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Open Space for Blind Children

by Pawel Gradowski

A child's full understanding of the world is the key goal of a school for the blind. Beyond the classroom, a landscape for blind children can enhance this educational goal.

A conception of space varies between sighted people who base it upon visual experience and blind people who rely upon other senses. The mobility skills of blind people depend upon this understanding of spatial orientation.

Partially sighted children can distinguish large objects or objects with bright colour. Play elements should be comprised of large colourful elements, rather than customary steel bars. Children with little vision have to rely on other senses in spatial orientation. Tactile perception, sound, smell and temperature perception are all used to classify the surrounding environment.

To develop better hearing abilities in blind children, the school yard can be equipped with various sound generating objects that will allow training in localizing these objects. Wind generates different

sound qualities on different objects. Large deciduous trees sound different from conifer trees. The wind in

shrubs generates different sounds than meadows or trees.

All this can be used for practice.

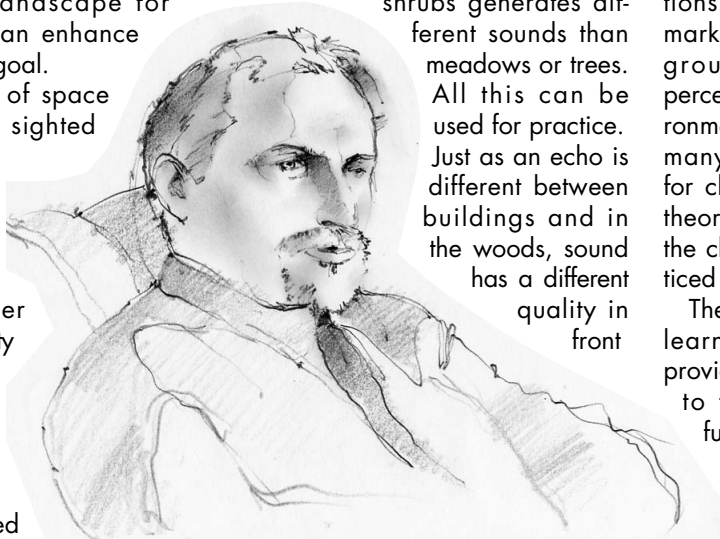
Just as an echo is different between buildings and in the woods, sound has a different

quality in front

by providing a diversity of materials for students to recognize. Scents can help children determine locations and fragrant plantings can mark various areas of the school grounds. Temperature can be perceived in sunny and shady environments. A school yard can have many different sensory elements for children to discover. This way, theory that is being taught inside the classroom can be quickly practiced in reality.

The landscape in which children learn independent mobility can provide a variety of settings similar to those to be found in their future environment. A carefully designed set will create opportunities to help and encourage a child to build up a mental map of surrounding spaces.

continued on page 2



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Drawing by Cameron Murray

of different objects. Sound can also play a major role in wayfinding if the surfaces of paths and landscapes are finished with different materials. The sound of gravel is different than the sound of sand, grass or paving. Tactile perception can assist with local orientation. For children who are deaf blind, this is the main source of understanding the world.

Landscape Architects can provide exceptional learning environments

Research	1
Design	3
Advocacy	5
Access	7
Review	7
Notice Board	8
Calendar of Events	9
Market Place	10

Open Space for Blind Children ... continued from page 1

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sitelines

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Sitelines is published 6 times a year: February, April, June, August, October and December, by the British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects and is mailed to all BCSLA members; registered landscape architects, associates and affiliates.

The editorial deadline is the 8th and advertising deadline is the 16th day of the intervening months. Advertising rate information is available on request.

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The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of Landscape Architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the BCSLA.

Moreover playing with other children will help to develop social skills as well as physical fitness. There should be several points of interest within a park to which students would like to go, and will have to find their way. Surfaces, paths and curbs can provide a variety of difficulties in wayfinding to allow for a gradual improvement of skills. A park that is easily accessible for both the visually impaired and sighted people allows users to meet each other. Contact between a society of visually impaired and sighted society will help to reduce the stigma on both sides.

The therapeutic character of nature can help people dealing with stress. Streams, waterfalls or fountains generate sounds which can attract the mind of a blind person and reduce stress. Wind, bird song, and crickets can be included with appropriate ecological conditions. Flowering plants, berries and fruit trees all invite birds. Bird baths will help the students know where the birds can more likely be found. Involvement in the gardening process can also have a positive influence on students.

A collection of plants can help a teacher to explain several lessons in biology class. Students can distinguish coniferous from decidu-

ous trees. They can collect fruit to analyze shape and content. Mathematics can be taught with a placement of objects such as stones, chairs or shrubs placed in groups to illustrate basic concepts. A stage can be included within a park design to allow for music or theatrical performance; while a sculpture garden allows for an appreciation of line and form.

An open lawn can accommodate a wide number of games such as dance, gymnastics and tag. The lawn edges can be marked with a different surface texture. A game of volleyball can be played with a beach ball that has a small bell inside. Sound generating soccer balls may also be used for many purposes in sport.

Winter sports provide stimulating play opportunities. Tobogganing on a well prepared track provides fun social interaction. Cross country skiing can also successfully be performed by blind students along with a guide who can help with spatial orientation.

The landscape around a school is an inseparable element of the school. The goals and objectives of the school curriculum can become the goals and objectives of school landscape architecture. ☐

2004 BC Land Summit

Plans are well underway for a joint conference in 2004.

BCSLA is looking for volunteers to help organize this exciting event.

In addition to BCSLA confirmed partners include the:

Planning Institute of BC, BC Association of the Appraisal Institute of Canada, Real Estate Institute of BC and the BC Institute of Agrologists.

Call the provincial office for more details.