

Participants Report

LEARNING LANDSCAPE NETWORK EVENT

Kinvara, Co.Galway
18th-20th July, 2013

This document is to feedback on some of the comments and resources accumulated during the Learning Landscape Network Event 2013. These are the opinions of those that attended and not necessarily that of the Burrenbeo Trust. This document is supported by the Overview Report which has all the biographies, full programmes and workshop abstracts in it.

Thoughts on the Keynote (Anon)

Hedge Schools –An exciting metaphor for pathways of deep learning in troubled educational times? With Dr. Michael Ryan of LIT, Thurles.

Michael Ryan in his keynote address drew from the analogy of hedge schools as an underground cultural resistance movement in 18th century Ireland against a political effort to eradicate Gaelic society and compared them to the efforts to promote place based learning in our current modern day context where education often seems to be driven along the road of commodification and utilitarianism typified by the efforts to move away from the broad curriculum to focus on English and Maths. One of the aims of his talk was to take us back to the hedge school context of forbidden learning by highlighting the role of place in learning with far greater emphasis on a localised curriculum which would draw on the many local resources available within communities. The child's locality would in fact become a departure point for all learning. Teachers would of course have to be educated to integrate the local into their learning spaces.

Using the principle of place-based learning Michael took trainee teachers to the remains of a restored hedge school in Curreeny in North Tipperary. There he discussed the context and role of hedge schools and used the occasion to draw deep responses from the students on their reaction to being on the hedge school site. One typical response was

"I learned more from the hedge school field trip than I did from an entire History of Education Module"

Another stated-

"There is something about the place—just being here—that is more powerful than classroom learning"

For protective purposes the illicit hedge schools were frequently located in remote and wild areas of the countryside and thus bore a close and deep relationship with their setting. Indeed the physical setting of place is ever present in Celtic literature.

Place is typically a physical or geographical entity. Our interaction with it has the potential to enable a deep psychological relationship fashioned by real experiences and our affective responses to them.

In forging a new metaphor arising from the hedge school Michael highlighted

- Engaging with physical place and natural environment
- Encouragement of community belonging and connection
- Harvesting local knowledge and stored wisdom
- Encouraging educators to create their own localised curriculum
- Using technology to explore place and our relationship with it.
- Using technology to connect communities of learners.

The metaphor of the hedge is appropriate as PBE provides seeds of connectivity which will organically grow like a good hedge. It will also allow the light in to help create further growth. The hedge also provides a nesting place and furthermore hedges adapt to both seasonal and climatic change.

On a personal note I felt that the talk was absolutely inspirational but despite being responsive to the needs of parents in terms of the curriculum chosen, the flexible school year followed and the facilitation of bartering in order to fund the school the actual curriculum of the school bore little relationship to place based learning although it was sympathetic to the spoken Gaelic language and culture of the region and clearly deeply rooted in its local community.

Feedback from the crowd:

"I really liked the metaphors he drew, as well as the idea that "place" may mean different things to different people- changed my view of how to interpret "place", and to be conscious of how to bring this learning forward with students."

"What is place? I was really given insight into this question from Michael's talk, and further conversations with delegates. To me, place had always meant nature, something living, and the landscape as well... but now I see that place can be people, history, future plans etc. It's something I need to really spend more time thinking about, but it certainly made me think..."

"The event this year, probably thanks to Michael Ryan's fascinating work around hedge schools, highlighted for me the question "What is place?" I immediately connect with a place/landscape through its ecology, what lives there, grows there, how it was formed. I had naively thought that was how most other people approached a place as well. Through understanding the idea of the hedge school I saw that place is more to some people than the physical world/reality, it is what it represents, history, shared past, social cohesion, struggle and stories. It helped me really appreciate the diversity through which we approach a 'place' and as a result the various experiences we have there."

"The spirit of the hedge school by Michael Ryan was awakening indeed. I searched for similar suppressive forces of the past in our modern day- there are plenty indeed. So this human spirit quality alive in the hedge school: giving in to desire for learning, giving in to following curiosity - desiring to satisfy a never ending curiosity and expansion of consciousness, is also vibrantly alive today!"

Workshops Feedback

The purpose of this section is to give the reader an idea of what was carried out in the workshops that they were not able to attend and perhaps what key points were learned from it.

There were two indoor sessions and one outdoor session on the 19th July. Each of these sessions had three workshops of which each delegate was only able to attend one. Each indoor workshop was two hours long and the outdoor workshop was two and half hours long. Below are the main points recorded from the workshops in relation to overall place-based learning. These are completely subjective to the recorder at the event, and not necessarily the viewpoint of everyone that attended that workshop.

Indoor Session 1 Friday, July 19th, 2013, 8.30am-10.30am, Kinvara
Workshops on Principles and Practice.

KW1 Title: *Tall Tales and Wonderful Pages*

Workshop Leader: Gordon MacLellan

Theme: Generating stories to develop a connection with the environment.

Recorder: Aine Bird **Participants:** 17

Lessons learned

- Establishing trust within a group is very important. Need to bring them along with you.
- Fun should be core to everything.
- Encourage cross-community/organisation projects.
- The joy adults and children have in making something such as books. This could be done by any age group once the materials are provided.
- Although it is hard to quantify it is good to question when does participation become engagement within your work.
- By physically making a character, it makes the story easier to tell.
- Give people freedom to explore and allow them time to be silent and think.
- Encourage people to bring something from their home to start their story.
- Good to have costumes and boxes of props to aid your teaching.
- Get children to read out each other's stories – can be easier for them to express someone else's story than their own.
- Another method is by having one child narrate and others act out silently, it allows for a high level of engagement as well.



Participant feedback below:

What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop?

KW1: GORDON MACLELLAN TALL TALES + WONDERFUL PAGES

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU ARE TAKING AWAY FROM THIS WORKSHOP?

#INSPIRING!!
Really engaging
😊

Adventures
are
Everywhere!
Perfect model for
PSL

How important it is
to be quiet in
your teaching
that when you settle
down + observe.
The world unfolds
and the story
becomes alive 😊

Little book
making

- Good engaging projects
are about opening
the heart.
- Creating a story book.

Excellent tips
+ attitude to open
up teachers
minds to encourage
children to use
imagination

the ideas are
very practical
Useful and
adaptable

I learned
How to guide children
through an imaginative
process in a fun and
engaging way
(beyond the book club)

Integrate more art,
poetry, and music
into our workshops!
Small workshops 😊

ideas for ways of
building stories
with groups that
aren't intimidating

Everything you need
to create a story
is surrounding you
every step

Thanks so much for a wonderful
workshop!
I went with children + got lots of
really practical ideas for
guiding & inspiring children to write
their own stories.
I also find that some children need
to read together to get started + then
they can do it on their own.
Really! I'm hard work on the
dotted line - but more...

I think how I
started shared with
these amazing of
these and surround
by making them to
share their own
stories of learning
as teachers should do

TRUST

KW2 Title: Learn from nature's design and unique technologies

Workshop Leaders: Katy Egan & Sophie Nicol

Theme: Exploring biomimicry as a mean of finding solutions

Recorder: Kate Lavender **Participants:** 12



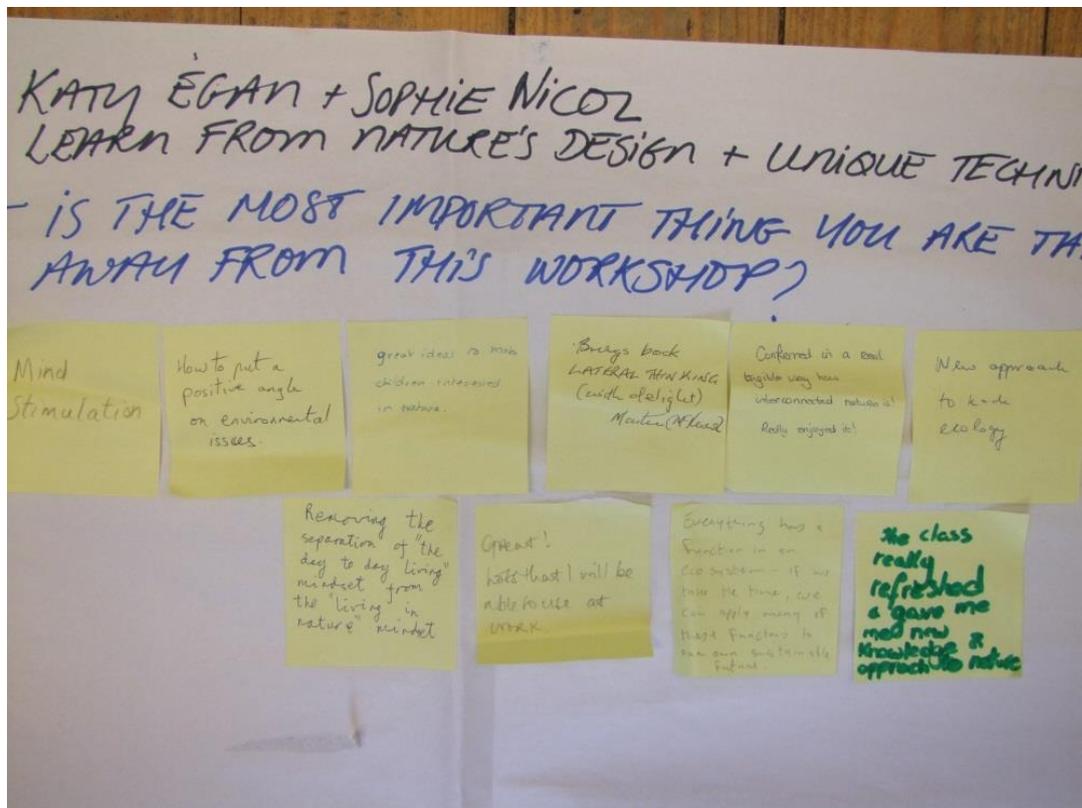
Lessons learned:

- As living organisms we also create environments to suit our own needs.
- We can get design ideas from nature.
- Humans are relatively young in species development therefore by looking at other older species we can gain a wealth of knowledge. Other life forms have had similar challenges in their adaption to their environment and we can learn from how they have overcome them. Good to look at nature for simple sustainable solutions.
- Some examples of how technology is mimicking nature ie solar panels (plants have a similar mechanism for using the sun's energy) but there are loads of cool examples. In nature there is little waste - what is waste for one creature is a resource for another.

- It is important to look at nature for other things such as how does nature heal? Or to look at nature as a model. Look at nature as a measure (moral/ethical). Look at nature as a mentor for a viewpoint and a value.
- Can we work like an ecosystem i.e. businesses etc - making sure that any waste product from one process is used for another process.
- Biomimicry is an interesting method of getting children to investigate nature on their doorstep.
- Good games – scavenger hunt, blindfold game (describe the object), splitting groups into trees and buildings to question their function, then group them together to see what similarities they have, having 3 pictures and getting groups to think about how these might be linked to nature.

Participant feedback below:

What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop?



KW3 Title: Tracing places

Workshop Leader: Deirdre O'Mahony

Theme: Using maps and exploring place names as a technique for developing a community spirit.

Recorder: Paula McHale

Participants: 20

Lessons learned

- Observation is more than just visual, it is about getting the whole story together about a place.



- Everyone has a story to tell or an angle on a place that could be helpful.
- Stories and drawing information out of people is a very strong way to become part of your place. Sharing whatever small bit of information you have.
- Without knowing it many individuals have large historical archives of a place just through taking photos of their environment. Even old 'problem' photos, that may be a bit blurred, Deirdre gave an example of such a photo that was the only photo available of a certain man. Everything is important. A project can be set up using a multitude of different documents: geographic survey; images; surveys of human interaction; aesthetic images (postcards etc.); un-official data – drawings, prints, problem images – These can all start a groups curiosity and give them a place to spring board from and develop a place-based project.
- The activity section of the workshop was mapping our walk. Documenting what we found on our way and eventually coming upon an area that interests us. At that place we then had to map this in detail, document everything that was there. Speak to locals in the area, record conversations (with people's permission), take photos of the places and people. Collect whatever was lying around, this could just be a can of coke dumped on the side of the road. Once this was done (taking a maximum of half an hour) we all headed back to the room to discuss what we had found. We sent any photos to Deirdre, and any recordings etc. that we had. We discussed these photos, our maps etc.

Participant feedback – *What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:*



Indoor Session 2 Friday, July 19th, 2013, 11am-1pm, Kinvara
 Workshops on Principles and Practice.

KW4 Workshop Leader: Michael Ryan

Title: *From Heart to Head and Beyond*

Theme: Using the spirit of the hedge school to awaken us to: landscape, connection and action for deep new - wave learning.

Recorder: Áine Bird **Participants:** 25

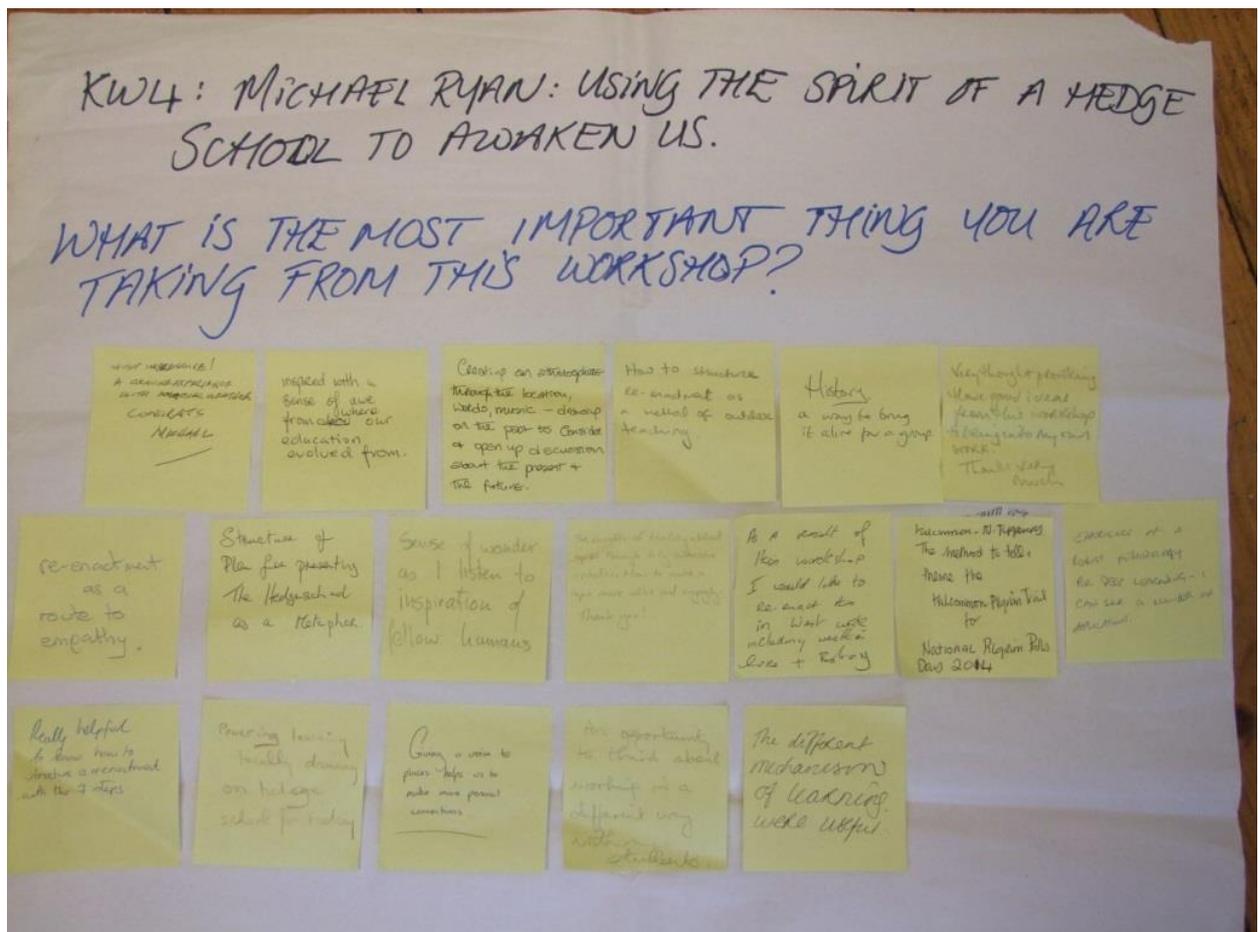
Lessons learned:

- The power of history in discussion of the present.
- Engaged with the notion of place-based learning as not just inspiring about the place but using the place as an environment to inspire about other aspects of learning as well.
- That place is not just about nature and the landscape but it about the past and the future of a place.



- Going through the 7 stages of learning including elements like mindfulness at the beginning and reflection at the end of an activity gives it strength.
- The idea of guerrilla education was proposed – subverting the system.
- Giving people specific roles – including all in the story gave a sense of ownership of the story to the group and a stronger opportunity to debate it.
- Music can work well in creating/adding to specific atmospheres.

Participant feedback – What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:



KW5 Workshop Leader: Zena Hoxter

Title: Place Exploration

Theme: Peeling back the layers of a landscape to better understand heritage and place.

Recorder: Paula McHale **Participants:** 13

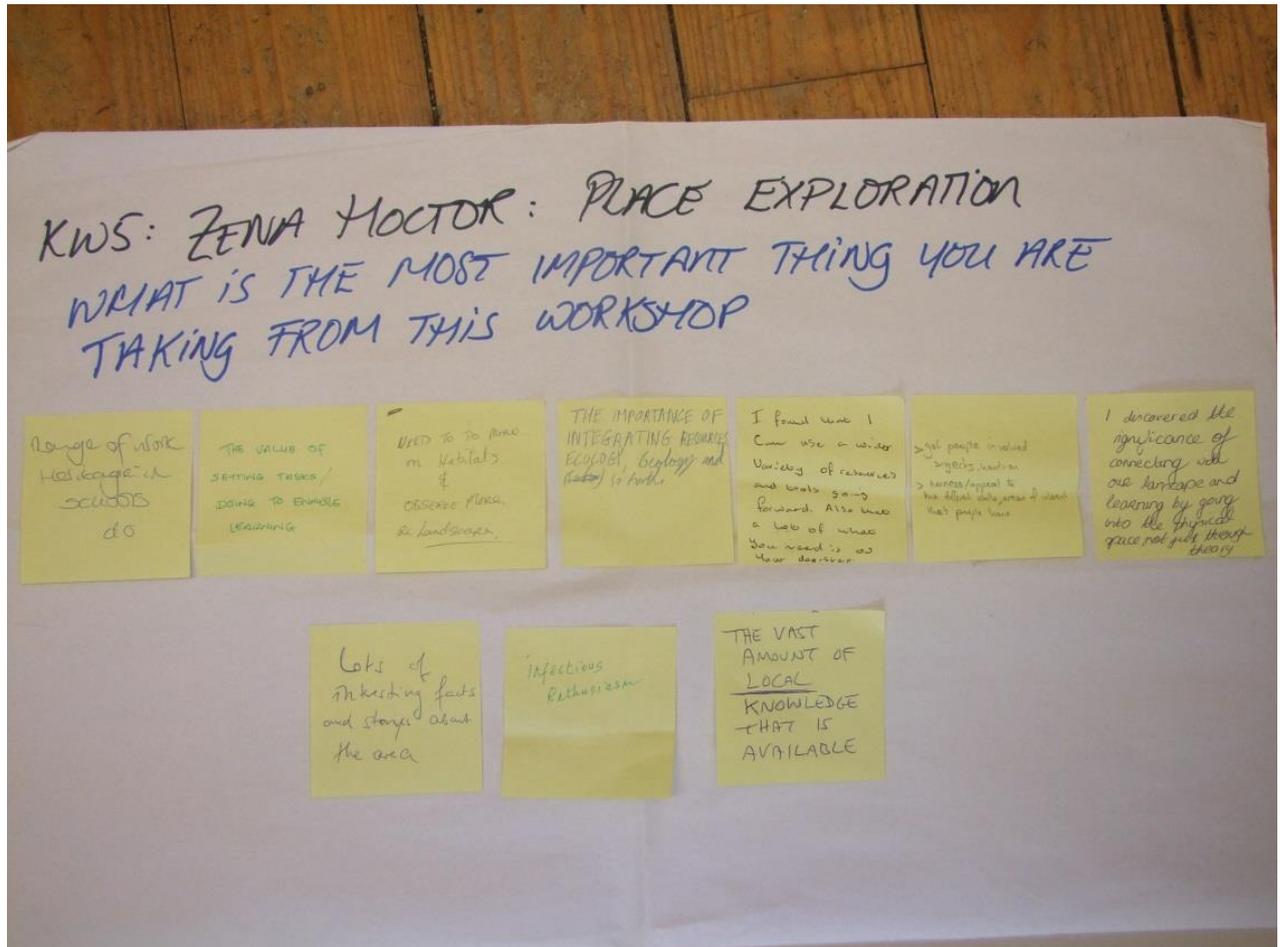
Lessons Learned:

- A good method to start any activity with groups introducing oneself and asking everyone else for an introduction so it is clear who is present.

- There are many layers from geology to history, archaeology to biodiversity etc that brings a sense of place. Important to examine how these are all interconnected and inter-related with students.
- Before going to a new group for a presentation, key to do the local research and visit the local area so it about relating to the individuals specifically.
- Perhaps identify unique heritage resources about this place and try and incorporate that into the teaching plan.
- Stories – always look for any good stories that can be used to demonstrate the natural heritage of the local area.
- Explore: Assign tasks to the students. Do a quiz to recap. Provoke participants. Go to revisit the students over a period of time so that they can do a task or small project in the intervening week based on what their skills and interests are, and incorporating what she has taught them.
- Resources – the group put together resources that they use. Appendix 1 has these and more that were sent on subsequently.



Participant feedback – What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:



KW6 Workshop Leader: Gordon MacLellan

Title: *Engaging with Stones*

Theme: Using geology as a means of engagement

Recorder: Kate Lavender **Participants:** 8

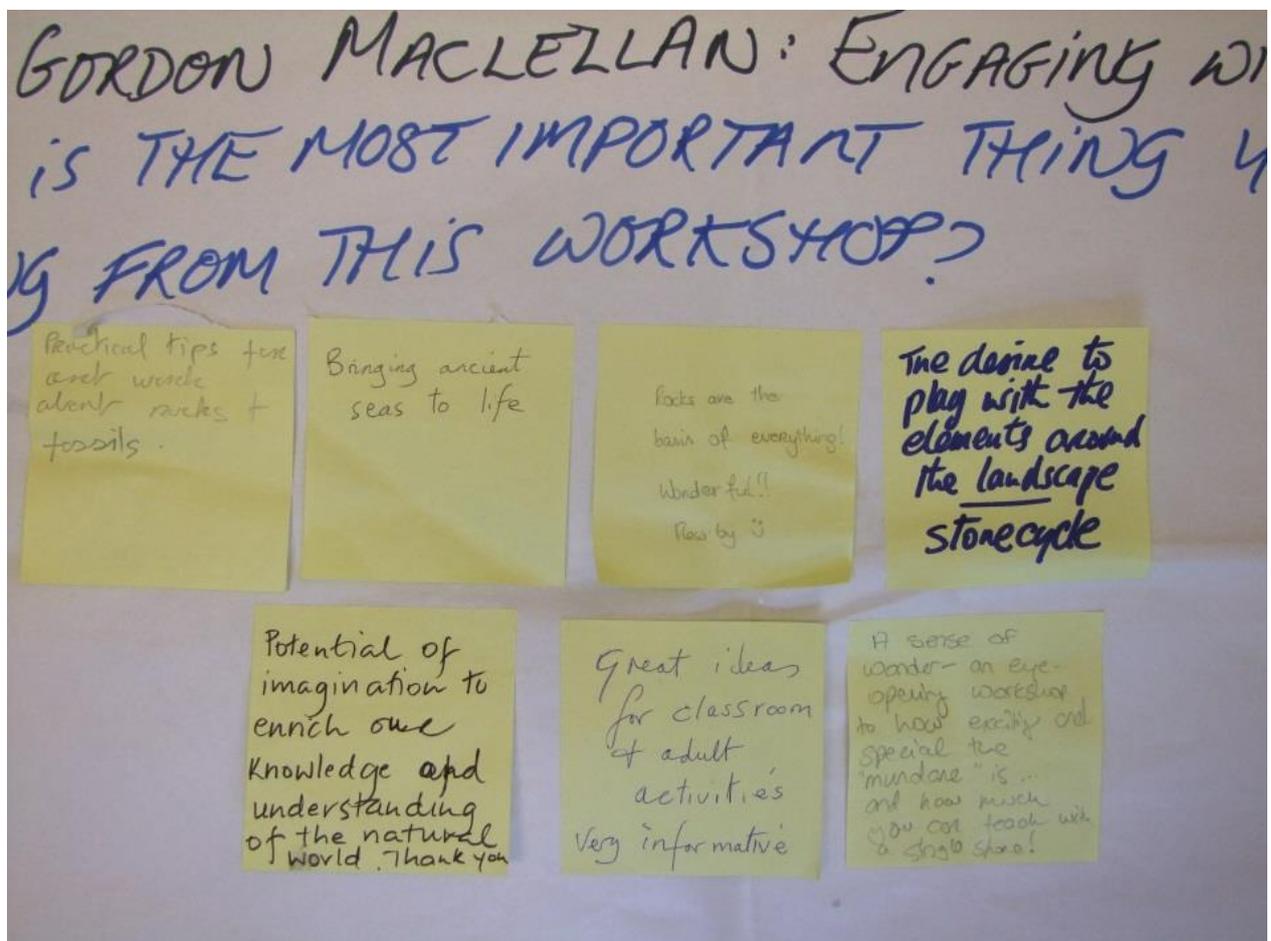
Lessons Learned:

- Finding ways to get people to engage with stones. For instance having pebbles from the local beach on a chair – all to choose a stone to identify. Start by describing the stone using similes, e.g. as grey as a.....as heavy as a.....Try to turn it into a short poem.
- By using a spider diagram of where stone comes in our lives: Culturally, economically, historically, landscape, domesticated, it gave more 'life' to this rock.



- Different paths to use to get people to become more aware of stones discussed – each stone has a story to tell. How it was formed and what it was used for until today gives a good story. Can draw the story of the stone on a large sheet of paper with the stone in the middle.
- As stone is something that is in everyone's life, it is a good feature for fostering a sense of pride in your local area.
- Discussion of how it is useful to have plastic models of what fossils used to look like and discussion of how best to demonstrate geological time – main consensus was to use a time line.
- Demonstration of how to make pebble puppets – draw pebble on card, cut out and make pop up. Can draw pebbles life around it. Also make finger puppets of different creatures that we find as fossils today, i.e. a trilobite.

Participant feedback – What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:



Outdoor Session Friday, July 19th, 2013, 2.15pm-4.45pm, Slieve Carron
Practice in the field workshops

BW1 Who: Gordon D'Arcy **Title:** *Nature, Art & the Learning Landscape*

Theme: Art as a medium to explore the outdoors

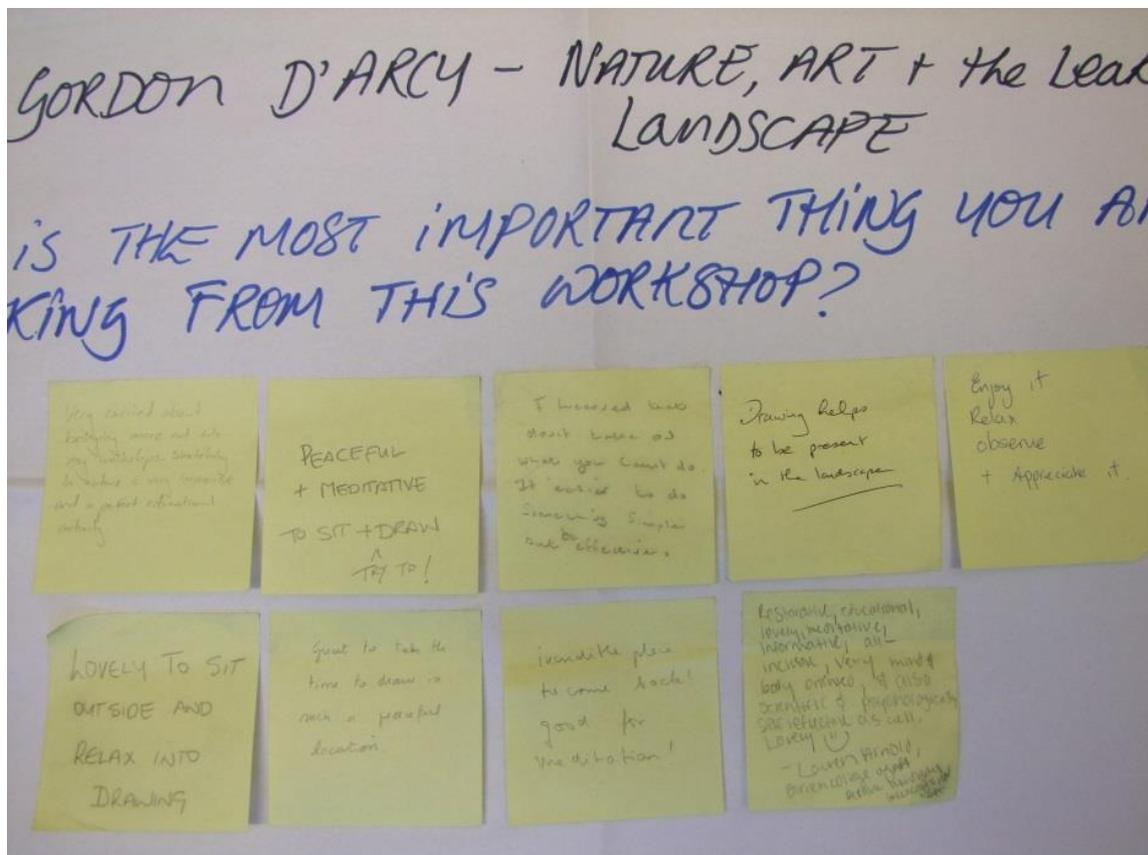
Recorder: Áine Bird **Participants:** 14

Lessons learned:

- Silent, contemplative time to draw can really focus the mind on a place/landscape/object.
- Using art can really focus the attention on the surrounding that one is in.



Participant feedback – What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:



BW2 Workshop Leaders: Sophie Nicol & Katy Egan

Title: *Through the Looking Glass*

Theme: Exploring and connecting to nature through the different lenses of arts, craft and games.

Recorder: Paula McHale

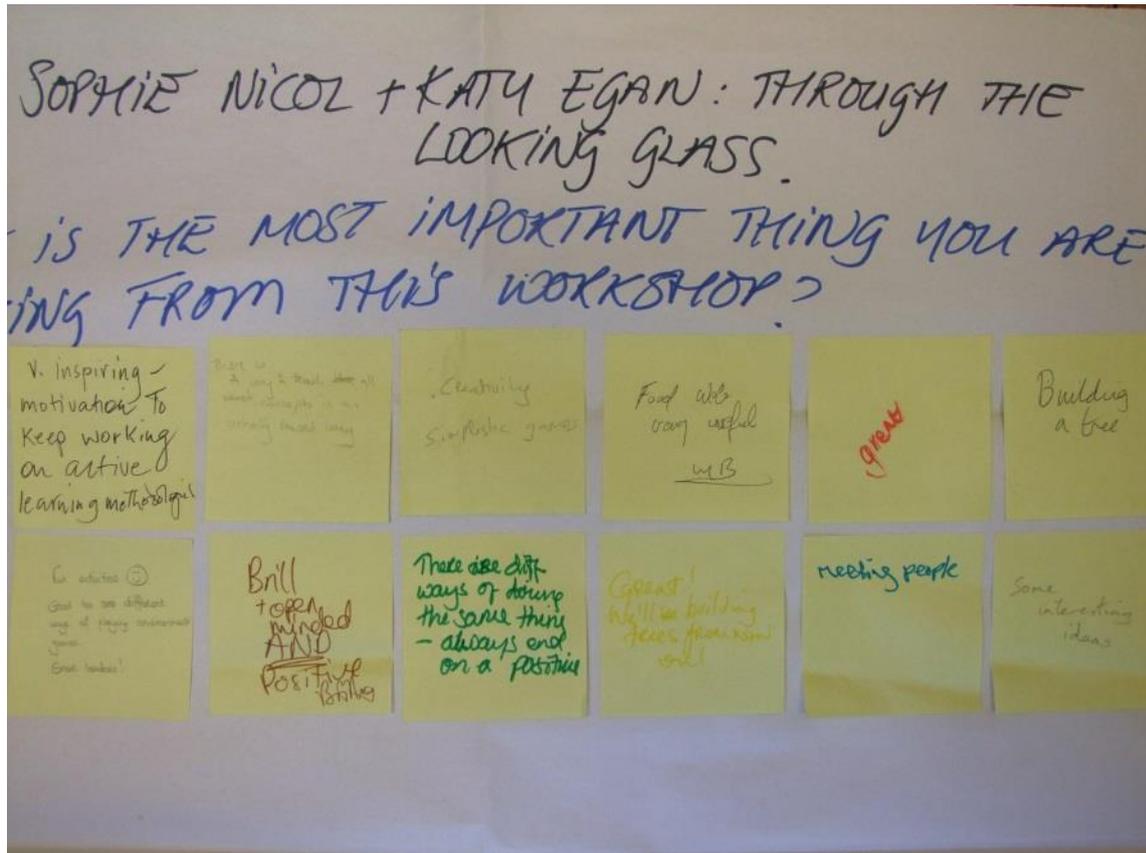
Participants: 26

Lessons Learned:

- When meeting for a workshop it is a good idea to set the scene, do introductions, and moved the group straight into an energetic activity.
- Tips for games outdoors: Make boundaries with canes, flags etc.
- Some games include Treasure Hunt – This treasure hunt included clues that answered questions to a crossword.
- Wild child game and group challenge – acting out an animal that is found in the Burren. The group have to figure out what animal it is. Natural charades. Building a nest etc.
- Food web activity with wool. Ask questions about what animals eat what and throw the ball of wool to the next person, each person holding on to the ball of wool as the game continues. In the middle of the game, when a good food web has been created, bring in some environmental threat, e.g. the ash tree gets die back – what is the effect of this on all the other parts of the food web. Don't finish on this negative, think of a way to improve the situation e.g. plant more ash trees and other species of trees – the food web becomes stronger. Always end with a positive!
- Make a tree – each group of people are the different parts of the tree – heart wood; xylem; phloem; tap roots; bark – Then a group of wasps trying to get through the bark. The children will remember all the different parts of the tree with this activity.
- Meet a tree - this had to be adapted to the Burren environment, and can be adapted to whatever environment you are teaching in. Split the groups up into pairs. Blindfold one and the other guides the blindfolded person to an object. They use their senses to figure out what the object is. After they have been gently lead away, back to the start by another route, the blindfolded person has to try to find the object again. This can be done with plants, trees, rocks etc.
- Make an activity – This can be done for older groups. Give them a concept ie symbiosis/evolution/adaption, and ask them to discuss it for a few minutes and come up with an activity that would describe this concept to young people.



Participant feedback – What was the most important thing that you are taking away from this workshop:



BW3 Workshop Leader: Shane Casey

Title: Learn the landscape, and then learn from the landscape

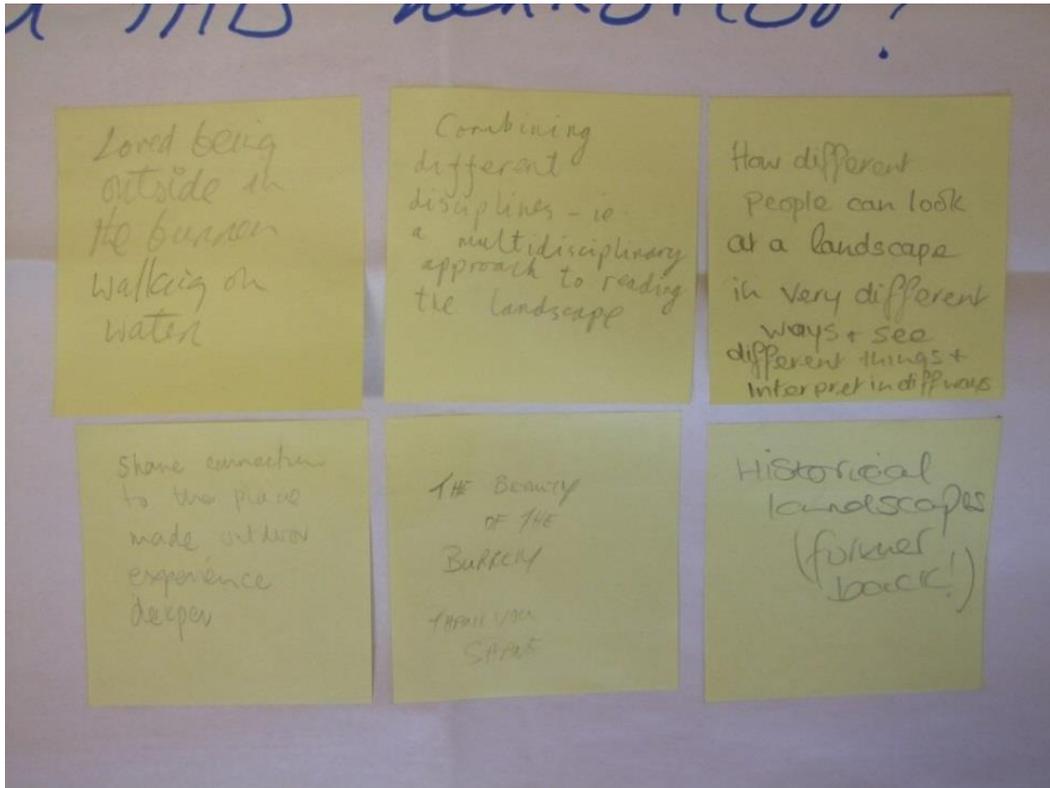
Theme: Look at the basic geography of an area, and then look at what practical lessons can be extrapolated from it.

Recorder: Kate Lavender **Participants:** 11

Lessons learned:

- The importance of bringing in local expertise into the place-based learning activity.





Network Feedback

On the evening of the 19th July, there was a review, reflect and networking session. The participants were asked to discuss the potential for a network amongst place-based learners nationally. 26 delegates attended and below are the responses and aspirations towards a network for place-based learning in Ireland.

A network would:

- Be totally inclusive, recognising that everyone is an educator.
- Build a collective of individuals that are likeminded to diminish the sense of isolation.
- Encourage life-long learning.
- Empower people and communities to discover custodianship of their own place that they love.
- Encourage greater appreciation of local place amongst people who have experienced place-based education.
- Build on a holistic approach to place-based learning nationally.
- Should not be too rapidly structured, be organic and build up naturally.
- Recognise when our work has changed and how we can adapt to that. To ensure that we don't work ourselves out of a job.
- Be purposeful and at the foreground of what is possible and what is a good direction to lead in.

- Encourage debate amongst children and communities about relevant environmental topics.
- Be vital in spreading the concept of and work of place-based learning. Making it current and approachable to the general public.
- Define the common purpose of place-based learning so people know the boundaries.

A network could provide:

- A space for sharing knowledge, expertise and resources. This could be a forum, meetings, through social media etc.
- A support network for educators where people could call for advice and ideas.
- The community of educators with a credible voice.
- Increased opportunities across the country to get involved in stuff.
- More integration and communication within informal and formal environmental educators and relevant organisations.
- For more sharing of information and encourage trust amongst peers.
- Research to show the impact of place-based education over time.
- A mechanism for exploring research models elsewhere on place-based learning. To encourage experience from elsewhere to be integrated in the work of what is happening here nationally.
- A mechanism to attract more government funding to this area.
- A quality standard for place-based education (possibly a certificate in time).
- A strong advocacy through numbers that encourages the normalization of learning outside and push environmental education and place-based learning to become subjects of the curriculum.
- Support for challenges, like accessing place-based learning in secondary schools.
- Support for teachers so that place-based learning becomes part of their role not an add on to their work.

Post-event Feedback

The Burrenbeo Trust received an overwhelming feedback response to the 2013 event. We are grateful for both the positive response and the constructive criticism. Not everything could be put in this document due to space but rest assured all comments have been considered in our recommendations going forward to future events. Below is a taster of the feedback given:

The Learning Landscapes is an incredible event, bringing together such interesting and passionate people from many different spheres with a shared vision- and I have gotten so much out of it both years, both personally and professionally.

Thoroughly enjoyed the experience; loved how the whole event was spread across the village with really cool venues; the workshops themselves were great with a very varied selection, from art to practical games, etc - just a shame I couldn't do them all; it's a brilliant opportunity to meet other people who work in the area - there's such great potential there with the Heritage in Schools scheme too; I came away refreshed and looking forward to trying out what I learned after the summer.

I also really enjoyed the "informal" networking that goes on at these events, and I met so many new, wonderfully interesting people.

Networking events were amazing – Chris [the facilitator] was masterful and it really speeded-up the get to know you process.

That network can be both a noun and a verb, the participants can breathe life into the network by networking with each other, building on the connections made and renewed.

It's great to discuss issues with other like-minded people from differing backgrounds and points of view.

The only thing is that I wish it was longer! There is never enough time to talk with everyone, and I would have loved to also attend more workshops myself, and learn more. But having said that, the event felt much longer than it was (in a good way), and I heard this comment from many others too- it is so rich and fulfilling, and impressive what can be done in a short space of time.

This has made me rethink the entire way I work on a day-to-day basis. I now know I need to observe and use my senses more. I can learn more on an observation walk up my road than I might do with a morning of online research. I have my eyes open and I want to keep them that way! I'm also excited to implement some of the activities I learned at the workshops and I'm thrilled with the connections I made at the event.

The 2013 *Learning Landscape Network Event* was embraced by a positive group of delegates and workshop leaders. The Burrenbeo Trust is grateful to everyone that was involved and look forward to hosting another place-based learning event in the future.

For information on the programme, the biographies, emails etc go to the supporting Overview document. See below for resource links that were sent in as part of the feedback.

APPENDIX 1 Resource Links Gathered

Geology:

- A free geopark activity pack can be downloaded on www.burren.ie,
- Geology Survey of Ireland www.gsi.ie
- www.Irelandstory.com – a good website for explanatory charts etc. e.g. the formation of bogs.
- www.geologyandenvironment.com

Archaeology & History:

- www.archaeology.ie
- This is a placenames database for Ireland – www.logainm.ie

Wildlife:

- Natural History Museum of Ulster has specific areas of many creatures
<http://www.habitas.org.uk/>
- www.wildflowersofireland.net
- www.habitas.org.uk/dragonflyireland/
- www.mothsireland.com
- www.birdwatchireland.ie
- www.butterflyconservation.ie
- www.butterflyireland.com
- Irish Whale and Dolphin Group – www.iwdg.ie
- The National Biodiversity Data Centre hope to record all the species in each area
www.biodiversityireland.ie
- The Marine Conservation Society www.mcsuk.org gives great information on depleting stocks etc.
- The National Parks and Wildlife are great for details on SACs/SPAs etc www.npws.ie

Plant life & food:

- www.seaweed.ie
- Plants for a future is a site about edible and medicinal plants www.pfaf.org
- www.rivercottage.net for ideas about growing food
- Grow It Yourself – www.giyireland.com
- The Environmental Education project as part of The Organic Centre
www.theorganiccentre.ie
- www.Bordbia.ie

Conservation:

- www.leavenotraceschools.org

Games for children:

- www.naturedetectives.org.uk
- Eco Detectives has lots of resources for Irish teachers:
<http://www.askaboutireland.ie/aai-files/assets/Environment/Environment%20for%20Kids/Eco%20Detectives/Eco%20Detectives%20interface/~interface.swf>

Other:

- Ordnance Survey of Ireland www.osi.ie

Social Media:

Katy Egan set up an Environmental Education facebook group page that she is inviting anyone interested to join:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/488656621217724/#!/groups/488656621217724/>

She also would like to share an American Place-based Education facebook group that she finds useful:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/488656621217724/#!/groups/119393998071286/?fref=ts>
