Facing the Urban Challenge

Learning Through Landscapes (LTL) is constantly looking for more effective ways of helping schools, and over the last year it has launched a major new initiative — the BT/LTL Urban Challenge, which focuses on the plight of urban schools.

The Trust recognises that schools in cities and towns are often the worst affected by environmental degradation, with their grounds too often resembling a prison yard. The BT/LTL Urban Challenge was launched in October 1992 to help schools overcome some of these problems. Sponsored by BT’s Community Programme, 30 grants of between £500 and £2000 will be awarded over two years.

There has been an excellent response to Phase 1, with over 250 entries, and the overall standard has been very high, demonstrating imagination, creativity and considerable ingenuity. The 16 winning schools reflect a wide geographical spread and an even representation of primary, secondary and special schools.

Any project or aspect of the process of improving school grounds for environmental, educational, aesthetic and recreational activities was eligible for funding. Awards ranged from paying for professional advice to covering the costs of materials such as trees, shrubs and play structures. In awarding grants, LTL was looking for evidence that the project would:

- Benefit the environment
- Benefit the curriculum
- Involve the whole school community
- Encourage active pupil participation at all stages

One of the more unusual awards was made to a consortium of six schools in Belfast. The grant will pay for a consultant to undertake training on all aspects of developing school grounds, as little work has been carried out on this area in Northern Ireland. Hopefully the scheme will act as a catalyst for other schools.

The majority of schools awarded grants have a high percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities, and many schemes celebrate the rich cultural heritage of these children. Pupils from Hardwick Junior School, an inner-city school in Derby, researched gardens from around the world to include in their playground. Parents, friends and relatives were asked to contribute by collecting their own favourite childhood gardens. There are also plans to paint maps of the continents on the back wall so visitors can see what the children can share ideas and discuss, listen and tell stories.

The Infant School drew on the talents of parents to work with the children to design and construct play equipment made from wood. At first the Local Authority adviser tried to discourage the parents from building the equipment, but after a meeting with the parents, they demonstrated their awareness of safety issues and their commitment to the project was strengthened. The two schools share the same site, so the schemes will benefit all the children.

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A celestial theme underfoot at Hardwick Junior School, Derby.

Against great odds, these schools are striving to give their children a more enriching environment

A story garden at Hazelwood Junior School, Enfield, London.

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