European Garden Heritage Network

Education Report - Summary

EGHN
EUROPEAN GARDEN HERITAGE NETWORK

LEARNING IN, ABOUT and FROM GARDENS

International cooperation in the garden: English, French and German school students create a Japanese garden at the Parc Oriental, Maulévrier, EGHN camp, 2005.(photo G Allard)

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The **European Garden Heritage Network** (EGHN) was formed in 2003. Partners from France, Germany and the UK, determined to prove that gardens and parks could be managed positively as cultural assets to promote regional development and sustainable tourism, joined together in a three-year project to further these aims.

The six EGHN action areas were:

- Spatial Strategy
- Inter-Regional Gateways
- European Themes
- Access
- Interpretation
- Education

Each partner led on a different action area and **Somerset took the lead on Education**. The full report outlines the current provision of garden education in the network, especially in the UK, it makes suggestions for the future and explains how the achievements of the EGHN *Education Action* could provide stimulus and resources for teachers and garden managers. There are many links to associated documents and further information. A downloadable version of this summary is available on the EGHN website at **www.eghn.eu**; the full report will be available as web-pages hosted by Surrey County Council's Countryside Team and linked to all the EGHN websites.

The main objective of the *Education Action* was to deliver useful and practical concepts and ideas for schools and gardens working in partnership to raise awareness and appreciation of our rich garden and park heritage amongst young people. A Transnational Education Working Group (TEWG) was set up to provide a forum for discussion and development. The EGHN *Education Action* was the catalyst for creating many productive links between educators, gardeners, managers, enthusiasts and school children.

What is Garden Education and why does it matter? Three essential aspects were identified: learning **in** gardens (the **experience** of being in a garden environment), learning **about** gardens (the **knowledge** we acquire when we ask questions about gardens) and learning **from** gardens (our own **creative response** to the garden). Above all, it is asserted that "everyone can learn **in, about** and **from** gardens".

The Child in the Garden: Pushing at an Open Gate. Educators have long recognised that outdoor experiences encourage the child's general social, physical, emotional as well as intellectual development. The Forest School philosophy of education reflects this approach and this thinking is once again becoming mainstream in the UK with the publication in December 2006 of the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' Manifesto, which encourages outdoor education of every sort. This is a good time for teachers and garden managers to ensure that they are ready to meet this opportunity.

How can Garden Education help schools and support the curriculum? To justify time spent out of the classroom, teachers need to plan their visits to fulfil very specific aims: subject-specific requirements and the wider needs of their pupils. The more relevant a garden visit can be made to the school's curriculum and needs, the better. The three aspects of garden education - experience, knowledge and creative response - provide fertile soil for developing both of these elements. In April 2004 the Somerset EGHN Education team researched and produced the **EGHN Survey of Good Practice in Garden Education in the UK**, producing an

updated version in December 2006. It contains many examples of excellent garden education. A regional survey of **Garden Education in the Pays de la Loire** (another EGHN partner) also provides valuable comparative material showing how the framework within which garden education can take place varies from region to region.

New Concepts in Garden Education. The EGHN Education team had the best possible means of testing out the holistic nature of Garden Education: they designed and ran two 5-day international youth camps which took place in the Oriental Park at Maulévrier in France in 2005 and at Schloss Dyck in Germany in 2006, both based around a 'WILD-FORMAL-CREATIVE' theme developed by the team. A major EGHN event at Hestercombe Gardens, Somerset on September 22nd 2006 gave a further opportunity to work with partner schools. The whole day, entitled "Imagine the Possibilities…", was also shaped around the 'wild-formal-creative' concept and involved children and teachers from both the primary and secondary sectors looking at and utilising Hestercombe Gardens to their full potential.

Gardens and 'Gifted and Talented' Education. The EGHN Education team worked closely with two schools in using gardens as launch pads for innovative 'gifted and talented' schemes for Key Stage 3 students (11-14). Hestercombe Gardens were used as a focus for developing the use of the IT educational tool 'Infomapper' with 'gifted and talented' Year 8/9 students from the Castle School, Taunton. Painshill Park, Surrey worked with Woking High School Special Needs Department to develop the 'Creative Minds' project, a pioneering, long term 'gifted and talented' programme.

New Curriculum Resources for Garden Education. The major achievement of the EGHN Education Action has been the production of digital learning resources, with the support of a partnership between Somerset County Council, the South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) and the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG). By working closely with pilot schools and near-by gardens they developed two on-line educational tools, which are now available on the Internet in English, German and French to pupils worldwide. 'The Story of Gardens' (www.storyofgardens.org.uk) is designed to bring gardens into Key Stage 3 History, by setting the Story of Gardens in Europe within its wider historical framework. It also provides in-depth examples of specific gardens, supported by a fascinating range of historical evidence, ideal for classroom work. 'Plant Life in the Garden' (www.plantlifeinthegarden.org.uk) is a simple ICT activity for KS1/2 school children, based around a visit to a local garden. It also provides information about the sorts of plants children might see in a garden, where they first came from, and how people have used them through time. Other, non-digital, resources produced include a Happy Families Game (a modified version of which became the 'Plant Life in the Garden' website) and the 'Plant Detectives' activity.

In conclusion, the EGHN Education Action led by Somerset County Council has explored a wide range of educational activities and tested them both in the garden and in the classroom. Examples of best practice are noted in the final Education Report, along with detailed links to learning materials via various websites. The production of learning resources for teachers, via the Story of Gardens website and the Plant Life in the Garden website, provides a lasting legacy for the learning opportunities provided by gardens.

The project has shown that gardens can and do provide a valuable cultural, economic and learning opportunity for society. They enable people to explore landscapes, plants and wildlife, along with cultural traditions and craftsmanship. Perhaps most importantly, the EGHN Education Action has shown that gardens can be fun for children of all ages.

This Summary report was prepared by Belinda Payne and Bob Croft, based on the full Education Report written by Rachel Shaw to be published soon.