

Outdoor Spaces for Children and Young People

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With the recent arrival of the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto and the DCSF's 'Out and About Package', the issue of young people's access to open and green spaces is a very topical one. Attendees of this session were presented with the perspective of a landscape architect who took them through some of the reasons why outdoor spaces are important and had some very practical ideas to share on how schools could improve their *own* grounds to enhance children and young people's outdoor learning experiences.

Helen began by affirming that geography teachers are at the very heart of the issue of children's access to outdoor spaces, as geography is a subject that traditionally takes students 'out of the classroom'. She then posed a number of questions, the first of which is perhaps the most obvious: why do children need outdoor spaces? The following list summarises the central reasons that Helen identified-

- **Physical benefits**; increased fitness and the reduction of obesity
- **Development opportunities**; motor and cognitive skills
- **Improved well being**; Increased self-esteem and interpersonal skills
- **Relief from stress**
- **Provision for SEN children**; Research has shown that students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) function better in green spaces than in the classroom.

Next, Helen went through some of the possible uses of outdoor spaces-

- **Play**; the importance of play is often overlooked (Helen identified the worrying trend in some schools to dispense with afternoon play time)
- **Learning**; some children learn better outside (according to Helen, geographers in particular are in a good position to know this)
- **Growing and caring**; this emphasises the possibility for outdoor play and learning to have affective and emotional benefits, encouraging care for the Earth and environment

Helen then went on to discuss the features that it is important to have in outdoor spaces, in particular the school grounds-

- **Grass** as opposed to tarmac
- **landform features**, such as elevations and slopes
- **Vegetation**, including novel uses of it such as den making and the construction of willow walls
- **Loose parts** (such as tree trunks and rocks that can be shifted around)
- **Sand and water features**
- **Seating areas** (particularly semi-circular arrangements that encourage communication)
- **Pathways**

Helen then acknowledged the difficulty encountered by teachers in putting these things into place (budget, space and 'red tape' being key limiting features). But she had some encouraging avenues of support at hand...

- [Eco-Schools](#)
- [Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto](#)
- [Out and About Package](#)
- [Growing Schools](#)
- [Learning through Landscapes](#)
- [Sustainable Development Action Plan](#)

Finally, Helen made links with the GA's Manifesto, [A Different View](#), which was launched at Conference. There is much in the Manifesto that puts emphasis on the value of outdoor learning - see in particular [Section 6](#) on 'Geography and the Real World'. Helen ended by stressing once again that geography teachers really are central in pushing forward the outdoor learning agenda.

Ben Major