



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

MALTA APPENDIX – LEAF PROGRAMME AWARD

EkoSkola Forest Team

In the EkoSkola Committee there are currently two co-ordinators, six main committee members (president, vice president, two secretaries, two public relations officers) and around four to five students involved in the project. Noella Saliba, a university student, also sits on the committee as an observer. Two parents, Abi Macleod Clark and Emma Morgan, co-ordinated the Tree of Life project.

The EkoSkola Committee meets three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday). The LEAF project is part of the EkoSkola action plan, but not all meetings are related to the LEAF project. Meetings take place before school and content varies between planning and direct hands-on project work.

The following is an example of minutes taken from two LEAF committee meetings:

EKOSKOLA

DATE: 19 January 2015 (Tuesday)
TIME: 9:15 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
SCHOOL ATTENDEES: Johann Gatt
J. Jesse Mercieca, learning support assistant (LSA) – Nurture Group
Marvic Refalo – EkoSkola Co-ordinator
Lelio Spiteri – Head of School
Emma Morgan – Art/Kreattiv
Noella Saliba – university student doing her thesis
OBJECTIVE: LEAF Project (Learning About Forests)

- Next scholastic year projects?
 - Edible garden projects
 - Need to put in fencing with reusable items in school basement
 - Bottle caps for murals on the wall
- Johann will get people/organisations involved with ethnobotany (President of Malta's new scheme – talk to her when she comes in March)
- 'Catch the Drop' – to get irrigation system
- 'Hands-on Farming' – Xewkija for seeds
- Tree of Life Project done by Years 1, 2, 3 for wall and now continuing with EkoSkola for recycled water bottle – creeping plants (morning glory).



Project report

The project aims to instil a love for trees, plants and the outdoors in the children, staff and families in the school. Children have the opportunity to learn about trees and plants, how to plant them, care for them, what they need and how to enjoy them. The project is divided into four parts: the Tree of Life project, the Green Wall (which includes a visit to a public nursery), tree planting at Marsalforn Valley and a visit to Chambrai woodland (including tree hugging and clean-up).

The Tree of Life Project



Figure 1. The Tree of Life

The project aimed to introduce learners to new artistic materials, artists and, above all, nature. Children had the opportunity to study the form, texture and structure of trees and leaves and learned how to identify art in nature. The inspiration gained was transformed into a large mixed-medium mosaic on a wall in the school grounds, using recycled china and tiles. Each child, teacher and LSA involved personally made a clay leaf with their name on as a lasting legacy of the project. The whole project was documented on video by a professional videographer, on the school blog and on digital camera by the children themselves. Children from years 1, 2 and 3 participated in this part of the project. Children were expected to gain a deeper understanding of how trees are an important part of the environment. The children were also expected to gain a love for art and a greater understanding of how it affects everyday life and to notice the beauty of their everyday surroundings more. It was also very important for every child to have their worked displayed. The design for the tree was inspired by the children's imaginations and the artwork they created. The children led this project and the final creation was wholly their own work.



Hanging planters to give more life to the Tree of Life Project: Creating a Green Wall

The school lacks the space for a proper garden. Last academic year children tried to increase the garden area in the school by constructing big wooden planters from fork-lift pallets and actually refurbished an abandoned corner in the school with the aim of transforming it into a Happy Garden.

The children themselves calculated the measurements and what they needed for the planters. They even thought of wheels to enable them to move the planters easily. Children, parents and grandparents came into school for a whole weekend to work on the project and managed to build the wooden planters. Unfortunately, a week later the Health and Safety representative in the school said the planters were dangerous because they had corners and therefore could not be allowed on school premises. The planters had to be removed. Following this, the purchase of large circular pots was discussed, but they were too expensive. Finally the following project was decided on, with the approval of the Health and Safety representatives, on the condition that children were supervised when using ladders and that plants within reach did not have thorns.

A year later, for the Tree of Life project, children went to the Lunzjata Valley and Villa Rundle public garden to study and learn more about trees. Tree experts from a local NGO accompanied the children on these visits to help them to learn about local plants and trees.

Once the Tree of Life artworks were complete, the EkoSkola committee decided to continue working on the project, taking it one step further and giving it more life. They researched options on the internet and decided to incorporate hanging planters made using plastic bottles with plants growing in them.

The EkoSkola team initially used plastic water bottles. They put in a lot of work, but a storm showed that the bottles were not durable enough and broke up. The project therefore had to be started again. This time the committee appealed to parents (through the school blog) to bring stronger and larger laundry soap, washing-up liquid and fabric conditioner bottles. They also bought stronger fishing line to tie the bottles. EkoSkola funds were used to buy the right tools and string. One row was completed to see if it would withstand the test and it worked. The committee also had difficulty obtaining soil. There is hardly any soil in the school, so, having used all the soil available, they had to make a further appeal on the blog for soil. The project took longer than expected and seeds had to be planted again.

As no local climbers exist, morning glory seeds were sown. Cotton seeds obtained from the hands-on farming were sown in the top bottles, which were chosen



because of the thorns in the plants. A committee visit to the public nursery also provided the children with plants to put in the bottles.

The action plan is part of the EkoSkola action plan, as included in the Green Flag portfolio.

Tree planting at Marsalforn Valley



Figure 2. Planting trees in Marsalforn Valley, Gozo

The Year 5 Roses class had the opportunity to plant carob trees along the Marsalforn Valley in collaboration with Eco-Gozo.

The Chambrai Woodland Experience

The Chambrai Woodland Experience was another related event which was added to the action plan. During meetings it was noted that most students (and even some teachers) were not aware of the little woodlands on the island. The visit to Chambrai gave the students the opportunity to appreciate the trees around them, learn more about them and do a clean-up of the area.

Informing and involving

The LEAF noticeboard

The EkoSkola/*Dinja Wahda*/LEAF noticeboard is in the main passageway in the school (see Figure 3) and is updated regularly.



Figure 3. EkoSkola/*Dinja Wahda*/LEAF noticeboard

Our contacts with the wider community

The funding and resources for the Tree of Life project came from the European Union through Kreattiv. The Tree of Life project was practically co-ordinated by two parents, Abi Macleod Clark and Emma Morgan. Parents were informed about the project and asked to co-operate by providing broken crockery and materials required for the project. All initiatives and events appear in various places on the school blog, including the news page, EkoSkola page and Tree of Life page. A plant expert from Birdlife assisted the children with plant identification and gave a lot of information about local plants and trees. The school blog is very active and popular. The Tree of Life also featured in Malta's *Sunday Times* and *Gozo Newsletter*.

Report evaluation

The children explored ecological, socio-cultural and economical dimensions through the project:

Ecological – learning more about trees, how plants grow and what they need, appreciating nature and loving trees.

Socio-cultural – the children realised that, thanks to their ancestors, they can now enjoy the woodland in the Chambrai area. The positive results obtained showed that collaboration between parents, children, staff and NGOs was possible and pleasing to all.

Economical – the project contributes to the younger generation's thinking on the importance of trees in the environment, which will carry through to their adult life. The cost of the project, materials used, recycling and durability of materials were all considered. Though the funding for Tree of Life was through the Kreattiv project, the Green Wall was funded entirely by EkoSkola funds and fundraising activities within the school.



The exercise on the structure of leaves, how plants grow and what they need was very rewarding and informative for the children. The various experiences were enjoyed by all learners throughout the project. New learners kept coming early in the morning before school to help build the Green Wall. This proved that word was spreading further and that children were enjoying it.

Real pride could be seen on the children's faces when they completed the project. The EkoSkola committee is still working on the Green Wall since the work had to be repeated. Plants are still growing. Children continued to maintain the Green Wall throughout the summer during the *Skola Sajf* programme.

Feedback

One positive aspect which emerged from the Tree of Life activity is that children got more in touch with nature. The visit to Chambrai woodland propelled the children to take their families for outings. Tree planting at Marsalforn Valley made the children proud to have their own trees. The pleasure on the children's faces was a positive aspect and the learning and interest that accompanied it made the experience even more positive.