School Yards

(arial black, 24pt, justify left top)

Dylan Yamashita
(arial, 12pt, justify right)

Today, schoolyards are inadequate spaces that barely function as places for children to relax and get exercise.   But there is now a movement to turn these asphalt wastelands into sites of not only recreation, but places for education and engagement where children can experience nature and everything associated with it.

School yards have gone through many changes over the years. From large open lawns for children to roam, to concrete deserts with little or no vegetation; school yards have been recognized solely as a place of recreation for children. Recently, there have been movements to modify these one dimensional spaces into much more then simply a place for children to mill about during their recess. School yards are no longer just for play, they are becoming multifunctional in their use; by creating habitat for local wildlife, providing produce through carefully managed gardens, and establishing educational opportunities in the form of outdoor classrooms, as well as many other possibilities that connect the schools ecologically and socially to the rest of the community.

There are a number of reasons why school yards have had to adapt and accommodate more responsibilities as open spaces. The current state of shrinking amounts and sizes of open spaces in cities and urban areas has forced the reassessment of how school yards are designed, maintained, and what functions they provide. These play areas are now being asked to contribute to habitat space because there is a lack of open space in the most populated regions. But at the same time it creates an opportunity for children to understand and interact with ecosystems that they would otherwise never see. The epidemic of obesity and overall unhealthiness that is overwhelming our country has also forced playgrounds to do more then simply offer a place for children to run around, they must now also grow the nutritious foods necessary for children to eat healthy. School yards are also being asked to supply communal space for neighborhoods without access to major public parks. Sometimes it is in the form of a conscious decision to meet, for example at a neighborhood potluck or perhaps a park cleanup effort; other times it is an informal relaxed assembly of people who come to use the park for different reasons, someone walking the dog, a father and son playing catch, or maybe even people just looking for a quiet place to rest.

Whitechurch, United Kingdom

Salem, Massachusettes

San Gabriel, Ecuador

Imagine a classroom with sky for a ceiling and earth for a floor. A room with out walls or desks…where teachers think "outside the box" as they turn schoolyards into laboratories for experimental learning".

Context

Schoolyards have long been unmaintained and seen as spaces that perform only a single function, giving children a place to release energy. These spaces have been paved over to make them more convenient, but by doing so they have been made less effective in terms of serving the children. Recently, schools in association with parents, students, teachers, and community members have been coming up with alternative solutions and giving these spaces new identities.

These schoolyards are great opportunities to create links with larger, possibly regional parks; and in the event that there are no regional parks, they might be able to act as regional parks providing open space and activities for the entire community.

Case: Martin Luther King Middleschool, Berkley CA

Preparation began in 1994; the middle school tore up an acre of parking lot to create space for this concept developed by a chef, Alice Waters and a former principal, Neil Smith. Garden classes teach ecology, the origins of food, and respect for all living systems. Students work together to shape and plant beds, amend soil, turn compost, and harvest flowers, fruits, and vegetables. They have created a program called Seed to Table where children and teachers are involved in every aspect of the food cycle, from planting and harvest, to food preparation, consumption and waste disposal, where they return the scraps back to the garden. This is meant to expose the children to ecology, food production and nutrition.

One concept that has helped make this process successful is that it has been incorporated into the curriculum as a part of the regular classroom education, and is not a separate activity that only a few children are a part of. Teachers use the garden and kitchen activities as common reference points to activate prior knowledge, integrating it into the overall education experience.

Schoolyard Models

Edible Schoolyards- Using food systems as a unifying concept, students learn how to grow, harvest, and prepare nutritious produce.

School Gardens- integrated into the educational curriculum to teach children about plants, nature, as well as other subjects like science.

Peaceful Playgrounds- creating an environment where children are less prone to violence and more likely to be active.

Outdoor Edcuation- appeals to the use of the senses - audio, visual, taste, touch, and smell - for observation and perception.

Schoolyard Habitat- teachers and students create wildlife habitat on school grounds, in an effort to battle one of the main threats facing wildlife.

Case: Outdoor Education Program, San Deigo CA

Elementary school students attend a residential school program that includes hands on learning opportunities which meet and incorporate the state guided framework for science. They teach students biology, botany, geology, meteorology, astronomy, recreation activities and crafts. Their overall goal is to provide students with experiences that will help enhance awareness and scientific understanding of the natural world.

The Outdoor Education Program has touched over 82,000 lives during 2004-05 and has been in existence for over 59 years.

Funding: $216,223 from Environmental Service Dept. $31,000 from the community campership council

They have been able to incorporate other state entities such as the San Diego county water authority, city of San Diego environmental service dept, and the community campership council. Through these partnerships, they have been able to expand out to more detailed outreach programs. These include a mobile science lab dealing with water issues like the water cycle and water quality. A "green machine" program which deals with the "seed to table" concept where children are involved hands on in the entire food production process from planting to cooking. They also provide a "Salk institute mobile science lab" which focuses on genetics and DNA education. They also have a marine science floating lab which creates an environment for students to learn about marine biology and oceanography through actual observation and activities happening in San Diego bay.

Other examples: Boston Schoolyard Initiative, Chicago Campus Park Initiative, San Francisco Green School Alliance

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before

after

San Francisco Green School Alliance

Aquisition / Implementation Mechanisms

For something like this to happen, there needs to be a source of inspiration, someone willing to take charge and be a leader. Whether it is at a regional or local level, strong guidance is required for things to change.

Having the backing of government and community organizations are also helpful. They can provide support, funding, equipment, and man power when a project gets underway. They are also important because these projects usually have some sort of effect on these agencies or groups, therefore there is a level of commitment needed on their part.

Case: Lower Southampton Schoolyard, Feasterville, PA

This site has been primarily created as a bird sanctuary, where children are able to watch and record the actions of wildlife that occur at this school site. It is integrated into the learning system as a science class where children learn to observe and document their findings, which is in turn used by scientist who study bird populations and develop bird conservation programs. It gives children a chance to gain knowledge and learn to appreciate nature in the form of an educational experience. It also creates an opportunity to build school and neighborhood relationships through hands on site construction, mentoring and other outreach programs.

Magical Birds
Magical birds
Flying in the sky
Making discoveries as they fly by
Singing a peaceful song
As they drift
upon the air
Perching on a branch
Making no sound
Resting peacefully as it sits on the branch
soaring in the sky
Flying with the wind.

Poem by: Alix
http://www.lowersouthes.org/hbwildlife.htm

Creating Habitat

Resources

http://www.ecoschools.com/SFGSA/2004_SFGSAconf_Photos/SFGSA_2004_Sloat-Workshop_photos.html
http://www.dltk-kids.com/school/poems_for_teachers.htm
http://www.lowersouthes.org/habitathme.htm
http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/outdoored/ar-2004.pdf
http://www.sdcoe.net/outdoored/outdoor.asp
http://www.whitchurchandllandaff.co.uk/School%20Yard%20Glanynant.jpg
http://irene.wrhine.com/images/school-yard.jpg
http://www.sssq.org/picture5.jpg
 http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/homepage.html

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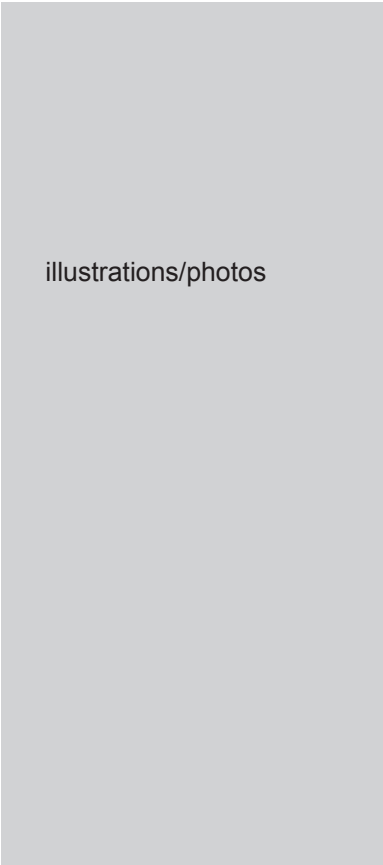
photo

Other: text or photo
text explaning (arial, 10pt.)
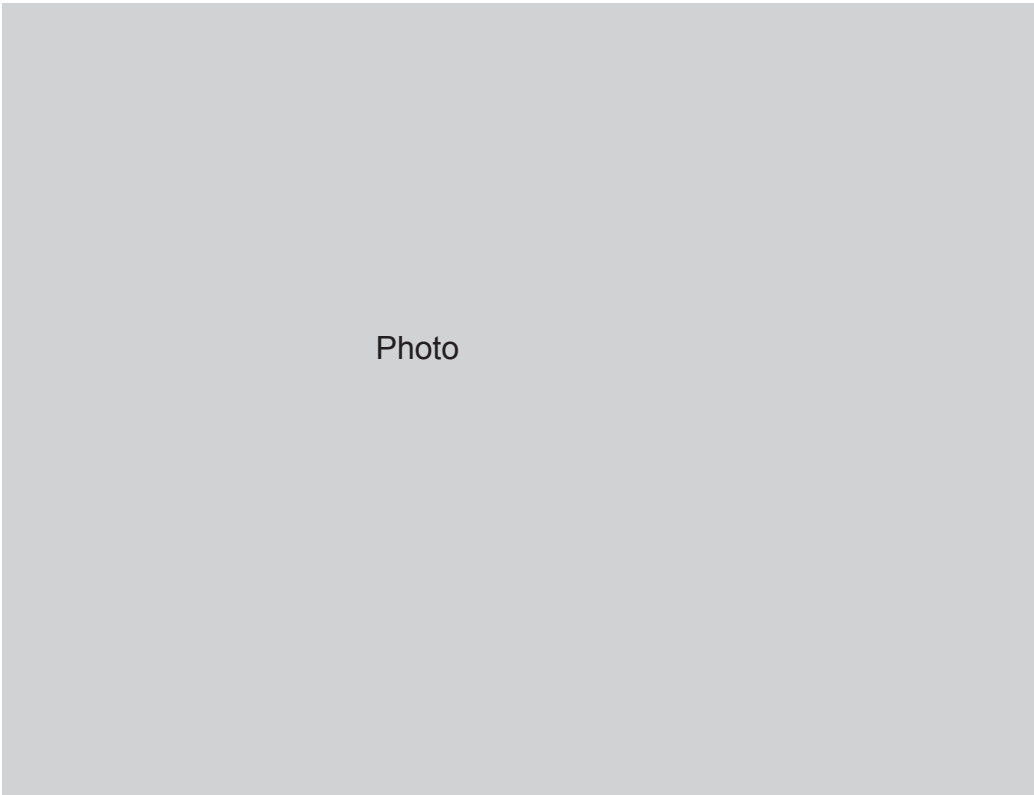could also be another story in a box

illustrations/photos

Photo

photo caption
photo credit

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