



Organising a Secondary school Eco-Day

Eco-Day at Fallibroome High School is one element of a whole school approach to Education for Sustainability. This approach had its origins in extra-curricular work, but increasingly it has been incorporated within the normal curriculum to ensure that Education for Sustainability becomes an entitlement for all pupils.

Experiments with energy generation



"The value of Eco-Day is undisputed by all who participated. Not only did it highlight the importance of sustainable development for the students, but also for everyone who attended the evening presentation. The day also required the students to utilise a wide range of presentation skills to communicate their findings." *Teacher*

The work has three main aims:

- to highlight critical issues affecting the environment, and to emphasise the themes of individual and collective responsibility for the present and future management of our surroundings
- to encourage departments to re-order their delivery of such themes within their Schemes of Work so that work in one subject informs, supports and extends work in another
- to integrate work introduced within the pastoral curriculum with work taking place in the formal curriculum (eg the theme 'Planning for the Future' introduced in an assembly by the local planning officer acted as a stimulus for land use issues in a form period. This, in turn, acted as a powerful springboard into urban planning issues in Geography).

Eco-Day included all 200 Year 8 pupils and took place towards the end of the summer term. It was to be a celebration of the work that had taken place in the course of the year; to consolidate and extend knowledge and awareness of sustainability issues; to build on existing community links, and to be an opportunity to communicate with parents, as well as contributing to the overall aims of education for sustainability.

Skills

- co-operative working
- critical thinking
- negotiation
- problem solving
- reasoned debate
- informed decision-making
- creativity – an ability to envision alternatives
- research and data handling.

Knowledge

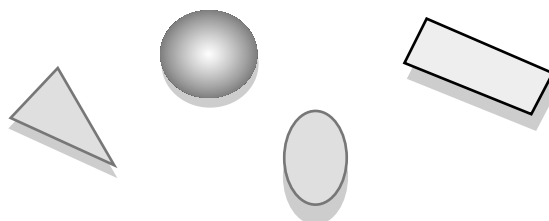
- how natural processes work
- how their own lives and actions connect with the lives and actions of others – locally, nationally and globally; past, present and future
- what is involved in different methods of providing for human needs and wants (energy, raw materials, human input, environmental impact)
- how the processes of decision making work and how to take part in them.

Values and attitudes

- a commitment to the well-being of all living things
- a desire for social justice
- empathy and awareness of the points of view of others
- an understanding that quality of life is not just dependent on standard of living
- an understanding of the place of individual and collective rights and responsibilities
- a desire to participate
- a belief that working with others, they can make a difference
- a belief in a positive future.



"We had moved from a rather green bandwagon, tokenistic approach to an appreciation of the wider issues of sustainability. In particular, embracing the issue of empowerment and local democracy within the scope of sustainability seemed to broaden our horizons." *Teacher*



Raising staff awareness

In a school with a tradition of pond clearances and litter picks, a move towards sustainability involved raising teacher awareness of the issues before these could be conveyed to pupils. A cascade approach, in which the core members approached other key staff and spoke at length about their department's current work on the environment and other related themes, was found to be most effective. It helped to create a 'cell' structure, avoiding large, unwieldy meetings and the consequent waste of time and resentment, and produced two immediate outcomes – an audit of education for sustainability and the formation of a steering group of interested volunteers. Eco-Day was led by this group but proved an effective vehicle for widening involvement.

A considerable number of staff were involved in the event and each saw the need to educate themselves. A clearly defined objective, within a specific timeframe and with sustainability at its centre gave staff something to aim for. Formal INSET sessions organised to help staff to plan their activities for Eco-Day were well received, being tied to a specific purpose.

The movement in thinking towards the broader issues of sustainability and the ethical issues it encompasses, which came about through the Eco-Day process, proved important in incorporating sustainability into the rest of the curriculum.

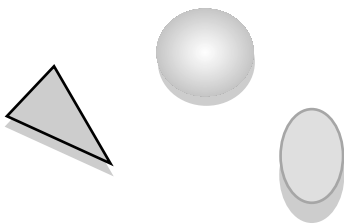
'What we came to see is that sometimes sustainability issues can pull an argument away from narrow, local interests. For example, we have our large school pond set up for pond studies. The pond, however, is actually an old drainage feature. By managing it for the benefit of wildlife in and around the pond, we could actually damage the pattern of water seepage over a huge area.' *Teacher*



Investigating wind power



"Anyone who wants to put on their own Eco-Day will need to plan well in advance. We found that good resources and well-prepared staff make all the difference. It is very important to base your focus on the capabilities of the staff you have got. In addition, don't forget to use local people with an interest in the subject." *Education for sustainability co-ordinator*



How to organise the day?

Meetings were kept to a minimum, but everyone who expressed an interest in being involved in the day was invited to an initial meeting to discuss the overall vision and to decide what their role would be. Senior management was represented by the deputy head, and the steering group felt that his support made all the difference.

The initial idea was to start with a bang – big assembly, invited speaker; split into small groups for a circus of activities; end with a bang – each group reports back. However, this seemed logistically impossible with a whole year group of 200 pupils. The second idea was the antithesis of the first. Each group would do one part of the whole project, participating in a range of activities but with the same staff, on the same theme and working towards a clear goal. There would be no starting and finishing sessions. However, communicating the work was seen as of vital importance so an evening event with a combination of presentations, performances and displays was planned.

The activities were chosen to build on the strengths of staff and take into account their personal interests. Some teachers felt they had the expertise to follow a curriculum based approach with a small group, eg the Science Department investigated energy use. Other staff were prepared to operate on the fringe of their school experience, like the English Department who volunteered to publish an Internet Web page and a paper based newsletter on the actual day. Yet other people were prepared to take on activities completely outside their normal role, like the Modern Linguist who went to work on the pond!

Each staff group was given INSET time to plan the work, which signalled that senior management considered the project to be of value.

Organising community support

From the start, Fallibroome saw its education for sustainability work as needing to be firmly rooted in the community and it was no coincidence that the person who took on the co-ordinator's role also has responsibility for community links. Environmental assemblies (two per term for each lower school year group) use outside speakers as far as possible, to give status to the assembly and bring expertise for a particular subject to both students and staff. Videos from organisations such as WWF and the Environment Agency have also been used.

These assemblies were initially intended to broaden the knowledge of the students about environmental topics by highlighting particular issues. Their importance rapidly increased and they became a medium through which to reinforce the work of various departments and an opportunity to involve members of the wider community in the work of the school. They were also found to be 'INSET by the back door' for staff who were present at assemblies in their role as form tutors, and who found them extremely useful and informative.

Outside speakers have included council officers involved with planning, leisure services, transport, recycling and Local Agenda 21, and representatives from local environmental and pressure groups such as Groundwork and the local Wildlife Trust.

The support of such people was considered a vital element of Eco-Day, lending specialist expertise and enabling pupils to work in small groups in which they were more able to contribute actively. It was felt that anyone contributing to the day needed to be quite well known to the school, and assembly slots were used to trial suitable people before they were approached to run groups on the day.

Preparing an Eco-Day newsletter and web page

"Having outsiders in seems to encourage staff and to make them more confident, and also to impress the students into thinking of the work as 'proper work' and not just a contrived exercise".

Education for sustainability co-ordinator







On the day...

Activities included:

- Participating in a planning exercise about the possible ways a local site could be developed in the light of sustainability, under the guidance of a planning officer. This was presented to the evening audience in the format of a planning meeting, with questions taken from the floor, and the planning officer took back ideas for the actual development of the site.
- Researching paper use in the school and carrying out a feasibility study into setting up paper recycling at the school, with the county council recycling officer.
- Studying conservation areas and environmental changes in the town from a historical perspective, with a worker from the Heritage Centre, culminating in a presentation of ideas of how to improve a local site, based on methods explored during the day.
- Investigating the benefits of wind, water and solar power by constructing models for generating energy, and comparing them to fossil fuels, led by science staff.
- Working with an officer from the county council planning department to enter sightings of particular species into a data base, as a contribution to the Cheshire Species Recording Scheme.
- Producing a theatrical piece based on discussion about the effects of out-of-town shopping on local businesses and the environment, with original songs composed by music students, to be performed at the evening event.
- Studying the biodiversity of the school grounds with a representative of the local Wildlife Trust before making recommendations for the future management of certain areas and beginning to set up a nature trail for visiting primary schools.
- Exploring lifestyle and attitudes in Delhi and London through use of the photopack **A Tale of Two Cities** before creating a performance which highlighted some of the issues of sustainability which came to the fore, under the guidance of creative arts staff.
- Carrying out an eco-audit of the school and comparing it with one that had been carried out several weeks earlier by the county council. This led to the development of an Environmental Charter, a copy of which went into every classroom.
- Visiting a local landfill site and recording findings to complement a subsequent Geography topic.
- Working with the Cheshire Agenda 21 Indicators Group to measure such things as water quality in streams, signs of air pollution in local woodlands and the age of hedgerows. This will need to be an annual event if the results are to be used as sustainability indicators.
- Comparing the quality, cost and environmental impact of bought, packet-mix and homemade cakes before preparing a range of foods for the evening event.
- All the events of the day were recorded by a press and video team who produced an Eco-Day Special Edition of the school magazine and put details of the day onto the Internet.

Although students worked for the whole day on one theme, there was plenty of variation of style and content within each activity. The afternoon session took on an extra dimension as the groups tried to get to a conclusion and produce a display of their work for the evening presentation.

...and the evening

The format of the evening was decided by the end products of the working groups. Those that had produced displays pinned them up and talked to visitors about their findings. The music, the drama, the presentations and the Internet Web page on the progress of the day were part of a programme in the hall.

The evening event was a great success in terms of public relations. Representatives of almost all the school's contact organisations came, bringing bosses and co-workers to justify their investment in the school. The students felt that the presence of local government, training, education and business people lent the whole thing an air of importance. Much of the important work of the evening took place over refreshments at the end, with offers of equipment and expertise relating to the event, ensuring that it will be even better next time.

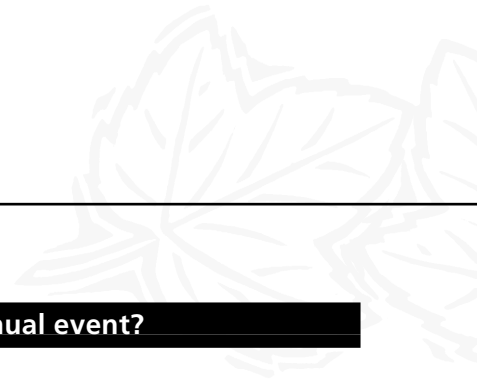
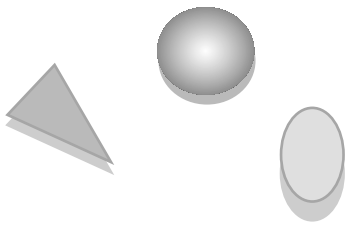


Investigating steam power

"It is important to retain the objectives of Eco-Day at the forefront of all planning and presentation. The process of carrying out the activities and developing a real understanding of what sustainable development actually is takes priority over a polished performance for the presentation evening. However, the standard of work presented was excellent and demonstrated that when students are working on a topic that is important to them, they spare no effort in ensuring that their work is of a high quality." *Education for sustainability co-ordinator*

Post mortem

"Students who had a reputation for poor behaviour or work seemed to enjoy the chance to work on a big project where they had more ownership of the work and a less formal framework to fit into. One student, with a reputation for trouble, was still asking if they could do it again twelve months later!" *Teacher*



Was it a success?

- The students think so. Many are disappointed that they won't do it again in Year 9. Others want to help with planning the next one. Year 7 keep checking when the next event will be.
- The staff think so. Quite a few of the veterans of the first Eco-Day volunteered themselves straight away for the next one. They don't want to do the same thing but can see ways of moving on.
- Management think so. They feel the school has invested a lot in environmental work and they like publicity about it. The day reinforced the ethos of the school at the same time as improving its image.
- The parents think so. They attended in large numbers, there was a lot of positive feedback on the night and quite a few congratulatory letters after the event.
- The steering group think so. Despite the added workload, they felt it was 'one of those rare pieces of work in teaching that captured the imagination of everybody'.

"We are proud of Eco-Day and can heartily recommend it to any other school."

Steering group

An annual event?

Fallibroome have now had an Eco-Day for three consecutive years. Some staff and activities have remained the same, building on the successes of the previous years, but new staff and members of the local community have brought new ideas and skills.

"The project has had many knock-on benefits, for example, students have developed presentation and inter-personal skills and become more confident at expressing their views." Teacher

"The actual management of the students seemed less involved this time but maybe it was because we were getting more used to it." Education for sustainability co-ordinator

"Hopefully, students will leave Fallibroome with an understanding of sustainable development and this will inform decisions that they will make in their future lives." Education for sustainability co-ordinator

Acknowledgements

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Reference

A Tale of Two Cities, Catherine McFarlane, WWF-UK Development Education Centre, Birmingham, 1992

