The Unit team is here to help you!
Just telephone 0392 ...

Unit Director
Juli Bailey, 264722

Orders for publications and general enquiries
Samantha Aller-Jones, 264722.

Health Related
Behavioural/Questionnaire
receipt of scripts and data preparation:
Evelyn Parkes, 264729

Primary Health Related
behavioural surveys,
Carolyn Shugulli, 264729 (part-time) or Anne Wills, 264729.

'Van A Tick' Health
epidemiology survey
Carolyn Shugulli, 264729 (part-time) or Sally Forster, 264722

Other projects
data analysis,
EDUCATION related education
David Kress, 264730.

Education and Health
Editorial: James
Marchant, 264720.

Subscriptions and
advertising: Sally Forster, 264722.

LIFESTYLES
A set of database containing
Health Related Behavioural
Questionnaire responses from 200 year 10 pupils.
They can be analyzed by pupils using any database
such as Lotus 123. A wonder.

For further information and a full colour brochure
please contact Tony Wheaton on: Exeter (0392) 384717

PLAYSAFE

PLAYSAFE is designed, manufactured and installed by our
own craftsmen
PLAYSAFE is made of treated wood which is environmentally
and visually pleasing

PLAYSAFE can be adapted for
use by disabled children
PLAYSAFE comes in a range
suitable for all customer requirements
and budgets
PLAYSAFE carries a 20 year guarantee

More than just play equipment!

For further information and a full colour brochure
please contact Tony Wheaton on: Exeter (0392) 384717

Zoe Evans

Playtime: when the
learning really starts

Zoe Evans on
creating an
'outdoor
classroom'

Bill Lucas on
why school
grounds
should carry
a govern-
ment health
warning

Helen Elliott
on how a
class ran
workshops
for parents of
14-year-olds

Our philosophy at Cowick School, Exeter is
that once inside the school gates our
families have entered into an environment which
at every turn expresses our care about the quality
of the learning environment that we offer:
exciting opportunities for active learning in
surroundings that are a world in miniature. Our
planning was inspired by Christian Schiller's
dream:
What I see in every small community (a few
streets, maybe one street) is a building, the
community's building: and it will be a place to
which young children can come to play, to
explore, to learn. There will be facilities there for

Devon Highways
Pinhoo, Road, Pinhoe, Exeter, Devon, EX4 8JA
A Division of Devon Direct Services - A Department of Devon County Council

Education and Health

Volume 10 Number 5, 1992
ISSN 0266-1602
£1.25

Zoe Evans

Playtime: when the
learning really starts

Zoe Evans on
creating an
'outdoor
classroom'

Bill Lucas on
why school
grounds
should carry
a govern-
ment health
warning

Helen Elliott
on how a
class ran
workshops
for parents of
14-year-olds

Our philosophy at Cowick School, Exeter is
that once inside the school gates our
families have entered into an environment which
at every turn expresses our care about the quality
of the learning environment that we offer:
exciting opportunities for active learning in
surroundings that are a world in miniature. Our
planning was inspired by Christian Schiller's
dream:
What I see in every small community (a few
streets, maybe one street) is a building, the
community's building: and it will be a place to
which young children can come to play, to
explore, to learn. There will be facilities there for

Devon Highways
Pinhoo, Road, Pinhoe, Exeter, Devon, EX4 8JA
A Division of Devon Direct Services - A Department of Devon County Council
A wide choice of activity at playtime means that the children have the opportunity to develop independence of mind.

Exercise yard

Five years ago, the playground at Cowick consisted of a tarmac area which, although it provided a safe environment for the children, did not offer much variety. However, the introduction of more accessible areas around the school has provided a wide range of activities for the children. The tarmac area is now used less frequently, as the new playgrounds have become more popular.

Dizzy

Three years ago, as part of the upgrading and remodelling programmes, we acquired a piece of waste ground which was subsequently turned into a playground. The result was a new outdoor environment for the children which provided them with space and choice. As well as being a popular play area, it would serve as an ‘outdoor classroom’ in which much of the school curriculum could be pursued.

We created:
- An area of tarmac
- A grassed area
- A pond and a wild space
- Places where fruit bushes and flowering shrubs and trees of all kinds could grow
- The kind of ground where birds and insects and creatures of all varieties could be encouraged to share our lives.

A wonderful ‘Dad’ called Richard Bally created a fenced allotment for us. A thousand pounds raised by our community association funded the building of protected space and cages for rabbits and guinea pigs who were later joined by hens and bantams.

Independence

A wide choice of activity at playtime means that the children have the opportunity to develop independence of mind. Tyrone may want his friend Mark to join him in a game of football; Mark, on the other hand, has asked if he can clean out the rabbits. Both choose to go their own way — in spite of close friendship, neither influences the other. Each boy is learning to respect another’s choice. The beginnings of understanding for the needs of others is inherent in incidents of this kind.

Rules and provision

This wide choice, however, is not without its problems. Numbers on certain activities must be limited — not everyone can have their first choice of activity each day, or even their second or third choice. Therefore the children have been given the opportunity to devise the rules which govern who can do what, and when they can do it, exploring the nature of rules and the need for their existence. At a level appropriate to their age, our pupils are gaining knowledge and understanding of both their own and other people’s rights.

Involving children in discussion about ideal play provision in the grounds, for example striking a balance between places where you can sit and rest, has also involved us in discussion about leisure provision in our city and about healthy living.

Bullying

Learning to stand up for their rights as far as chosen activity is concerned, we believe, helps children to gain experience in standing up to bullies. Six-year-old Claire knows that a contract exists which states her right to play in the wild area on certain days and that it cannot be challenged by eight-year-old Andrew. She is confident that school law will support her.

Conservation

The variety of playing area available within the school grounds is helping children to develop an awareness of the variety of conservation problems. The children know that play within the wild area needs to be rationed, as otherwise all the grasses get trampled before they can seed, flowers are crushed, and young trees burned.

Many living, growing things are celebrated in our outdoor classroom. We have a wide variety of trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses. They must be continually added to. Caring for them and observing them throughout the year teaches so much about the special pattern of the seasons. Conservation is a word in every child’s vocabulary as we cherish each flower and grass that we tempt to live with us.

Since our battle to improve outdoor provision patently demonstrates care, the trust spreads.

Individuality

At Cowick, having acknowledged that children are good people with varying recreational needs, we hope we are demonstrating continually to our pupils both our concern for their wellbeing and our recognition of individual needs. The children in turn are being made aware of the fact that different things make different people happy — in one case sitting under an apple tree and talking to a friend, in another being able to climb and jump and run.

Children can learn, climb, slide and balance, hide, chase and be caught in our grounds: opportunities for physical challenge abound. They can sit on stiles and logs on a summer’s day and dream for a while. They can be together or find a space to know others. Whatever they want to do they want. It is our hope that demonstration of concern is contagious, that thoughtfulness for the needs of others will be caught by our pupils.

Social growth

All in all, each improvement in the outdoor environment of the school has brought about an enrichment in the personal and social development of the school community. Christian Schil- ler, in an address given to a conference of school teachers said:

For me, ‘social growth’ means that part of each young child which gives him an increasing awareness and understanding of other human beings as part of his world. The awareness comes from an exploration of a widening field of person which gives greater and greater experience of more and more living beings. The understanding comes from a growing power of identification with other living beings.

I believe that we now have a space where the kind of playtimes which offer our children opportunities for personal and social growth can
Part of the activity apparatus installed in the school grounds. Wildlife habitats border the grass areas, some deliberately planted, others original ‘woodland’.

The staff of the school can recognise that many of the stated objectives of the 14th of the HMII discussion documents Personal and Social Education from 5 to 16 are being achieved through our aims for recreational times.

Using the ‘outdoor classroom’
The more interesting the outdoor environment of a school becomes, particularly when it acquires the status of an ‘outdoor classroom’, the more financially demanding the maintenance.

Certainly, the upkeep of the outdoor classroom at Cowick is outside the present county specification! Its development has caused immense problems for the contractor, for we have created a veritable obstacle course. For a great deal of time the outdoor classroom takes on the role of science laboratory: if we were a secondary school, a technician would be employed to facilitate the work of the teacher. Our needs are different from those of our secondary colleagues, but not less, and we have seen it as a priority to appoint a classroom assistant for this purpose.

The teaching styles at Cowick move easily but in complex patterns between class teaching, group teaching and individual teaching. Perhaps it is only once a week that the whole class will be brought into the grounds at the same time for a “What has happened since last week?” session. At other times the most appropriate teaching input is when a group of children receive a high input or perception-heightening session, or are actually carrying out an investigation or task (watering plants, feeding rabbits).

To make maximum use of the grounds, teachers need to be able to plan work for the outdoor classroom and then be able to send groups of children outside to work with the highly-trained ancillary teacher, who is aware both of cross-curricular development opportunities and has a working knowledge of the ways in which young children learn. Without this support, the teacher will need to work in the outdoor classroom but leave unsupervised groups working inside.

Romanticism?
We dreamt of and planned for the space to grow. We have no way of looking into the future, but we believe that children who have felt secure in their school and whose trust in the teaching staff’s concern for their happiness has never been betrayed will be more unlikely to become the school vandals of the future. Cynics shook their heads, told us we were riding for a fall, accused us of romanticism, told us of the reality which would be for the hens and rabbits to be butchered by vandals and drug-takers to use our quiet retreats. We said, if our ideals are betrayed, if tragedy intrudes, we’ll grieve and grow together — in humanity.

(A few weeks after visiting the school to discuss this article, I returned for the photography and saw Zoe Evans again. It was wet and the children were using the hard playground. When I commented on the range of active games and exercises going on, she told me that children were arriving at the school without any apparent games culture and were having to be ‘taught how to play’. I wonder if other teachers have had a similar experience? — Ed.)