

CASE STUDY

THE GROWING SCHOOLS GARDEN

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Stumpery and Evolutionary Path

The Coombes Nursery and Infant School, Reading

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Why we got involved

We wanted to support this project because we perceive our outdoor environment to be our largest classroom and a superb resource for teaching and learning. We have a long association with Learning through Landscapes (LTL) and were one of the original schools involved in the LTL pilot project in the 1980s. We are pleased to be able to help to demonstrate the benefits of learning in an outdoor setting and are delighted that the Royal Horticultural Society has recognised the benefits of the outdoor classroom by including this garden at the Hampton Court Flower Show.

What we made for the Stumpery and Evolutionary Path

WIRE INSECTS Our artist-in-residence this term was wire artist Celia Smith who worked with the children to create three wire sculptures of swans for our school grounds. The small wire insects created by the children are an extension of this work and reflect our pond dipping and mini-beast observations during the last few weeks. They are simple to create using wire recycled from surplus cabling.

For other areas of the garden we made:

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CHESS BANNERS Much of our work this term has been based on logic games and we have chosen to represent this at the Hampton Court garden. Our Year 2 children have been thinking about how to symbolise the different chess pieces, investigating the designs of ancient chess sets and looking at the work of the artist and chess enthusiast Marcel Duchamp. They then used computers to create original designs (ICT is embedded within the whole school curriculum) and made them into banners with the help of the school's parent group.

WILLOW TREE HANGINGS We regularly make tree hangings from natural materials gathered by the children from our own grounds. The designs and materials used will vary with the seasons. Hangings for Hampton Court were made from 'green' willow and included fleece gathered from our recently sheared sheep, reeds and grasses.

What we learned

Our chess project is part of the school's plan to develop and extend the children's higher-order thinking skills through strategic games that involve an understanding of sequencing, cause and effect, planning ahead and logical thinking. The games have encouraged our children to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, independently of adults. We always translate the children's learning into many different settings, including the outdoor environment, and the culmination of this work will be a 'life-size' chess game with the children taking the part of the chess pieces on a giant outdoor chess board especially created for the occasion.

Photo gallery



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Quotes

'I like to do science and do more things to learn about nature and the future. It is fun to play it (chess). It is a quiet game and we can play it at book time. I am looking forward to Chess Day it is exciting and I am going to be one of the dancers. I will feel excited and proud of our school when we play chess at the (Growing Schools) Garden.' Omer, Year 2

Helpers and sponsors

Wire artist Celia Smith, www.celia-smith.co.uk

Other information

We are committed to working with a range of groups and institutions outside our school and have gained a lot from our connection with Learning through Landscapes and the RHS. We hope this will continue.

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Our school is known internationally as a centre of excellence for early years education and we are always happy to share our work, ideas, pedagogy and ethos. We welcome visits from schools looking for ideas to help develop their own grounds. Our school site has been developed for the purpose and our outdoor environment allows us to take a truly multi-sensory approach to teaching. We are able to move all our work between our outdoor and indoor classrooms.

The geology trail, ponds, arboretum and small flock of sheep offer many direct learning experiences for our children. We are able to view red kites and hunt for invertebrates without leaving the school grounds.

We have established good relationships with the wider community and are able to take the children to visit neighbouring pig and poultry farms. Some of our older children recently visited a local quarry to find out about gravel extraction, and to observe the archaeology uncovered by the quarrying. Later this term they will also visit Reading Museum and Silchester to find out about the Roman archaeology being studied there.

Many visitors come into school to share their expertise with the children. These have included entomologists from Reading University, a bird-of-prey expert, wood turner, stained-glass artist, weaver, and musicians from our local REME garrison.

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