The process of developing the educational landscape is an enriching one for all concerned.

Why change?
For many schools, this is the easy part. Parental dissatisfaction or child unhappiness may have provided the impetus. Conversely, it might be through an awareness of the obvious benefits to the curriculum, or for children's play, or to enhance the school's image in the community.

At this stage it is important for schools to have a clear idea of what they want to change.

How to go about change
It is this aspect of the process which schools find most difficult. Many of them leave it out altogether, moving straight from statements like "We must do something about the playground" to "Let's buy some play equipment and stick it over there by the wall!" LTL attempts to help schools spend time working their way through a series of important activities which make it more likely that changes will be sustainable and appropriate to children's needs.

There are two very important elements at the start of this stage. The first is the undertaking of a comprehensive grounds survey and the identification of the needs of children, teachers and parents. To help schools undertake the survey, LTL has produced a photocopiable pack, Eezo Schoolwatch, which has already been bought by 2,500 schools.

Identifying needs is a more complex task, and our experience shows that it is important to approach this systematically. When identifying the needs of the pupils it is helpful to talk with them about what they would like to do outside. (They will say things like climbing, hiding, sitting quietly and enjoying getting dirty!) It is then possible to work back from this list to create possible features for the school landscape. It is much better to do this way round than starting with a shopping-list of "things that the children want to have". (They may indicate things like Disneyworld or a zoo or expensive play equipment of limited long-term value.) With staff it will be important to identify activities in the formal and informal curriculum which they would like to be able to undertake.

A period of intensive planning then follows, one which is probably best managed by a steering group of some kind. It will involve co-ordinating a range of ideas, consulting relevant professionals such as landscape architects, raising money and, of course, making a detailed plan of action.

What to change
It can take quite a long time to reach the moment when you dig the first hole, plant the first tree or put in your first sculpture. It will definitely have been time well spent, as there is every likelihood that what you have decided to do will be approved of and enjoyed by your pupils, teachers and parents alike.

It is impossible to do justice to the range of possible landscapes features which schools have chosen to include. The most popular are undoubtedly ponds, nature areas and trees, with butterfly gardens, seating, play equipment and shrubbery. LTL's publications indicate the scope of possible ideas. But it is the quality of the process and the need to take a holistic overview that are most important to stress.

Enriching
With even moderately-developed grounds it will be possible to use your outdoor classroom to teach almost every subject in the curriculum. Children will also be able to play and develop in a way which is likely to be healthy. For many schools, the decrease in the number of accidents is startling. Children discover a new sense of responsibility and pride in their environment. Parents start to want to be involved. Supervision becomes easier. The landscape becomes a gentler and more civilised place. The benefits are clear for pupils, parents, teachers, governors and the local community. LTL has examples of schools which have made improvements like these in every area of the UK and will happily help to put you in touch with them.

Many school grounds should carry a government health warning. That much is clear. Equally they can be delightful places where children can grow up in security and with considerable sensory, mental and physical stimulation. It does not follow like night after day that they will be happy but, if it is, in our experience, highly likely than the school will be a healthier place. Certainly, the process of developing the educational landscape is an enriching one for all concerned.

Helen Elliott is currently Head of Years 10 & 11 at Heathfield Community School, and is a member of the County Active Learning Insect Team.

Heathfield Community School in Tauton pioneered a new-style parents’ evening in January of this year. It was aimed at parents of year 10 & 11 pupils and looked at a wide range of issues which are of concern to parents and pupils – a sort of parent INSET! The evening was attended by 200 parents, which was an encouraging response. The two year-group consists of 360 pupils, so taking into account a combination of 'single parent' and 'both parent' attendance potentially half the pupils were represented.

What was it about?
Senior staff (pastoral) and the Advisory Teacher for Health Education, Kath Wilson, met in order to plan the event. There was much discussion about what we were actually trying to achieve. Was it purely educational issues - the concept of coursework and extended homework, so different from what parents were used to in the O-level days - or was it social issues which can militate against the work ethic? Parties, alcohol, drugs, relationships etc? Or was it just about the anxieties about being a parent of an adolescent?

Eventually it was decided it was all this and more! Therefore, the evening needed to be one of awareness-raising with a promise of following up specific issues with future workshops. This would enable parents to set the agenda.

Structuring the evening
Having decided the purpose, rather than having a vague notion emerging from a gut reaction that we were responding to a need, it was necessary to structure the event with respect to When? What? Where? and Who?

One of the briefs was: What are the pressures on young people today?

So far we had only addressed When and What, and the When was getting closer. After perusal of the school community diary we were committed to 22 January, and it was now November, with a whole host of Christmas events to worry about as well as this new initiative.

What?
It was decided to open the evening with a keynote speaker.

This would help to universalise the issues rather than making it a case study of "our school". It would also add prestige to the event and hopefully be attractive to our potential parent market.

This was to be followed by a brief brainstorming exercise transcribed at the platform to a flip chart. This slot allowed parents to raise issues with the brief "what are the pressures on young people today?"

The next stage enabled parents to work in workshop discussion groups with a facilitator. Each group would be presented with a scenario applicable to teenagers. There would be half an hour to negotiate a strategy or strategies for appropriate courses of action and to prepare a flip chart sheet indicating the information. Refreshments and a chance to look at displays of coursework, with relevant staff in attendance, would divide up the programme. A plenary session for feedback and the distribution of evaluation sheets was the chosen method of drawing together the objectives of the event.

Where?
School halls do not necessarily lend themselves to creating a conducive environment for this type of occasion. At Heathfield Community...
School there is a drama studio (capacity 200) and a newly-built English Centre (6 classrooms, 2 alcohoes, 2 seminar rooms and a staff room). We decided to house the introduction and plenary in the drama studio, the discussion groups in the English Centre classrooms and serve refreshments from the alcohoes (a free-flowing space).

Who?

I invited Dr Martin Bloomer, a lecturer from Exeter University, to be the keynote speaker. He presented an excellent introduction and hit just the right note. As a parent of teenagers himself he was able to be unctoal, as well as highlighting the academic pressures upon young people.

Dr Bloomer also led the initial brainstorming session, inviting the audience to turn round and discuss with one or two people nearby.

Group leaders

The choice of these was partly determined by attendance demand (so as to have no more than six in a group) and by the skills factor. It was thought to be of importance that the group leaders were skilled in facilitating discussion, keeping it to the point, and encouraging everyone to join in (see panel). The resulting staffing was made up of:

**GROUP LEADERS BRIEF**

About 15 individual parents will have a small card with your initial on and will join you in your designated room.

Your role is as a facilitator.

1. Please ask each person to turn to the page nearest to them and in a pair talk about:
   (a) What did you do last weekend?
   (b) What did you do last weekend?
   (c) What did you do last weekend?
2. Divide your group into three smaller groups (of about 5). Give each small group a scenario A, B or C. Each group nominates a spokesperson. Come up with a reaction to report back to the group of 15.
3. The Group Leader notes on a piece of flip chart to be displayed and used as a record. Bring flip chart back to drama studio.
4. Please ensure that the discussions are kept as informal as possible — e.g. not "my son X gets too much homework from Mr Y" (and (strike through)).
5. Ensure no one dominates.

**Workshop scenarios**

We constructed the three scenarios presented in the box opposite and asked each group to work on one. However, each person received a typed sheet of all three so as to be aware of the brief of other groups.

The scenarios were intended to be specific and "authentic", tangible but allowing under-the-surface social issues to emerge.

**Groupings**

These needed to be "random" so that parents of the same pupil were not in the same group. This would allow freer and more varied discussion. Practically this was organised in the following manner:

1. Each group leader's workshop space was labelled with a large piece of coloured card with their initials on.
2. Upon arrival, each participant was handed a small version of one of these coloured cards. They were given in rotation so that, providing parents of the same pupil arrived simultaneously, they were unlikely to be in the same group!
3. As participants were invited to go to workshop spaces the significance of the cards was explained.

This system worked well and we have used it since in the first follow-up evening.

There was a sense of addressing real concerns . . . "Thank goodness I'm not the only one."

**Evaluation strategy**

At the outset the planning committee decided to aim at raising awareness of issues, rather than providing answers. This inherently demanded a detailed evaluation of the follow-up workshop evenings on specific related issues should prove to be essential.

Evaluation was three-part:
1. An evaluation questionnaire given out at the end of the evening.
2. A letter sent to each participant with the flip-chart scenario responses collated.
3. A series of follow-up workshops put into operation.

**Group leaders' brief**

A short meeting was convened in the week of the parents' evening (see the brief on the opposite page).

Due to shortage of time and numbers involved we decided that group leaders would display the flip-chart sheets around the walls of the drama studio for others to read or compare.

There was not entirely satisfactory as it did not allow discussion of salient points.

**SCENARIONS FOR THE WORKSHOP EXERCISES**

**Situation A**

Your younger wants to watch a television programme. You know that there is a coursework deadline for work that is, as yet, unfinished.

What would be possible courses of action for an "acceptable" solution?

How would you go about discussing this with your daughter or son?

**Situation B**

A friend invites your younger out mid-week. You know at school next day there is a mock GCE/SE/Modular assessment starting at 9.00 am. The function in question finishes at 11.30 pm. ETA at home will be 1.45 am. Apparently "Someone's going dernier".

What would be possible courses of action?

**Situation C**

Your child has been offered a part-time job, with a local shop. The hours are non-negotiable — two evening jobs 6.00 pm-8.45 pm and Tuesday, Thursday 9.00 am-1.00 pm. This will earn £50.00 per week.

What would your reaction be?

* (Regulations of Employment Children and Young Persons Act Amended 1972 states:
  - no child shall be employed on school days during school hours for more than two hours on any single day and that only after the close of school hours before 7.00 pm except that for the delivery of milk or newspapers a child may be employed between 7.00 am and 8.00 am but if a child works both mornings and evenings it must be for the same employer.
  - no child shall be employed on any Sunday or more than two hours on any week day."

1) before 7.00 pm
2) after 10.00 am except in the milking or feeding of livestock when the employment shall cease at or before 7.00 pm.

The session itself centred on a "where do we go from here?" approach, which explained the importance of the evaluation sheets to be handed out.

The 'atmosphere'

The whole event was buzzing with expectation. It was quite different to the traditional appointment 5 minutes-with-each-teacherslot annual occasion. There was a sense of addressing real concerns that are beneath the surface. Without exception, all the parents participated freely in small groups. The sense of camaraderie was evident during the return from the English Centre to the drama studio, where comments such as "Thank goodness I'm not the only one!" were vocalised. When we dispersed at the end, the fact that parents held back to talk informally demonstrated that we had not exaggerated their need to share common experiences as parents of teenagers.

Exploring other issues

Information collated from the evaluation summaries produced the following list of topics, with the number of requests:
PARENTS' EVALUATION FORM

Would you please complete the questions below, either by placing a tick in the appropriate box or by adding your own comments. There is no need to add your name to the sheet unless you particularly wish to do so.

1. It would be useful to have some comments on this evening's help in planning future evenings of this kind. Would you please describe briefly:
   (a) The most useful activity.
   (b) The most difficult activity.
   (c) An activity on which you would like to spend more time.

2. You may wish to consider other important issues in more detail. For example:
   (i) helping with studies; the police and young people; general health issues; would you please list any in which you might be interested.

3. In what ways would you be interested in exploring and developing these issues:
   (a) Small groups of interested parents.
   (b) Groups of parents and staff.
   (c) Groups of parents, staff and young people.
   (d) Separate evening sessions with representatives from outside organisations.

Thank you for completing the questionnaire; we will be sending out a summary of the evening's discussions, the results of the evaluation and some more detailed proposals for the future.

The positive side they referred to music (interestingly), competition for grades between friends, regular breaks and their own goals.

The second task, also in small groups, was a practical reading and recall session: the purpose of this was to look at the skill of skimming. This was great fun. The group leaders gave each pair in their group a passage to read (subject matter, electricity) — they had ten minutes, working in pairs, to read the passage and be tested by their partner on knowledge recall and understanding. Group leaders encouraged pairs to work as pupil/adult, wherever possible.

Just to add to the atmosphere we introduced distractions rather than allowing uninterrupted study, thus attempting to simulate a pupil's need to impose self-discipline. The distractions included coffee and biscuits available in the corridor and stimulating, controversial newspaper articles and magazines.

The parent openly talked about his feeling of inadequacy in advising his own child.

Group leaders were briefed to observe behaviour, and the dynamics of my group were fascinating. There were three pairs: (a) a year 9 pupil and a year 10 male parent, (b) two female parents, and (c) one male, one female parent.

Pair (a) managed excellent recall: they were on 'task' the whole time. The pupil remembered nearly the whole of the passage and the parent accommodated in comparison. Pair (b) spent most of the time giggling and saying they couldn't do it! Pair (c) worked quietly, managing to grasp most of the principles of the passage. These observations themselves could provide subject-matter for a whole paper concerning gender, mixed-age working groups, etc.

Following the exercise itself, the group leaders' brief was to draw this part of the session together by discussing how each pair tackled the task, how individuals affected each other — giving confidence, or chatting, or being encouraging — and then to relate this to actual experiences as a parent or pupil and to bring out any other points before the final plenary.

Reassurance

One of the most touching moments for me was the feedback from pair (a) to the rest of the small group. It summed up the spirit of what the evening was all about. The pupil openly talked about his feeling of inadequacy in advising his own child. He didn't understand the work his child was doing, especially coursework, and was aware of the facility of his efforts to help: this often ended in arguments. His partner, a year 9 pupil, reassured and gave suggestions. If the whole evening succeeded in nothing else, this moment was worth it.

The evening concluded with a whole-group session led by two of the study leaders. The content was delivered by OHP, and highlighted revision and study-skills methodology. Participants were all given supporting handout materials, booklets, and an evaluation sheet.

Disappointingly, the evaluation returns on this occasion were few (11 out of 70). As a result it has been decided to issue these forms at the beginning of future evenings to be completed at the end, rather than relying on returns the following day. However, the evaluations received were very positive, and highlighted concerns for addressing the following future workshops.

Just to add to the atmosphere we introduced distractions, to simulate the need to impose self-discipline.

Study skills

13

Careers/work

5

Drugs

4

Study time management

3

Health issues

3

Police and young people

3

Relationships

3

Communication

2

Parties

2

Peer pressure

2

Praising

1

Homework

1

Interview skills

1

Post-16 opportunities

1

Stress

1

Work experience

1

The methods advocated for organising future workshops were as follows:

48 votes: Groups of parents, staff and young people

24 votes: Groups of parents and staff

22 votes: Separate evening sessions with representatives from outside organisations

15 votes: Small groups of interested parties

First follow-up session:

Study Skills

The first 'parent survival kit, 14+ workshop' was held in June. It was open to Year 9 and 10 parents and pupils, and 70 attended. The random grouping system mixed parents and pupils so that everyone worked in a group of six containing a mixture of ages, genders and faculties.

On this occasion it was unnecessary to open the meeting by setting the scene or with philosophical debate, as parents and pupils had arrived specifically to take part in the workshop. With this in mind, the introduction was little more than a welcome followed by an explanation of the logistics of the evening's timings.

Study-related issues

The first exercise (20 minutes) in small groups was a brainstorm flip-chart exercise examining issues which determine effective study. Flip-chart sheets were then briefly shared with the whole group. Even though "reporters" were asked not to repeat any point made by another group, only pupil reporters kept to this request!

The session seemed to enjoy illuminating points which ranged from negative peer pressure to lack of self-confidence and to part-time jobs; on
News from the Unit

These are exciting times at the Unit; many new services and publications are being created to facilitate, enhance and promote the work already done in numerous schools around the country. The new Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (version 16) is now available and already in use. Many original questions have been retained, some improved and a few new ones introduced.

Anne has been very much involved in creating the new Lifestyles database, which is an exciting way for youngsters to study the lifestyles of their contemporaries. This not only meets many NC attainment targets (e.g. Maths attainment target 5, Handling data) but is an exciting and interesting resource which the pupils can relate to and enjoy using!

John and Di have completed their report Alcohol education in schools. This report suggests ways of introducing alcohol education using the cross-curricular model. Although alcohol education is not an NC subject, it can be incorporated within many others very effectively. Educating youngsters about sensible drinking was regarded, by the great majority of schools participating in this report, as a most important dimension of the youngsters’ personal and social education, and so I’m sure that many schools will find this book a valuable resource.

John has recently spent three weeks in Hong Kong, where there is substantial interest in the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire methodology being adapted and adopted to inform health education and health care planning. Several government departments were involved, together with the University and outside agencies. The British Council sponsored the visit and interest was shown by representatives from WHO and UNICEF. A pilot study has begun.

It’s subscription time again! To ensure receiving your copy of Education and Health in 1993, please pay promptly!

"The team" would like to wish everyone a very Happy New Year!

S.F.

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