

Marino Institute of Education

Learning Landscapes - New Possibilities – Transformational Spaces



Learning in the outdoor landscape at Marino.

The grounds at Marino Institute of Education provide a wealth of opportunity as a learning landscape. We are already making good use of our outdoor spaces for both learning and wellbeing. However, there is much potential still to be realized. I will address the potential benefits of further developing the college landscape under three headings - teaching and learning, health and wellbeing, and biodiversity.

Teaching and learning across all programmes

The development of the college grounds into a learning landscape over time could significantly enhance the following:

- Exemplify global / Local links within the curriculum
- Provide spaces for the college community working together and alone
- Open up conversations and experiences through the use of the landscape
- Enhance working environments for all in the college
- Be an example to other institutions at differing levels

BEd1, BEd2, BEd3, PME1 and BECE2 all use the College grounds and local landscape for inquiry-based learning and SESE. Our campus offers many affordances for outdoor learning – woodland, open spaces, a varied selection of plants and flowers.



Exploring where butterflies, ladybirds and fairies might like to live on MIE campus. Photos taken from student padlets (BEd3, BECE)

Health and wellbeing for the College community

Apart from its natural teaching and learning potential, here are five ways in which exposure to the natural environment can benefit our students and staff:

- enhanced personal and social communication skills
- increased physical health
- enhanced mental and spiritual health
- enhanced spiritual, sensory, and aesthetic awareness
- the ability to assert personal control and increased sensitivity to one's own well-being.

Source: *Health, Well-Being and Open Space, Literature Review by Nina Morris, OPENspace Research Centre, (2003).*

Biodiversity

Our campus is a wildlife haven, home to a wealth of plant and animal species, including birds of prey, native trees, shrubs and wildflowers. However, there are still many things that could be done to enhance and protect the biodiversity of the campus, such as provision of bat boxes, wildflower meadow areas, insect hotels and wild water (see below).

The following are possibilities for enhancement of our outdoor space in each of the arenas introduced above.

1. Productive Spaces - Extending our Model School Garden

Ciaran has already been extremely supportive of the school garden. In the past year, PME1 and BECE2 students have grown a variety of fruit (raspberries), vegetables (potatoes, spinach, beans, onions) and flowers (sweet pea, nasturtium). The Irish Register of Herbalists has donated a Herb Patch, with rosemary, thyme, calendula, lavender and heartsease. We are home to a number of beehives, managed by our neighbour, Brian. To date, all seeds, plants, materials have been resourced through the SESE budget. It would be great to have a small, dedicated budget for the garden, which would allow us to plan for immediate (e.g. new hose) and medium-term (e.g. replacing timbers) needs.



Hard at work in MIE School Garden

2. Gathering Spaces – Making space to teach outdoors

There are many places in the college where we could amend the landscape slightly to make some wonderful gathering spaces. We have some of these (e.g. between Nagle-Rice and St. Mary's) but many look outward not inwards. Logs make very simple sitting spaces.



Gathering spaces at the Eden Project, Cornwall

While the positioning of such spaces would need to be carefully considered, to avoid the potential for anti-social behavior, the woodland area to the front of the college naturally lends itself to an informal outdoor classroom/gathering space, while remaining at the heart of campus life:



Woodland areas adjacent to the front lawn, bounded by St. Mary's, student accommodation and the front boundary fence of the campus.

3. Secret spaces - Weaving a willow space

Another way to create spaces to sit and to gather is to create living willow structures. Willow provides beautiful structures that can have multiple uses. A dome can be a story telling space, bird hide or thinking space. Such a structure could provide collaborative teaching opportunities in Art, Geography, Science, SPHE and PE. Many primary schools create such structures with their pupils through collaboration with Heritage in Schools specialists. At St. Pat's DCU, staff members created a willow dome and tunnel on campus as part of a cross-campus initiative.

Willow structures around Ireland.



4. Beautiful and edible - Creating an Edible Landscape

When thinking about repopulating the landscape with trees, shrubs, perennials – consider using species that are edible to humans and/or other species such as birds. There are plenty of native fruit trees and bushes that could be used – such as those listed below.



Another possibility is a Forest Garden... these look beautiful and make great local and global links. They inspire action, such as writing, talking or eating!



The Eden Project, Cornwall

Suggested species for an edible landscape:

Trees

- Apple, Pear
- Cherry
- Plum, Damson, Gage
- Medlar
- Quince
- Mulberry
- Hazel
- Cob/Filbert
- Walnut, Chestnut

Shrubs/Bushes

- Blackberry
- Raspberry
- Loganberry
- Tayberry
- Black/White/Red Currant
- Cranberry
- Hawthorn, Blackthorn
- Guelder Rose, Dog Rose

Perennials

- Herbs
- Wild Strawberry
- Rhubarb

5. Walking spaces - Following the Darwin 'Thinking' Path. A space for thought and reflection.

"Darwin would take five turns around the Sandwalk every day at noon, often accompanied by his fox terrier Polly. It was a place for meditation, known as his 'thinking path', and as he made a complete circuit he would place a flint in the path to help him remember how many times he'd been round."

Thinking spaces – Reflection www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/walking-helps-us-think



We already have some wonderful walking routes around the college campus. We could perhaps consider making the reflective/mindful aspect explicit (mapping/signage) and/or including opportunities to stop, sit and reflect (benches, logs).

6. Going with the flow – making room for wild water on campus.

While we have several ponds and water features on campus, most are not particularly attractive to wildlife. Wild ponds do not have to be large, or deep. The addition of a mini-pond (made from a washing-up bowl) in the school garden would offer a haven for amphibians such as frogs and toads. Insect hotels are another feature that could greatly increase biodiversity on campus, and be a model system for our student teachers.



Miniponds and wild areas

7. Collaborative Spaces – an opportunity for research and shared practice.

There are many opportunities for collaboration and shared practices within the college community- developing art, music, PE activities and spaces.



A fairy village, sound garden and water feature, Waterville community garden, Kerry.

The Outdoor Learning Network is a network of education professionals across the island of Ireland who have a professional interest in environmental education. The network holds a number of seminars and workshops each year (e.g. in Spring 2017 OLN members planted a small apple orchard at All Hallows DCU). In Oct 2017 Marino hosted a Field Studies Council/OLN seminar which was very successful (sponsored by FSC). Further such events at Marino would allow us to highlight the many excellent resources we have here, and to ensure the continued centrality of MIE within environmental education.

We continue to provide a test site for a number of research projects undertaken by Prof. Jane Stout and her team, Botany Dept., TCD. We hope to continue such collaborations and to build new connections in the future.



Active Pollinator Research in Progress

This is one of four 2x2 m pollinator research gardens located at this site. The land owners at this site are collaborating with researchers at Trinity College Dublin to learn more about how pollinators visit six native Irish perennial plant species and one annual species used as "green manure". The experiment will run for two years.

Annual "Green Manure"



Phacelia tanacetifolia

You may see researchers tending to plants, observing pollinators visiting flowers, or collecting insects for further identification.



Native Irish Perennials



Cat's Ears (Hypochaeris radicata)



Willowherb (Epilobium hirsutum)



Spear Thistle (Cirsium vulgare)



Meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria)



Plantain (Plantago lanceolata)



Oregano (Origanum vulgare)

Feel free to ask questions! You can also contact us at: russola@tcd.ie