

# Landscape Ontario Podcast: Something for Everyone School Program

**Host:** Karina Sinclair

**Guests:** Heather Jerrard, Dawn-Marie Deagle

## Transcription

Karina: Thank you for joining the Landscape Ontario podcast. I'm your host, Karina Sinclair. Have you ever wondered where your inspiration to work in landscaping or horticulture came from? How did you learn it might be a possible career option for you? And where do you think you might be in your work journey if you'd understood from a young age that you can build a livelihood by being creative, spending time in nature and digging your fingers into the soil? That's what we're going to talk about in today's episode.

Heather Jerrard is a landscape designer who noticed there was a lack of landscaping resources for elementary school students that went beyond planting a bean in a paper cup. So she partnered with educator Dawn-Marie Deagle to design and implement a classroom experience that engages students from grades 1 to 8 in garden design.

Together, they developed lessons that aligned with the Ontario curriculum and demonstrated how landscaping and horticulture can have a meaningful career path. Let's hear more about the inspiration behind this project, how the Landscape Ontario's Peer to Peer Network gave Heather the confidence to pursue it and how it might evolve to encourage more students to consider a green career.

## Music Interlude

Karina: Welcome, Heather Jerrard and Dawn-Marie Deagle. Thank you so much for joining us here on the podcast to talk about your project.

Heather: Thanks for having us.

Karina: So, Heather, you're a landscape designer now, but you've had an interesting career that saw you in a wide variety of roles. Tell me how your work experience has led you to this point.

Heather: That is quite a journey. So I would say it all started 2013. I took a friend out for coffee. She was 63 at the time and I was complaining to her that I couldn't get a job because I didn't have a piece of paper called a diploma. And she looked at me in the face and she said, "Well, are you going

to change society or are you going to get a piece of paper?" and kind of hit home that, Oh, I guess I really have to do this?

So this was August of 2013 and I went home and I checked on Fanshawe College's website to see what courses they were accepting students for that September the following month, because it was walking distance to me. I didn't have a vehicle that I could drive anywhere else and I could walk to Fanshawe, so I looked and they were accepting students for business finance, which sounded really gross, and landscape design.

And I had actually never heard that term before until that moment. And so as soon as I saw that on the screen, it's been love ever since. So 2013 to 2016, I was at Fanshawe College in their landscape design program. My first co-op was at Whistling Gardens. My second one was at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

I also studied abroad in Italy and Spain of Garden History, Garden Design through the program. And then after graduating, I actually got my first job with Rural Roots Landscaping, which was owned by Jay Zehr at the time. And it was there that he actually had me attend Landscape Ontario's Peer to Peer networking meetings on his behalf. I was the manager and he was the owner, but he couldn't attend. So I started attending those meetings on his behalf.

And then two years later, I actually was hired by TLC Landscaping as an assistant manager for their enhancements division. And then two years after that, this little thing called COVID happened, which affected...

Karina: I've heard about this!

Heather: You've heard about this?! It sounds vaguely familiar. And so I very suddenly and abruptly found myself without a job. And it wasn't anyone's fault. There wasn't anything that could be done. We weren't...it was a very uncertain time, as we all remember. And we didn't know what was going to happen next. And my job was just not in the top of the priority list. And that not having that job really knocked the wind out of my sails.

I hadn't really noticed how much I invested my self-worth and self-belief and associated that with my job until I no longer had that job. So I spiraled, downward spiraled big time. I ended up going to therapy. I ended up reaching out to the Peer to Peer network, which I'd still been attending as a member. And it was that network that really that really held me up. Between them and my husband, I'm forever in their debt.

So it was after, I think it was about four or five months of some fairly serious inner work and grieving, I realized that if I really love what I do and if nobody's hiring because of COVID, then I'm going to have to go out on my own because this is really what I want to do for the rest of my life.

And I did. It's pretty crazy that March 31st I was let go, and July 7th, I started my job, started my business.

Karina: And what's your business called?

Heather  
My Landscape Artist.

Karina

Fantastic. I think we underestimate how important our careers are to us, of that day-to-day ritual habit that we have of getting up and going to work. Yeah.

Heather: Well, too when you feel like you're contributing and that you're a member of an extraordinary team, you know that you feel like what you do matters at your job. Then when you don't have that job anymore, that's when it hurts, right? If you're in a job and you don't feel like you're contributing or you feel like what you do doesn't matter, then you're not really attached to it.

But I really loved where I worked, the people that I worked with, what I did, and then suddenly I didn't have that anymore. So it's a little rough.

Karina: And so before you found yourself working in landscaping, you had tried a couple of other things as well, though.

Heather: I did, Yup. I had the reputation of being flighty. Years ago, because it wasn't that I couldn't keep a job. It's just that I would refuse to stay in a job that I didn't feel like I was contributing or whatever I did didn't matter. So I have done everything from the call centers to Tim Horton's. I was in construction and renovation, so I did bathroom and kitchen renovations for almost two years. Oh my gosh. There's been so many different things that I've done.

Karina: I recall that you told me once about theatre. Children's theatre?

Heather: Yeah. So I have. I still have, even though we haven't been active since COVID, I did start my own theatre company in 2010. So this was well before I knew I was going to get into landscaping. But I've always loved acting and producing and the project management of theatre. So it's finding

the script, finding the actors, putting the team together, collecting all the props, the costumes, arranging for set pieces and theatres, selling tickets and putting on a show. Bringing people together and hoping that when people leave, they leave a little lighter and a little happier than when they showed up.

Karina: Do you think some of that is what helped to start to conceive of this idea of creating a program for children?

Heather: It could be a part of it. So my theatre company was primarily adults. So this was a community or independent theatre. I would say that it was instrumental in me choosing to, I guess, start my own company in landscaping.

So during Fanshawe, when we were on the Italy trip, I have a very clear memory of sitting on a ferry with Ron Koudys. So he was with us, local landscape architect, he was with us on the trip and he's sitting beside me and I'm talking to him about theatre. He at the time sat on the board of the Grand Theatre here in London, and I don't know if he still does, but I told him about my company and he says, "You know, that's project management, right? Like you could, you could be project managing stuff in landscaping."

And it didn't occur to me that, oh, there's transferable skills for the last 20 some odd years that I've been volunteering as a director and producer and actor. So that definitely contributed.

Karina: It's always fascinating to hear from people in the different pathways that they've taken to get into the landscaping horticultural profession. Everyone has such a different story to tell and that's fascinating.

Heather: And it's never a straight line. I know that lots of people, not just in landscaping, but when you find something that you're truly passionate about... During COVID, I came across the word 'dharma' for the first time, D H A R M A. And for me, just kind of finding that perfect thing that I feel like I'm really good at this. I'm meant to do this. Doing this matters and people, there's an appreciation or a need for what I do. And it's just been a ride. So I would have never guessed all the things that would have led me here. There's been a lot that seems very random or flighty at the time, but here we are.

Karina: So it all had a purpose to bring you to this point now, which is that you've been developing a program that engages school age children in landscape and garden design, right?

Heather: Yes.

Karina: So how did this come about?

Heather: Well, actually, it was a dream. So I can't even remember. I think it was shortly after Christmas. I had a very vivid dream that I was walking down a school hallway and there was all these beautiful children's artwork all over the walls. And they weren't just of flowers and butterflies and and whatnot, but it was actual gardens and garden structures and in my dream, this was actually a children's landscape architecture school.

So it was elementary, it was junior kindergarten to probably grade eight. And the building seemed like a LEED building. It was just very vivid, very real. And all these kids weren't just studying about different habitats or different animals or different plants or how to grow seeds or how to draw a flower. They were actually studying landscape architecture according to their grade.

And I woke up and I thought, Somebody must be doing this. Like, this has to be a thing. And I started doing some research online, trying to find resources about teaching children how to design outdoor spaces, so not how to garden. Right? I find that there's a lot of research and a lot of resources out there on how to teach children how to grow a sunflower or how to grow beans, or let's do a crafting class and make a flower, but bigger, like how do we plan our schoolyard but maybe not a schoolyard. Maybe it's a community garden, or maybe it's a community pool, or maybe it's a garden that doesn't even exist except in our imaginations. Like how do we kind of incorporate these? So I found one resource online, and I believe it was published by the ACLA, and it's a colouring book is pretty much what it is. So I pretty much, that morning I looked at my husband, I said, I think I'm going to write a book. And that was kind of how all of this began.

Karina: Now, Dawn-Marie, I'm going to turn to you here. You're a teacher-librarian at an elementary school in the Thames Valley District School board, right? Yes. So what do you think of Heather's vision of this school that encourages not just the gardening, but to take students deeper into the architectural elements of landscape design?

Dawn-Marie: Well, for me personally, any time that I can get our students out in nature, I think that it's a win. I think students today are very disconnected to the earth and to where our food comes from and the interconnectedness of nature. We are so far removed from that that I think that has an impact on students. So when Heather contacted me, I was pretty eager to partner with her.

I didn't really know what it was going to look like, but I think both of us just knew it was going to work. Like as soon as we met, we had a lot of the same goals and vision, very different styles on

how to get there. But our different styles complemented one another when working with the students, and it was some of the best team teaching that I've done in my 20-year career.

So it was awesome. And she was a trooper. I really didn't know what it was going to look like because...

Heather: Me either!

Dawn-Marie: And that's, flexible people don't get bent out of shape and I think we both kind of live by that motto. And so we saw all 14 classes from grades 1 to 8, and it's very different teaching a group of grade one students versus a group of grade eight students.

And Heather, she rocked it. If she needs to pivot again teaching, she would be welcome in this profession because she was fantastic with the students.

Karina: Well, fantastic. Tell me more about the process of working together. It's not just about bringing in a lesson for students, but you wanted to connect it to the curriculum?

Dawn-Marie: Absolutely. So our teaching time is limited. We have a lot of curriculum expectations to get through in a very finite amount of time, and we're still recovering from COVID. I know that this year we didn't miss any school time, but there's a lot of skills, social skills that students are still recovering from being isolated for so long. And this was an opportunity.

I'm also the guidance lead at our school. So I help the intermediate students as they're picking courses for high school. I'm very cognizant that our kids need to know about a variety of different career paths and so that was the other lens that I was looking at Heather's email from in that landscape design isn't a profession that is often discussed.

I mean, many of our parents and our families want their students to do post-secondary. But what does that look like? And to be able to have someone in our school regularly because she visited all of the classes and for them to see, oh my goodness, this is actually something I could do. And it allowed some students that maybe math and language aren't their strongest subjects, but they have a great eye for design and colour and how that all goes together.

It really allowed those students to shine when they were creating their gardens, and each grade had kind of a different curriculum expectation from the art expectations. So it evolved differently with each grade. But for the intermediate kids, it was neat to see some of those kids that maybe their career path isn't highlighted very often or potential career paths for them, that weren't highlighted.

And so it was very much valuable time used in the classroom. And there's a therapeutic element to any time that you're working with with colour and art and no rules where they could just kind of create what they were seeing in their head or what they imagined in their head.

Karina: There could be an easy correlation with the art in creative skills. But how did you tie it to the reading, the writing, the math and science? What sort of examples can you give me that connected those elements?

Dawn-Marie: So it depended on what the classroom teacher was wanting to do with it. We had two classes that did a written component, writing about their dream garden and they did some lessons on adjectives. So I teach at a French immersion school. So adjectives, without getting too grammatical, they have to have an accord with the noun. So feminine-masculine nouns have different forms of adjectives, many of them.

So it was a grammar lesson, and it's woven into the art lesson, which made it more real for the kids because they wanted to be able to talk about their gardens, and their gardens and their little mini essays are still hanging in the hallways, so they're very proud of those. And it's really nice to walk down there.

And our timing of the year, if Heather and I were to do this again, was perfect because it was just as spring was just starting to awaken. So the kids were excited about gardening. It was perfect timing. Teaching is something that you, you reflect upon and think about how you could do better next time. I think there's a lot of math that we didn't cover that we absolutely could incorporate for sure.

But I know for the art expectations, Heather did a really good job. She was able to really personalize that for each grade level for the students so that if the teachers chose to extend the teaching and the learning that they could or it was a review for some classes of the colour wheel.

Karina: So Heather, how did you approach that without a background in education? How did you decide what you were going to share with each class from all the grades to know that it would be something appropriate and engaging for them?

Heather: So definitely Dawn-Marie has helped me a lot with that. At the beginning of this, I was very excited to incorporate all aspects of the curriculum for each grade and that still is my long term goal. So for the books that I'm writing, I'm focusing on the curriculum expectations by grade across all subjects, because landscape design ties in to all the subjects and quite easily.

So once I realized just how big of an undertaking that is and many conversations with Dawn-Marie looking at the curriculum, we really focused on, okay, let's narrow in on art and language. But then there's also the social skills and the personal story summary. I'm not sure what it's called, but the personal identity. So tying in with having those children and the students discover and uncover what their preferences are, where it's warm or cool colours or different colour schemes, or what's their favourite colour, what shapes do they prefer? And it all ties in with their own identity so that was kind of where we focused.

But then what came out of it was that if teachers wanted to explore further. So after I left, each student had created their own garden and there were other things that teachers could have done. So some of the things that came up where or that they could explore were different types of people and what activities they would do in a garden. So we were actually asking the students, you know, who might you see in a garden and what are they doing? And so we got answers from all students between grades one and grade eight, different animals and insects that you would find in the garden.

Something that came up that we didn't have a chance to really explore is the fact that there are birthday flowers, right? So each month actually has a corresponding flower associated with it. So again, with their identity, depending on the month they were born, they would have their own flower. So that's something.

Two famous gardens around the world, different things that you might find in a garden as in structures. So talking about arbors and pergolas and patios and driveways and even treasure, you know, it came up a couple of times where the students like, what might you find if you're digging in the ground? Well, I might find money. That's right. You might find money, right? And just having them explore their imagination without there being anything wrong, there's no right or wrong answer is just what can you come up with?

Dawn-Marie: And it gave the kids a background to like, really... Our schools located really close to one of the community gardens and one of our grade one teachers, she does almost weekly walks to the community garden. So a lot of our students that have been here since grade one, they're familiar with what a community garden is, but not the planning part of it.

Like it's just this magical piece of property that shows up with flowers and vegetables and fruit. So it was nice for them to kind of see the back side of that. And we were fortunate. Depave Paradise, which is a local organization, chose our schoolyard to green it up a lot. For the first time I've taught at this school — this is my 14th year and for the first time ever, we have grass on our school yard. And so the kids got to put in proposals for that. But they were very fanciful. They weren't realistic at



all. So their plans weren't really used, I don't think, in the planning. I think they already knew what they were going to do out there when they came in.

But it allowed Heather and I to be able to talk to the kids like why are those plants there? Like we have a rain garden and then we have two pollinator gardens that are out there as well. And to be able to talk to the kids before those plants started to come up again because it was done at the end of the school year last year, to be able to give them some context of why those plants, it wasn't just random. The Depave Paradise people didn't just go and pick pretty plants. There's actually a purpose for those plants and everything was done with intention. And so to be able to frame it that way, the kids are exposed to gardens, but not the planning part of the garden.

Karina: I think that's really clever to give them that opportunity to see that, Oh yeah, people are behind this, making thoughtful decisions and in doing physical work. And I guess if you don't have exposure to that, you might think that it just happens by magic or that a kit was plunked down and just works.

But to know that somebody has had to plan it means that maybe someday I could plan it and I could be the one who designs these spaces. That would be pretty exciting for a kid if they've never had that exposure before.

Dawn-Marie: Some of the conversations really challenged the kids. Many of our students live in apartments, and for them, initially, many of them thought, Well, I can't have a garden. And Heather was really good at reiterating to each of the groups, No, you can have a container garden. If you have a patio or even in your apartment, you don't need land in order to grow things.

And so that really challenged some of the misconceptions of what a garden is for our students, which I think that's a gift as well. That, you know, you can grow stuff even if you don't have a yard.

Karina: So what other effects did you see with the students going through this program? Did you notice that perhaps they were finding some inner peace, you know, some of that therapy, like you mentioned, being grounded with the soil or were they making connections with teamwork? Did you see other positive elements?

Dawn-Marie: I saw a lot of creativity coming out of kids and a lot of focus, which is something as teachers, one of the byproducts of COVID is for many students, their attention span is shortened just because they've been so disconnected from human connection and everything's been digital. And it was really interesting to see some of our students how long they could attend, like Heather brought in catalogs from a seed company.

Dawn-Marie: Do a shout out. Heather I can't remember which companies supported the program.

Heather: It was Vessey Seeds as well as O.S.C. Seeds.

Dawn-Marie: It was really generous that they gave a catalog for each of the students to be able to cut out plants that they wanted to incorporate in their garden plan. And just so many students took it so seriously. And I wasn't I wasn't sure how the kids would respond to that. The cutting and pasting bit. But many of our older students, they were really, really intentional with how they were laying things out.

And I think it was in the seven and eight group they did hardscape thing as well. And it was really interesting to see how much effort, like most of the classes continued beyond the 100 minutes that Heather was in there for the lesson. So they begged for more time to be able to really finalize what they were seeing in their head, translated down into two dimensions on the paper.

Heather: So it's actually funny that you mentioned the 100 minutes. So I was very recently, so last week I was invited into another school in Aylmer to do the same thing for two classes. So there was a grade two-three split and a grade three-four split, and they were each a 45-minute class. Like when you and I, we were feeling so... I would say there was a little bit of under pressure and not rushed because we were really intentional with our time. But at 100 minutes we wanted more time. And so I've completed now two classes at 45 minutes and I've determined that that is not going to happen again. So 45 minutes is not long enough.

The kids get so excited and so engaged and they're brainstorming and the kids all did something different. We tried to make it so there wasn't too much structure or too many rules for the students. So they were given very few rules.

With the younger students, you had to pick either a square or a circle, and then they had to pick one colour, right? So for the grade ones. The grade twos, they picked two colours and it was the contrasting colours on the colour wheel. So they also got to learn about colour opposites and then grade threes and fours did a triadic colour scheme and they did I think it was just a square garden. But then as the grades got older, we started incorporating other things and telling them, Well, if you want to do collage and drawing, you can do that if you want.

I think one of the rules was just that you had to fill that square, that circle. So they had a I believe it was seven inches by seven inch square and the only rule was is that they had to fill it. And so some students, it was just full of flowers. Some students put in paths.

I remember a young student actually asked for a second square because she wanted to make her garden a two-story garden. So without being prompted, without any kind of ideas or examples, she got this crazy idea that she's like, You know, I want steps to go up to the second story garden. And it just blew my mind.

Dawn-Marie: And we had bridges and different things too in that other class, that was like it no longer was a two dimensional. Like they started branching out into three planes, which...

Heather: And furniture! We had a student cutout a chair and actually fold it so that it would stand up on the garden in 3D, right. Without telling them. And these are grades 1 to 8. Like they were just so creative.

It was so cool to see what they would come up with knowing that the final results, you know, there wasn't very, it was easy for everyone to complete the task. I shouldn't say easy. It was challenging, but it was possible without there being too many obstacles in the way.

Dawn-Marie: Lots of entry points for different, different students.

Karina: What I'm hearing is that it seems like there's a real thirst for tangible elements in life, right? So much of what we do, this podcast included, it's virtual, it's digital and you can't lay your hands on it, but with a physical space, like a garden and a landscape, perhaps by coming into the school and offering these programs, we're generating a whole new generation of stewards of the land who want to be hands-on again, to have their their fingers in the soil. And it's wonderful.

Heather: And it keeps coming back. I mean, the trades... I never even heard about the trades until I was in high school. I didn't even realize it was a thing.

Dawn-Marie: So that's a big transition that's happening in Thames Valley. I know that as a board we are really, really pushing for the trades to be viable options for students that they're aware of. So I know this year there was, I don't even know what you would call it, there was like a smorgasbord of different trades and they loaded all these guidance leads onto busses and they went to the carpenter's union and I think they had a bunch of different locations at Fanshawe.

So that as guidance leads because, this is getting a little off topic, but teachers tend to teach the way they were taught and the way they learn sometimes. And if your family has all followed a university path, then you may not be aware of options that are available that aren't teaching or other university degree programs, which we know that's not what we need as a society.

So it's wonderful that we're becoming more well versed in the different options that our students can follow. And I mean, I often tell my grade eights, you're probably going to work in a job that isn't even created yet. So like, be very general with what you want to study and find what really interested you in order to be able to pick a career path, but don't pick a specific job to end at because everything is changing so quickly with technology.

So this is a great way. This was a great opportunity because there were kids that were like, I didn't know that I could do this for a living. Right. And what a powerful gift. Like yes, we teach curriculum specific expectations, but ultimately, I want our students to know how to learn and what their options are.

So to be able to know that there's a whole field that they can get into, that a garden isn't just planting it. There's a lot of steps that happen before that, and that involves science, knowing soil types and different plants, which ones grow well together and things that the kids weren't aware of before. Like I even had visions of them when they're buying their vegetables, paying attention to what colours of vegetables when they're planning it out, because there's an aesthetic quality that you can have in a vegetable garden. Whereas I'm not sure that the kids were aware of that or would even think about that when their parents are picking plants for the garden.

Heather: It's funny too, something that came up because I remember me personally in elementary and even in high school, whenever a guidance counselor would ask me, you know, what do you want to be when you grow up? And I always had the same answer. It's like, Well, give me a list, and where are all the options? Because I have no idea. I can list about maybe 20 jobs and none of them interest me.

Dawn-Marie: And so that's what you've been exposed to right now. You can't know about something if you've never witnessed it.

Heather: Exactly. And I think that's something that I really am very passionate about. Our profession as landscape professionals is that I do believe, I strongly believe, that there is something in it for everyone.

If you are a math guy or girl, or if you are in marketing or advertising, or if you're science and chemistry, or if you like hands-on work or if you like languages, if you like presenting. Right? So I love performing as an actor, but I'm also very passionate about education. And so I think that there is something in our profession for everyone. If we could just let everyone know, it's like there is something in landscaping for everyone.

Karina: That's a really great point. I'm glad you're here too, to talk about these things because this is what we're hoping through inviting the trades and building our GROW program and supporting the Horticultural Technician Apprenticeship Program. And these are all ways that we're hoping to encourage people to join these trades.

Now back to the students for a second. What kind of feedback did you get from the students or even from their parents? Did anybody speak up and give you some ideas about how they felt about these programs?

Heather: I'm not sure if Dawn-Marie might have had some feedback, but there's a couple of things that come to my mind right away. So I had one teacher, Dawn-Marie might be able to tell me, I think, was it Natasha?

Dawn-Marie: Natalie.

Heather: Oh, my goodness. So this teacher, she got so into it in her class. What grade does she teach again?

Dawn-Marie: She has a five-six split.

Heather: Five-six class. So her class was a lot of fun to teach. And she got really inspired. So she actually wanted to build a garden herself as well. So she got in there with the students. Collage, I guess was her jam and she's also the teacher who wanted to extend the program. And she was the one, I'm pretty sure, who came up with the written component, encouraging the students to describe what's in their garden and why they chose what they chose. And what is it like to walk through your garden? What does it look like? What does it smell like? All of those types of things. So that was really cool. Just having a teacher that got really passionate and really into it.

And then, I don't know if it's feedback, but just a situation, I guess, that came up with a young student who had a teacher's aide with him. So this was the school in Aylmer. They had told me in advance that he was going to be there with his aide and that not to have too many expectations. So as we went through the class we asked, what do you like? What do you like, he put his hand up for everything because he liked everything and I just encouraged it.

I said, That's great. That's great that you like everything. And he got into it and he collaged and at the end of the class, the teacher, Chris, asked, "Okay, well, does anyone have any final thoughts?"

And this young man came up to me and he had cut out a flower from the collage and he wanted to give me a flower and oh my gosh, I just like welled up and I said, okay, thank you. And I quickly left and had a good cry. Things like that were very memorable.

And there were two students in grade seven class at Dawn-Marie's school. I'm pretty sure they were grade seven. They might have been grade eight, and the teacher had also given me a bit of a heads up that they might, you know, they're a little bit attention seeking or might be a little, I don't know. Those were class clowns, as you say. And at the end of that class, I remember both these students when they said, oh, thank you, Miss Heather, for coming. And they're like, "Yeah, Miss Heather, that was so cool." And it was just like, Huh. So even these guys who don't really engage in a lot as what I've been told, they thought that what we did was pretty cool and that was awesome.

Karina: That's high praise indeed to get a compliment from an age group that likes to be blasé about everything.

Heather: Yes.

Dawn-Marie: The biggest feedback that I had is that they didn't want it to end. Like they wanted to know what was the next step. So I felt like we kind of let them down a little bit, like, Yep, you're going to plan this garden. And they're like, Okay, when are we building our garden? Yeah, what's next?

So that shows like they weren't like, okay, thank goodness that's done. Like, they wanted it to keep going. So moving forward, it reinforces, like, we do have a few teachers on staff that do get the kids out. We're very fortunate to be just a couple of blocks from the Thames River and getting the kids out into nature, it's definitely something that we've tried to do, but we haven't had this lens we're looking at how did all these green spaces come to be? We're close to Harris Park. Well, what were the choices? Why are those trees being planted and just being a critical thinker about spaces that the students visit? I think that that would definitely be something that I'd want to further explore and take it beyond just a two dimensional creation that they're making, but also for them to look at maybe city planning.

I mean, we've got ReForest London in the city here, they plant trees. Well, how do they pick which ones to plant? I think that would be really interesting and bring in a little bit more of the science curriculum because there's a lot of science that we would be able to cover and if this lesson were to be extended into more of a unit, I think that that would be an easy extension to do. And the kids were clearly hungry for more, so.

Karina: It sounds like there's so much room and so many possibilities that maybe someday you could have an entire school of children who are entirely focused on such a thing.

Heather: Doesn't that sound amazing?

Karina: It does!

Heather: You know!

Karina: So now that you've got this first season under your belt, what happens next? What is the future of your program and your book look like?

Heather: Definitely more students. So we've not yet presented the program to JK or SK students. I also would be interested in going into high schools and I think the term is IEPs. Dawn-Marie, is that the correct term?

Dawn-Marie: For students who are on an individual education plan?

Heather: Yes.

Dawn-Marie: So, students with learning disabilities or learning challenges. Yes. An IEP.

Heather: Yeah. So I think that would be definitely something next. I'm also in contact with Ryan Dunn and Mandy Cleland through Thames Valley District School Board with the idea that or they seem interested in doing more of what Dawn-Marie mentioned.

So the first unit would be designing an outdoor space. The second unit might be going outside the school and measuring the garden at the school. And then the third unit might be installing that garden, the fourth unit might be looking after that garden. And it could be, for example, something that was perhaps in grade four, you do the weeding, right? It seems when I say it like that sounds like child labour, but it is educational. What weeds are there? What's present, what bugs do you see? You can also be counting, right, when you're out there. How many ladybugs do you see? Or centipedes or spiders or whatever.

Dawn-Marie: They do habitats in grade four. So that would be an easy connection.

Heather: And then grade five, perhaps they're designing and installing whatever has to be done. So in order to maintain that garden does something need to come out? Is something dead, damaged or

diseased? Does something need to be pruned? Do we need more mulch and assess that square footage we tie into math. Also the conversion because in most trades we don't really talk in centimetres or metres.

We talk in feet and inches or yards for mulch, for example. And then grade six, that might be the one where, I don't know, they might be the ones who maintain it or install it or whichever, but it could be tied in with the curriculum for each grade so that each grade kind of has that certain list of responsibilities that connect them to their outdoor space.

And it gives them that sense of ownership for their outdoor space. And it's something to look forward to. So if in grade six you get to redesign the front garden, well then when you're in grade five, you're going to look forward to grade six because you get to redesign the garden, right? And over time, that's something that can be built upon. So that was one of the ideas that came up anyway.

Karina: Just one of the ideas. I'm sure there are a thousand. So if somebody at another school or a parent or a teacher, they were interested in implementing something similar for their students, what should they do?

Heather: So the easiest one is to reach out to us, both Dawn Marie or myself. I think it's really interesting to see where this goes. There's also my blog on my website, so [MyLandscapeArtist.ca](http://MyLandscapeArtist.ca) where I've actually been putting up the results of each class. And I'm also in the process, aside from a book, creating an online resource that teachers can access to print off PDFs or talking points or lessons or things like that.

But also, if parents or teachers are interested in this, then they should be going to their boards. They should be speaking with their teachers and their principals and saying, Hey, this is important, this is something we want to do. And maybe it's not me, maybe it's not Dawn-Marie, maybe it's not us. But the more that people talk and ask for these types of programs, the more likely I think that these programs will start becoming a norm.

Karina: Do you think this is something that you would expand almost like a franchise and train other people to go into schools and scale up how many schools you could go into by inviting more people to participate?

Heather: You know! Sky's the limit. I don't know about Dawn-Marie, but when we did it at the school, we were both pretty darn excited about this and just seeing the students and how engaged they are. It was so rewarding.



Dawn-Marie: Thames Valley has a really great program in grade ten where students can do an entire semester in an outdoor... at one of our environmental centres. And my one of my sons participated in that. And just seeing the change in him, in his demeanor, his mental health, really validates for me that kids need to be outdoors, kids need to be in nature.

They need to be learning the names of plants and the ecosystems that surround us and having that connectedness to the earth. So I think if Thames Valley is able to do an entire semester, and that program's gotten so much in demand that they run it year round, now they have enough students that want to be outside and they get 4 high school credits.

But the entire thing, it doesn't matter, rain or shine, they're out, they're hiking. They volunteer with different local environmental organizations. So that is a program that I think would be a really good model because I think landscape design and horticulture, it fits nicely with that. So if we can do it for environmental leadership, then I don't see why this can't evolve into something, whether it's at the elementary or the secondary level.

I think for our kids' mental health and wellbeing, we need to have programs like this that connect them back to the earth and outside of the classroom and taps into some of the skills that perhaps traditional school has been neglecting because our future, we need those skills to be present in our students.

Karina: I love that, Dawn-Marie. Thank you so much for sharing your insights as an educator. And Heather, thank you for sharing your enthusiasm about landscape architecture for students. Thank you to you both for joining us here on the Landscape Ontario Podcast today. I really appreciate your insights.

Heather: Thank you.

Dawn-Marie: Thank you for having us.

Karina: Thank you so much for listening to the Landscape Ontario podcast. We hope you'll subscribe to catch new episodes every month. If you are interested in learning more about Heather's classroom program or about the resources mentioned in our conversation, we'll have links in the show notes as well as a full transcript on this episode's web page at [LandscapeOntario.com/podcast](https://LandscapeOntario.com/podcast).

Thanks again for tuning in.

## **Resources**

[Vesey's Seeds](#)

[OSC Seeds](#)

[Depave Paradise](#)

[ReForest London](#)

[Heather's company: My Landscape Artist](#)

[Landscape Ontario's Peer to Peer Network](#)

[Thames Valley District School Board Outdoor Environmental Leaders Program](#)