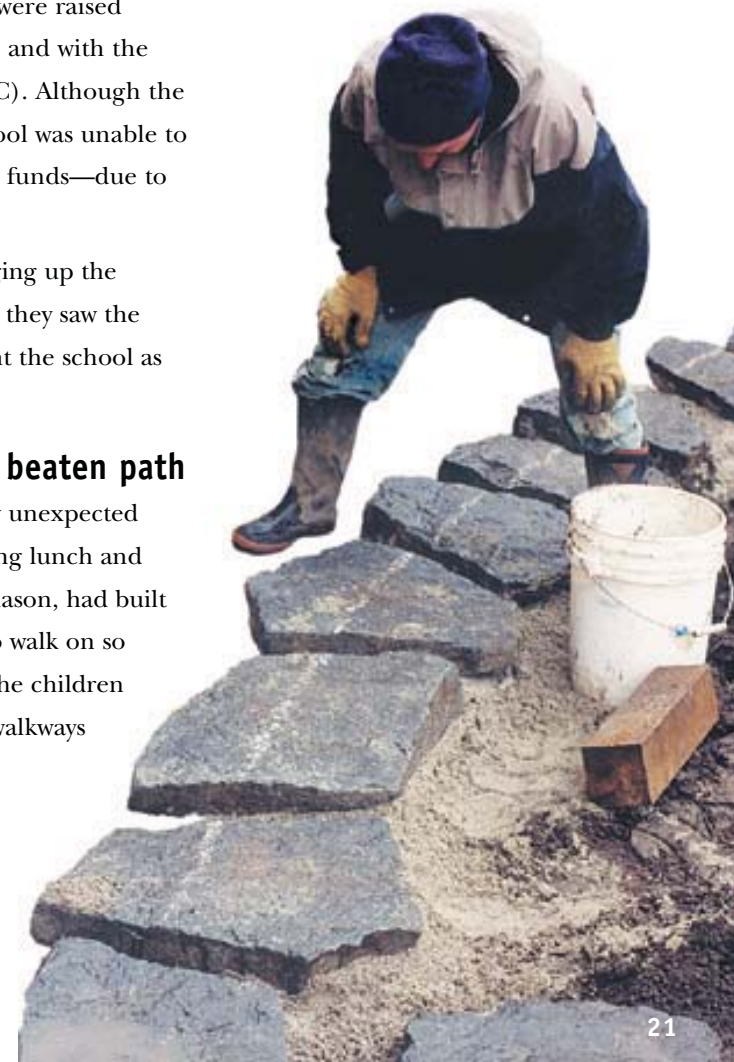
Fundraising—hot dog days and penny drives

Over two years, sufficient funds for the garden were raised through hot dog days, penny drives, plant sales, and with the support of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Although the principal was supportive of the project, the school was unable to get more involved—by committing staff time or funds—due to the funding cutbacks.

The school board donated their services by digging up the asphalt for free and donating the top soil. Once they saw the garden and the new mural, they decided to paint the school as well—an unexpected bonus.

Wear and tear, and straying off the beaten path

Parents and teachers have been faced with a few unexpected problems. The kids gravitate to the garden during lunch and recess. The dads, including one who is a stonemason, had built paths throughout the garden for the children to walk on so that the vegetation wouldn't be destroyed. But the children refused to confine themselves to the neat little walkways laid out for them. Not surprisingly, the children were drawn off the beaten path to play in the plants and garden spaces.





L'École Bilingue, Vancouver

To prevent the kids from trampling on the plants, the garden committee put a fence around the native plant garden. This was a bit of a disappointment as they had wanted the kids to be able to walk along the path.

The garden has not been immune from vandalism either. “We had corn in the planter boxes and kids would take them out and smash them...They just did it for fun,” said a student.

Maintenance and summer droughts

The soil donated by the Vancouver School Board had a lot of clay. The parent’s committee added compost twice to try and improve the quality of the soil. Unfortunately, school board concerns over rodents prevented the school from developing their own compost.



The parents arranged access to the school over the summer months in order to take turns watering the garden. This plan worked well the first summer but the second summer presented a coordination problem. When the parent with the key to the school went on holiday, other parents were not able to access the water and watering equipment. There was a long stretch of exceptionally dry summer weather with no water and the garden suffered.

Although the school board maintenance workers had access to the school, their primary responsibility was to water the trees. Eventually, they started to water the plants as well, but since the parents didn’t know the maintenance workers’ schedule, and as it was not officially their responsibility to maintain the garden, the parents could not depend on the maintenance crew to take over.

Stewardship and creating a space for the community

The garden has brought other unexpected advantages. After school parents come and sit around the garden while watching their kids play. “Just to see that is nice,” commented teacher Michelle Christen.

The garden committee is also pleased to see the community enjoying the garden on weekends. Ackerson has seen people sitting on the steps playing guitar. Several neighbors have commented on how great the space looks. Since there are no parks in the area, the school ground now acts as a more enjoyable communal space for the neighbourhood.

The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Asphalt	8247 m2	7732 m2	- 515 m2
Planted area	258 m2	515 m2	+ 257
Trees	only around perimeter of school ground	14	+ 14
Shrubs	—	20	+20
Native wildflowers	—	40	+40
Annual plants	—	300	+300
Planter boxes	1	4	+3
Benches	—	2	+2
Rocks	—	1	+1
Picnic Tables	—	3	+3



While the teachers were extremely supportive of the garden, the biggest challenge for the parents has been in getting the school to take ownership of the garden, and the teachers to use the area. One suggestion has been to have a curriculum document that links instructional resources to garden activities for the children.

Ownership has certainly not been an issue for the students though. Some students took on full ownership, if not responsibility, right after the original planting event by pointing out, “That’s mine! That’s the one I planted!”

Outdoor learning

The teachers were looking forward to integrating the garden into the classroom at every level. “When it’s sunnier we take our reading outside so the kids can be outdoors doing their work. That’s the real sense the outdoors actually becomes the classroom.”

The students as well are ready to become teachers in their outdoor classroom. Sitting outside at the picnic tables and observing their teacher intently as she spoke about the garden, the children were ready with their own advice. “Don’t put plants that will die in the winter, put more evergreens,” one student suggested.

“If you’re planting berries, they really like low spots where water can reach them,” another student added.

One student’s hand shot straight up in the air. “Don’t use pesticides!”

“When it’s sunnier we take our reading outside so the kids can be outdoors doing their work. That’s the real sense the outdoors actually becomes the classroom.”

Christen told a story about being outside, watering the garden in September, when two students came along and looked at a sunflower, unaware of her presence; “They were asking each other: ‘Do you think those seeds are ready to eat?’ and the other: ‘No, no don’t touch them, they’re not ready yet, we have to wait!’ And I thought to myself, you know this whole conversation would have not happened before if we didn’t have this plant. Just for that, it was worth the effort.”

Renewal and sustainability— “It’s made an enormous difference.”

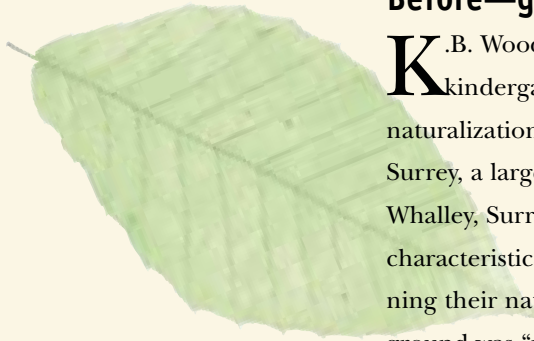
The mantle of tending to the garden was eventually passed on to a new parent committee. This new committee divided up the tasks since they recognize that it isn’t sustainable to have one person take on all the responsibility.

Teacher Girard-Fortier captured some of her confidence about the garden in an old saying: “When you get married it lasts for a few years but when you plant a garden it lasts for a lifetime.” She went on to say that the garden will always be important in the education of children because, through the garden, L’École Bilingue is helping make the planet a better place. 🌲



K.B. WOODWARD

SURREY



Before—gravel, blacktop, and two trees

K.B. Woodward Elementary serves students from kindergarten to grade 7 and was, at the time of the naturalization project, the largest elementary school in Surrey, a large suburban city near Vancouver. Located in Whalley, Surrey's city center, K.B. Woodward has many characteristics of an urban, inner-city school. Before beginning their naturalization project, K.B. Woodward's school ground was "pretty awful," a field of gravel with only two trees in the entire area. Teachers and parents alike had a feeling that something needed to be done.

Getting started— planning, research, and going slow

Teacher Lynda Bent championed the project from the very beginning. Attending an Evergreen Foundation workshop on school ground naturalization motivated her to plunge headlong into the project. She used pictures of what school grounds were like, and what they could be like with a bit of greening, as a source of inspiration for herself, and to inspire others. With the help of a consultant who suggested species for plantings, the teachers presented their ideas to naturalize the school grounds to the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). To set goals for the project and help guide it, a School Ground Naturalization Committee was formed, comprised of both teachers and parents.





The Committee identified eleven sites around the school as possibilities for naturalization. The whole project was planned in practical, incremental phases meant not to be overwhelming, and to be carried out over a period of

For the students, the favorite part of planting was getting dirty because “it was the most fun.”

three years. For example, the grade three’s began phase one by researching native plants for planting in planter boxes. Over the next phases, the students played an increasingly integral role in choosing plants—they made sure none of the plants were poisonous, in case small children ate them. In working on the design, they chose natural barriers such as Oregon Grape, whose sharp leaves would prevent children from trampling over the garden.

The students then made maps for the garden. They chose to locate paths through the Aspen Grove so that kids could appreciate the plants “without stepping all over them.”

A team approach

Before planting in the first phase, the school held a “Planter Box Construction Day” with staff, students, and parents working together to build over 60 feet of planter boxes. “We had parents here who had never swung a hammer before,” parent Randy Price remembered. Within a



Bird’s Eye View

Student Population	550
Grade Level	K- Grade 7
Special Features	Butterfly garden, winter garden, kindergarten forest, wildlife hedgerow, orchard, walled garden.
Funding to Date	\$4800
Project Start Date	October 1995
Awards	VanCity’s Youth Environmental Service Award, 1997

Timeline

Project Started	October 1995
Fundraising Campaign	Began April 1996
First Planting Day	November 2 1996



week of Planter Box Construction Day, a bobcat dug the compacted gravel to make holes for the large trees, and the next day, students, parents and staff took part in planting. For the students, the favorite part of planting was getting dirty because “it was the most fun.”

Planting the gardens also helped to break down class barriers. For the kids, taking part in a planting event meant being able to see beyond labels. “It’s just one of those things where you don’t have to care about what you’re wearing,” said grade seven student, Brittney Sitch.

“Everybody got a chance to work together,” added grade seven student, Paul Bratsch.

Fundraising with a conscience

From the outset, the School Ground Naturalization Committee decided to avoid approaching groups or companies for funding whose ethical and environmental practices they couldn’t respect. Nevertheless, they were still able to obtain plenty of support from an array of organizations. Local companies such as Revy, donated shrubs and fruit trees, and a local nursery, Yoshizawa’s, which carries a variety of native plants, provided plants at wholesale prices.

Other funding came from the Evergreen Foundation, the Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation, SEEDS Foundation, the Surrey School District, Habitat 2000, the Chris Spencer Foundation and the Hamber Foundation. The students also raised funds to purchase trees by selling stickers with an environmental message.

Local leadership and a clear vision

Like most grassroots initiatives, local leadership is vital to success. At K.B. Woodward Elementary all agree (except Bent herself!) that teacher Lynda Bent has been the driving force behind the project. She not only initiated the naturalization project, she wrote proposals for funding, and helped generate the ongoing enthusiasm necessary for continuing the project. This clear direction and consistent approach has helped keep everyone on track, motivated, and now, proud of all that has been accomplished.





Responsibility for the garden is now well entrenched in the student body— school ground vandalism has actually decreased.

The students, however, are by far Bent’s biggest fans. “Ms. Bent will always have kids planting “as long as there is ground to plant.”

Managing for wear and tear

The children have learned much about caring for their garden. A continuous process of older students educating the younger kids has nurtured this sense of stewardship. When the naturalized areas were first developed, the intermediate students (grades 5, 6 and 7) took the primary students on tours of the grounds, pointing out the different native species and explaining their uses from the research they had done. Responsibility for the garden is now well entrenched in the student body—there is less wear and tear on the grounds and school ground vandalism has actually decreased. Even the original concern of vandalism from the surrounding school community has not been a problem.

“The hard part would be to watch someone destroy it. But it hasn’t happened,” commented parent Randy Price.

The intermediate students see their role as both protectors of the garden and as educators to the younger students. As student Sylvia Chow explained, “We let the kindergartens

get dirty and get their hands in the soil because then they’d have more respect for what everyone else did, because they did something and they won’t feel left out”

Both the students and teachers are learning how to respond when the garden is damaged through vandalism, and from natural wear and tear. One student pointed to a specific spot and remarked, “There was another tree but it got snapped off by some other kids.” However, instances such as this have not dampened the students’ enthusiasm. When vegetation is damaged, students and staff have filled in the gaps with new plants.

Even the younger kids playing with the twenty or so large seating logs has not been a large cause for concern. No matter how many times Bent repositioned the logs, the kids would roll them around, putting them out of position.



The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Gravel	20530 m2	17372 m2	- 3158 m2
Planted area	—	3159 m2	3159 m2
Trees	2	40	38
Shrubs	—	200	200
Native wildflowers	—	20	20
Annual plants	—	500	500
Planter boxes	1	4	3
Benches	—	2	2
Logs	—	20	20
Rocks	—	15	15



The hands-on learning has given students a deep knowledge of native plants and life cycles and an increased respect for the nature around them.



Soon Bent realized that there was value in this play for the younger children and that it actually caused little damage. The children have learned how to move the logs, and be careful of the plants.

Experiencing the life cycle of living things

Teachers and students used the planning stages as opportunities to put into practice various principles acquired in classroom learning. Classes took the responsibility of researching the plants, their names and uses, and the ideal growing conditions. They also had to determine the shade and drainage pat-

terns on the school's land in order to assess which plants would be the most suitable for the different gardens. These activities tied in nicely with Science and Fine Art Integrated Resource Packages (IRP's).

Teachers soon noticed another benefit of the alternative learning environment provided by the garden—the garden drew out students who were not as active in the classroom. For example, one boy who was having

difficulty at school, became a leader in the plantings. It was a place he could shine. Teacher Mike Martin reflected, "Wonderful things happen when you bring children and nature together."

Teachers Joan Compton and Jane West discovered that, more than reading a book, the hands-on learning has given students

a deep knowledge of native plants and life cycles and an increased respect for the nature around them. Before the garden, Joan Compton observed "the students didn't even know there were trees on the school ground. Now they are noticing seasonal changes in plant growth and development."

This learning has extended beyond just the students. The parents and teachers, too, have learned more about nature and themselves. "I know how to chop down trees," said parent Randy Price, "Before this, I never planted any. Interacting with the kids—that's the best part. That's the main reason I do it; I do it for the kids first."

After—"There's life here!"

"There's life here!" Bent exclaimed. "I used to walk with my head down because I know I wouldn't see anything. But now I want to have my head up because there are things happening and the kids are involved." She advised other schools to go ahead with such projects: "No matter how bleak the conditions are, it can be done. It's not beyond the capability of anybody to make it happen. You don't have to be a horticulturist."

"It makes our school better, but it's also for our environment," said Michelle Logan, grade seven.

Grace Asimo, grade seven, added simply, "I like the smell of the trees." 🌲

LORD STRATHCONA

COMMUNITY SCHOOL, VANCOUVER



Before—some greenspace to call our own

Students at Lord Strathcona Community School, many of whom live in apartments, always had an interest in the outdoors, in a place they could identify as their own, even when the space outside their school was just gravel. Bill Hamilton, the School Coordinator, explained how the primary school kids played outside before the naturalization project: “For years before we put the garden in, the kids would dig their own streams and things...they dug their hands in, taking greenery and sticks and making their own little world.”

Volunteers had long recognized the importance of greenspace for children at Lord Strathcona. Joan Taylor, a parent and school volunteer who has been central to the naturalization project, had started a gardening club and used to take students weekly to the Strathcona Community Gardens to plant in a small plot of earth. Describing herself as a “fanatical gardener,” Taylor started the club because she knew that kids needed to have a natural place to play in, particularly when they are surrounded by asphalt and buildings.





Lord Strathcona Community School, Vancouver

Bird's Eye View

Student Population	604
Grade Level	JK to Grade 7
Special Features	Native plant garden
Funding to Date	\$500
Project Start Date	October 1997

Timeline

Project Started	October 1997
Project Planting & Garden Celebration Event	Fall 1998

Surrounded by kids from the WorldWise Club, an environmental education club for students, youth worker Ross Armstrong commented that there wasn't a lot of green around the school before. One of the students quickly jumped in to correct him, "There was no green around the school before!"

Planning

Bill Hamilton realized early on that the best way to approach the garden project was an inclusive approach. His first step was to form a Naturalization Committee with a broad range of support. Hamilton brought together students from the WorldWise Club, parents, school staff, and staff from the adjacent community center. He also approached organizations such as the Strathcona Community Center, The Environmental Youth Alliance and The Evergreen Foundation.



Even trying to be as inclusive as possible in planning the garden, Hamilton soon realized that the Naturalization Committee had not included a very important group: Facilities. This presented a potential snag when the grounds crew presented some opposition to the garden project going forward. Once they were asked to sit on the Committee and recognized the scope of the project, the grounds crew "bought in to the project." In fact, the grounds crew made a great effort to enable the progress of the garden.

"You have to look at the big picture and think, 'who are the people who can contribute and how are they're going to contribute,' rather than looking at them as barriers or red tape. Just stop and say 'let's bring them into the process early and get their support and advice,'" explained Bill Hamilton.

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) maintenance and grounds crews did a lot of the preliminary work to prepare the space for the garden. Once this preliminary work was done, the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA) a local non-profit organization staffed by youth volunteers, was ready to get the students involved in starting the garden. Because the WorldWise Club was already meeting once a week after school to work on special projects related to the garden, such as gathering leaves for composting, it was easy to build on the student's momentum and get the garden going full swing.



Besides participating in the physical aspects of starting a naturalization project, students from the WorldWise Club also helped in the planning stages and in the fundraising. The students wrote the successful grant application for the Healthy Schools Strategy to secure funding from the health board.

Students sang “Inch by inch/ Row by row/ Going to make the garden grow,” as they moved through the garden sowing seeds.

To satisfy liability concerns, school board regulations required that the Committee put fencing around the area that was to become the garden. “Anytime kids will stick their hands in dirt, there’s a concern that they’ll stick their hands on needles, condoms, and stuff — you know; we are on the downtown east side,” Hamilton explained.

However, the fence also helped to define the boundaries of the garden and many wide-ranging activities were planned that can be carried out in a fenced area. In planning for the future, for instance, Taylor’s vision for the garden is to have a network of dry stream beds acting as both paths and irrigation, depending on the weather. “All our streams are actually paths.” Although this does pose some concerns for the maintenance crews, Taylor hopes

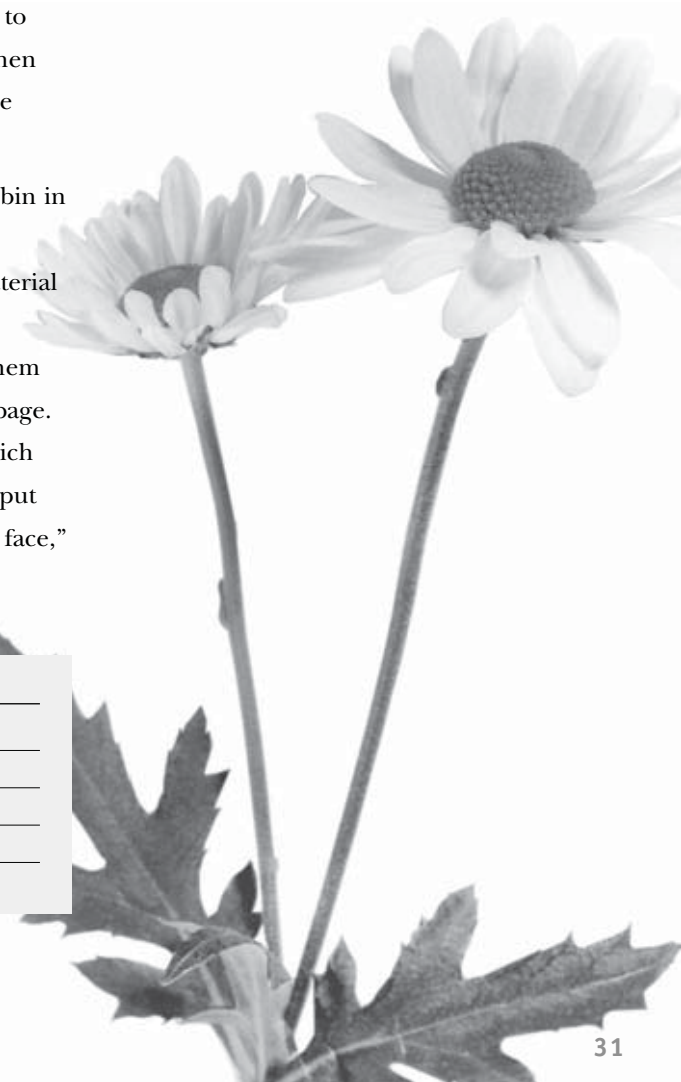
that ultimately the weather will define the difference between waterways and pathways. Taylor also hopes to create a small pool to collect water in the rainy season, all within the fenced confines of the garden.

Site Preparation

The Vancouver School Board brought in a bulldozer to dig through the hard-packed gravel. The area was then covered six inches deep with bark mulch, to minimize maintenance.

The Naturalization Committee started a composting bin in the garden area to create soil. Students from the WorldWise Club scouted out suitable composting material from the surrounding area. One neighbour was so impressed with the students’ dedication that he let them cart off bags of leaves otherwise destined for the garbage. The next step in composting involved the worms, which for one student accomplished a twofold objective: “I put the worms in the compost and stuck them in Cathy’s face,” he exclaimed.

The Dirt	Before	After	+/-
Gravel	721 m2	421 m2	- 300 m2
Planted area	—	300 m2	300 m2
Trees	2	7	5
Shrubs	—	41	41
Native wildflowers	—	36	36



The Garden Celebration: “Inch by inch, Row by row”

Most of the planting took place the day of the Garden Celebration, an event supported by The Evergreen Foundation. Students sang “Inch by inch/ Row by row/ Going to make the garden grow,” as they moved through the garden sowing seeds. This event brought the school community together, along with some officials, to celebrate the opening of the garden, an event that many found to be quite touching.

Although the Garden Celebration was not necessarily the most productive event from a planting perspective, it was a success in terms of raising motivation. Taylor realized that a smaller work party would likely have been able to accom-



plish more work in a more coordinated effort. However the celebratory nature of the event brought more people on board the naturalization project and helped seal the foundation for the garden’s long-term success. For Hamilton, the bulldozer coming in and the garden celebration were the two defining moments in the garden’s history. The change was visually apparent and people realized that the project was really happening!

Changing values

One of the challenges faced by the Strathcona community was getting past the “flat playing field” mentality that assumes that it is easier to maintain gravel fields than a garden. The Naturalization Committee is also working to change the prevalent mentality that native species are weeds.

“Native species are only unusual because we have destroyed the environment in which they live,” insists Joan Taylor.

“The plants are sleeping”

Students at Lord Strathcona Community School are learning that gardening requires patience and that change does not happen over night. A WorldWise Club student had this to say about the slow process of garden making: “It’s better now but it doesn’t look like a garden...people keep asking ‘Where is the garden?’”

“The plants are sleeping,” another student answered, justifying the effects of winter on the fledgling garden.



“Native species are only unusual because we have destroyed the environment in which they live.”

Taylor was also aware of this problem, which she hoped to remedy in the spring through a bulk planting of native plants. “It’s fun,” she said, “but it is work and you don’t see things immediately. The children want to put the seed in the ground, have it leap up immediately and climb and find the giant. But gardening doesn’t work like that, not unless you’re in a fairy tale.”

Outdoor learning

The garden is increasing children’s range of experiences. They are learning that it’s okay to get their hands dirty and to work physically. Perhaps most importantly, the garden is allowing the students to experience nature first hand.

Though no formalized connection to the curriculum existed within the first year after the planting event, this is largely because the garden is still relatively new. Hamilton expects that teachers will use the garden more fully in the spring, and that garden project sign up sheets posted in the spring and fall will draw more classes outdoors.

Throughout the winter, though, Taylor managed to pass along to the students some of her knowledge about native plants and the environment through her regular volunteer work on the garden. Students can’t help but be infected by

her conviction regarding the environment and the importance of native plants. “The place we live in used to be a rainforest,” she instructed, “We devastated the rainforest in this area, and we’re here because we have clear-cut.”

A final word— overcoming the barriers

Hamilton had some final advice to pass along: “Make sure you pull all the people who can help together, not just the funding people, but also those people who you think are going to be in there getting muddy, who like the idea of a garden and want to work in it. And don’t be discouraged by barriers. You can overcome most of the barriers.” 🌲





STEWARDS AND STORYTELLERS:

THE GREENING OF BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHOOL GROUNDS

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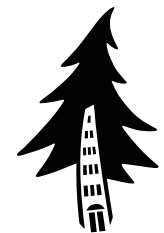
STEWARDS AND STORYTELLERS

THE GREENING OF BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHOOL GROUNDS

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