

Association of Gardens Trusts' South Western Education Meeting, Bicton EarTH Centre
Wednesday, 26 February 2014

'Working in Partnership - Engaging with Schools'



With the gift of a beautiful day in stormy February, the AGT Education Meeting was held in Devon and it proved to be informative and convivial. We had chosen the theme of 'Working in Partnership' in order to illustrate the way in which the DGT is now approaching education – alone we can do little, but with partners we can achieve much.

Members of the Devon Gardens Trust were delighted to welcome 35 attendees. Among this number were our four speakers, representatives of the CGTs of Hampshire, Avon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire, teachers and TAs from two secondary schools (Growing our Futures at Okehampton and Honiton) and three primary schools (Chulmleigh, East the Water and Cheriton Fitzpaine). We also were very glad to welcome members of the recently formed Growing Devon Schools Partnership, representatives from RHS Rosemoor, Paignton Zoo, Devon Composting Network, Growing Together (Community Gardening) CIC and Ashburton School of Cookery.

The meeting was opened by **Gilly Drummond, President of the AGT and member of Hampshire Gardens Trust**. The report that follows is largely the work of Nicky Scott who (thank goodness) took comprehensive and entertaining notes of the proceedings.

Gilly gave an inspiring introduction describing the county garden trusts education committees' hard work over the last thirty years that has now 'come together'; with the introduction of the small School Task Force and the School Food Plan, the work within education committees of the county Garden Trusts is on the cusp of a wave!

Our first speaker was **Clare Barwick, Teacher at East the Water Primary School**.

Clare has been a teacher at East-the-Water for four years and is a member of their Senior Management Team. She has recently been made an SLE (Specialist Leader of Education).

As Nicky Scott noted, it was so refreshing to have an actual teacher speaking from the coal face! East the Water, over the river from Bideford, is the eighteenth most deprived school in Devon with 320 pupils on roll and this number is rising. These children have had little experience of 'the outside' and rarely (if ever!) visit the nearby seaside.

Clare was a complete novice to gardening when she put her hand up and volunteered to take on the school garden. When she posed the question to the school's Gardening Club: What do you want to have in the garden, loads of ideas tumbled out: 'Mud!'. 'A pond!'

Clare described a subsequent visit made to the Children's Hospice near Barnstaple where they have a beautiful sensory garden based on the Narnia books. Everyone was inspired and a plan was made of what they would like in the garden, but then they had no idea how to begin.

Eventually, key people emerged to help bring the plan into reality: a school governor, the Allotment Association, the Devon Gardens Trust along with The Princes Trust, the Environment Agency and South West Water, who all played important parts. It was also made possible by the teachers, parents and children

coming together on 'ground force' days willing to work the heavy clay soil. They became adept at asking for help. Local firms and organisations were happy to help out; Tesco with their Community Champion Scheme, Jewsons, and even South West Water allowed the use of their diggers for free (operated by an SWW employee); the school could not have created the garden as it is today without all this help.



The teachers were encouraged to use the new garden, to incorporate it into every area of the curriculum and to constantly think about the garden in their lesson plans. They needed to be more creative and adventurous.



Staff meetings involved inset training and some great ideas came out – buried treasure with, of course, a map. This creation of elaborate stories encouraged literacy and more importantly, it was lots of fun. Problem solving and working collaboratively in teams became normal. At least one lesson a week was held outside. Numeracy projects were also very successful: using traffic surveys, calculating the height of trees from shadows and so on. East the Water Primary School is in a new phase; they are working with the Woodland Trust to improve and build upon their outside learning by ensuring the continuing use of the garden across all the areas of the curriculum. Children are excited to be going outside - and what was a 'failing school' is now 'outstanding' and the children love it!

Rupert Bannister *Joint Chair of the Growing Devon Schools Partnership (GDSP) , Director of KORU Education CIC*

Rupert spoke about the value and synergy of working together and the huge potential that a true partnership can have. The Growing Devon Schools Partnership has been formally launched as a legal entity and is now an Industrial and Provident Society (a form of co-operative).

Rupert also referred to the national reports that Gilly mentioned. He described how the GDSP hope to use these papers to persuade schools of the importance of the work we are doing already and in the future. The Partnership does not want to replicate the good work being done by individual members of the partnership or organisations working along similar lines; the aim is to inspire and support schools and crucially help develop the skill and confidence of teachers.

To that aim, the GDSP is already running a very successful pilot project, funded via the Federation of City Farms, Devon County Council and the Devon Gardens Trust. Using two training bases, Embercombe outside Exeter and Diggin' It in Plymouth, 20 teachers and TA's from 10 schools are taking part in courses in the current academic year. Growing, cooking and composting are covered with an emphasis on how to incorporate this into the curriculum.

One of the most valuable things to emerge so far has been the way the teachers are beginning to communicate with each other; they have set up a 'DropBox' account to share documents and photographs. Rupert also talked about using social media (a steep learning curve for most of us) and how important and powerful this can be. Rupert finished his presentation with a short film about GDSP.

Melissa Harvey *Devon Community Composting Network and Member of the GDSP*

To illustrate her contribution entitled ‘cultivating young minds’, Melissa used slides with lots of similes and metaphors showing parallels between growing plants and growing minds – for a child simply being outside can be a lesson in itself. If meaningful and practical activities are added, many things can be achieved simultaneously. The right conditions - and you can prepare for the growth of both plants and children.

One of the new ideas now being funded through Devon County Council is the ‘skill share’ visit. Teachers wanting to start gardening and composting can visit ‘a beacon school’ for inspiration and advice. Although evidence has shown the key person to get on board is the head, Melissa went on to emphasise that the whole school community needs to come on board for the success of the any project outside, even if this can involve re-setting some key contracts and job descriptions to give the time needed for various activities.

Melissa went on to say how contact with a school at the right time is crucial. Staff replacement is a key factor in the continuity of any project at a school; it is common in many schools that initiatives are started and then abandoned when a key teacher leaves.

Melissa finished her contribution stressing that how important it is to embed the ethos of outdoor learning into the statutory curriculum. This is the vital question to which we must find the answers if we are to support and sustain teachers in this approach to education.

Diane Perry *Member of the Devon Gardens Trust and Mentor at Chulmleigh Primary School*

Particularly in rural areas, Diane told us how the school garden was often seen as an activity for the less able children, a sad fact which was alluded to many times during the day. Hopefully with the reports already mentioned, the work of the RHS and others, this attitude will be seen as completely outdated. Not only is it vital that children are involved in growing in primary schools, but we also need this ‘growing’ activity to become standard in secondary education and not have it as a ‘fall back’ option for those children classed as having ‘special needs’.

Diane made an important point: the presence of Teaching Assistants in the classroom, such as Philippa Lausen at Chulmleigh Primary (one of our attendees), could make a big difference to embedding outdoor learning into the curriculum. The Teaching Assistants are able to help busy teachers coordinate the delivery of the curriculum and assist the building of ‘growing time’ into the timetable.

Diane mentioned that although Bicton College is working with some primary schools, a clear thread needs to be developed from primary, through secondary to tertiary education.

Celia Jenkins *Education Co-ordinator for DGT* thanked the speakers for their time and wonderful insights into their particular ‘take’ on partnership and how it has been working in schools in Devon.

Afternoon Forum

The afternoon forum was attended by nearly all delegates – Alison and Michelle from Honiton Community College had to return to school. Several subjects (including funding, Ofsted inspections and horticultural qualifications that are available in schools) were covered during the Afternoon Forum with most of the attendees making contributions, including:

Nicky Scott who said that funding was getting harder but a useful website to look at is 'Awards for all', and researching and applying to local grant providers, particular to your town or community, seems to work. It is worthwhile to apply for funding for what you are already doing rather than a possible future project. It is important to remember that schools do have funds in their budgets but these budgets are always tight. If you can help them deliver what they need, they will often find a way to pay for it.

Sarah Chesters from Rosemoor RHS made the point that you can always ask for materials rather than money; those two odd paving slabs round the back of the shed for instance! This is invaluable to schools and an appeal to the parents and governors can reap all kinds of useful stuff. The local business community, as we heard from Clare, are also great providers of items on the 'shopping list'. Pilkingtons in Okehampton are funding the cost of coaches to visit Rosemoor and this was increasing the number of school visits to the gardens.

Pete Scott from Growing Together emphasised that organised funding was extremely important to get projects off the ground.

Carey Thorne from Cheriton Fitzpaine Primary School spoke about the frustrations of Ofsted and how subjective the process was. The same lesson could be highly praised by one inspector and another inspector totally underwhelmed by it. She felt that Ofsted inspectors can be unimpressed by the good work going on outside and often the whole process of inspection is unpleasant.

Beth Hamer (Growing our Future at Okehampton College) and **Catherine Addison** (Education Department, Paignton Zoo) also contributed to the discussions.

The meeting closed at around three thirty.

Celia Jenkins (with a massive thank you to Nicky Scott)

Sunday, 23rd March 2014

ATTENDEES

Gilly Drummond	Hampshire Gardens Trust / President, AGT
Sue Stuart	Hampshire Gardens Trust
Juliet Wilmot	Wiltshire Gardens Trust
Deb West	Wiltshire Gardens Trust
Marigold Treloar	Wiltshire Gardens Trust
Cynthia Troup	Avon Gardens Trust
Carol Carsley	Dorset Gardens Trust
Rosemary Agg	Dorset Gardens Trust
Shiela Rabson	Somerset Gardens Trust
Eileen Meiklejohn	Somerset Gardens Trust
Catherine Addison	Paignton Zoo Education / GDSP
Stella West-Harling	Ashburton School of Cookery/Project X
Sarah House	Guest – Landscape Designer

Pete Scott	Growing Together (Community Gardening) CIC
Dr Martin McDonagh	Growing Together (Community Gardening) CIC
Beth Hamer	Growing Our Future (Okehampton College) GDSP
Alison Salter	Honiton Community College
Michelle Turner	Honiton Community College
Carey Thorne	Cheriton Fitzpaine Primary / DGT Flagship School
Anna Tyrer	Cheriton Fitzpaine Primary
Clare Barwick	SPEAKER / East the Water Primary School / DGT Flagship School
Diane Perry	SPEAKER / Devon Gardens Trust / Chulmleigh Primary
Philippa Lausen	Chulmleigh Primary School
Rupert Bannister	SPEAKER / KORU / GDSP
Nicky Scott	Devon Composting Network / GDSP
Melissa Harvey	SPEAKER / Devon Composting Network / GDSP
Ian Varndell	Chairman, Devon Gardens Trust / GDSP
Richard Soans	Devon Gardens Trust
Janet Anderson	Devon Gardens Trust
Joy Williams	Devon Gardens Trust
Jane Thompson	Devon Gardens Trust
Clare Greener	Devon Gardens Trust
Anne Brodie	Devon Gardens Trust
Celia Jenkins	Devon Gardens Trust / GDSP