

Two articles on developing playgrounds as part of the learning environment (Vol. 10 No. 5) attracted widespread interest. Siobhan Hayward of Learning Through Landscapes has written the following update on the work of the Trust. — Ed.

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.

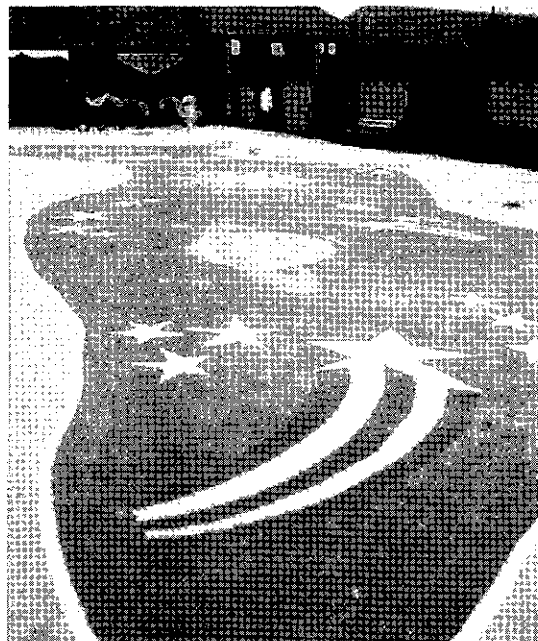
The Trust recognises that schools in cities and towns are often the worst affected by environmental degradation, with their grounds all too often resembling a prison yard. The BT/LTL Urban Challenge was launched in October 1992 to help schools overcome some of these problems. Sponsored by BT's Community 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 celestial theme underfoot at Hardwick Junior School, Derby.

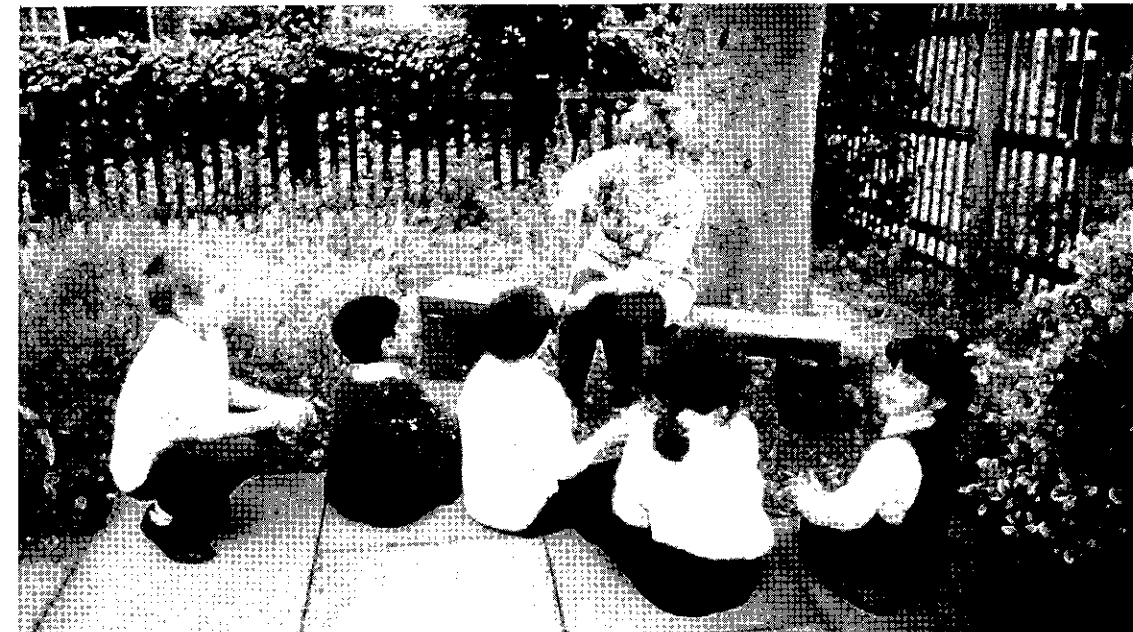
a consortium of six schools in Belfast. The grant will pay for a consultant to undertake training on all aspects of developing school grounds, as little work has been carried out in this area in Northern Ireland. Hopefully the scheme will act as a catalyst for other schools.

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 games from around the world to include in their playground. Parents, friends and relatives were asked to contribute by recollecting their own favourite childhood games. There are also plans to paint maps of the continents on the back wall with murals opposite, to represent the wealth and cultural variety within each continent.

Park Place Nursery School in Dundee converted a flat grass area into a garden with a variety of levels, paths, trees and shrubs representing gardens from around the world. A Scottish garden was obvious, with heather, Scots pine and some native rock-type plants, but ideas for the South American garden proved a little more difficult! Research by parents resulted in pampas grass, Beriberi, Chilean Fire Bush and other shrubs.

Art featured strongly in many of the schemes. The next stage of Park Place Nursery School's

Telling tales: the story garden at Hazelwood Junior School, Enfield, London.



project is to create a 'fun' entrance and bring art to an inner-city environment. Children worked with artists from a local college, and their ideas formed the basis for the gate and wall. Three-dimensional models have been produced to illustrate ideas which include a wrought-iron gate of children's profiles and a skyline of the city for the wall.

Another interesting idea was a joint scheme put forward by Hazelwood Junior & Infants School, Enfield, London. The Junior School plans to create a Story Garden surrounded by a variety of habitats including a coppice wood and a pond. A seating area has been designed so that the garden will become a haven where children can share ideas and discuss, listen and tell stories.

The Infant School drew on the talents of parents who worked with the children to design and construct play equipment made from wood. At first the Local Authority adviser tried on safety grounds to discourage the parents from building the equipment, but after a meeting where the parents presented their ideas and demonstrated their awareness of safety issues they won the support and encouragement of the Local Authority. The two schools share the same site, so the schemes will benefit all the children.

Three Crowns Special School in Walsall put forward a proposal to open up their grounds for disabled pupils. Although very fortunate in having spacious grounds with a 1½-hectare woodland on a steep hillside, the pupils have never had access to this area. In April 1992 the school

adopted LTL as their mission and agreed to emphasise curriculum benefits and social development and to address disability awareness through sharing the grounds with neighbouring schools. They wasted no time, and called upon the local Territorial Army squadron to help them lay 1200 metres of paths around the school to allow access to the woods and give pupils a new-found independence and freedom. The school is now ready to tackle the next stage of the project and create a variety of habitats, including a wildflower meadow, bog garden and sensory garden.

A commitment to involving the community was evident in many of the proposed projects. Golden Hillock Secondary School in Birmingham places a high priority on its links with the local community, and the site is increasingly used by local residents for meetings and holiday schemes. The school plans to build a courtyard designed to reflect and enhance the Victorian character of the building. The development will benefit the local community, as this area leads to a community room. It will also provide an oasis of greenery for local people, who are surrounded by urban dereliction.

It was a very hard decision to choose just sixteen schools, as so many schemes were well thought out and displayed tremendous effort. It was encouraging to see the outstanding level of commitment from schools which against great odds are striving to give their children a more enriching environment in which they can learn and grow into healthy, caring adults.

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

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