

‘The opportunities and challenges of integrating Education for Sustainability into early years education’

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Introduction

In the current century, humans are making changes and development at a rapid speed, but these processes have a propensity of dependent on over-exploitation on the natural environment and resources (Nayar, 2013). The complement of these supplies is concerned of its disproportion and unstableness to support the future living (Dogaru, 2013). The essentiality of sustainable development was then brought up to attention in order to change our current process and to maintain the standard of life for our future generations (Goosen, 2012).

Education in sustainable development was considered as a huge aspect in order to success, but the current status of sustainable development in education is still vague within this evolution (Nasibulina, 2015). This Article will provide you the perspectives of the relation within *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* and the early years pedagogy and curriculum, as well as its challenges during the integration.

The Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC)

Since the international document - *Agenda 21* has emphasised that education is the essential tool to achieve the intention of sustainable development (UNCED, 1992), the concept of ESD was then established in a range of government documents and policies within the UK. The *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC)* policy was then initiated by the Government of Wales, in order to convey our future generations about the significance of ESD, and to educate children the ability and knowledge related to the maintenance of our environment, as well as the issues of fairness and equity of global citizens (DCELLS, 2008a & DCELLS, 2008b). ESDGC proposed seven themes that are based on the themes identified by UNESCO (2016), these are: choices and decisions; consumption and waste; health; identity and culture; climate change; wealth and poverty; and the natural environment. Where DCELLS (2008a and b) emphasized that all these

themes must link intimately together while delivering ESD to children.

Integrating ESD with the present early years pedagogy

Despite the fact that sustainable development might still appear to be an unfamiliar condition in early years education, there are a multitude of concepts in which ESD and ESDGC's objectives can certainly be found in our current curriculums, approaches, or those early years pedagogies. Therefore, in the following discussions I will be presenting how those shared values and objectives of ESD have linked with our current early years pedagogy.

One of the main concepts in ESD and ESDGC is to cultivate children to become individual 'thinking beings', and to encourage children 's ecological thinking to become a way of life, so as to prepare for their future living. DCELLS (2008a: 4) marked that ESDGC should prepare children to 'build the skills that will enable learners to think critically, think laterally, link ideas and concepts such as needs and rights and uncertainty and precaution, and make informed decisions'.

Accordingly, in order to inspire children to become ecological thinkers, ESDGC started to include and educate children about those ecology concepts. Gatersleben et al. (2002) indicated that when children are included in sustainability from a young age, their values, thinking style, knowledge and skills may revolve around sustainability and the ecological thinking method. In other words, children will value sustainability as an essential factor if they have experiences and are educated about it. Moreover, Krnel and Naglic (2009) also emphasised that children's perspective is essential to sustainable development. They considered that there are always problems which only children may view and feel as the 'beginner' in the society, which will influence adults to reconsider our current actions and values.

ESDGC prepare children to become capable to make their own decisions on the environment and world, and to understand what constitutes responsible environmental behaviour (DCELLS, 2008a and b). 'ESDGC is not about transmitting a set of answers to learners' (DCELLS, 2008a: 6). Besides, it also encourages children's critical thinking skills and their action abilities. For instances, encouraging children to question the current situations of their surroundings, environment, as well as people

in the other part of the world. ESDGC influences children to question the current lifestyle in current generations, and to encourage children to possess the motivation to make changes on those issues (DCELLS, 2008c). Beyond, it also provides opportunities for children to acquire those knowledge and abilities to generate solutions (DCELLS, 2008a and b).

Devine-Wright et al. (2004) emphasised that the gap between knowledge and behaviour, which represents what people know and what they are willing to do, must be resolved in order to conduct the objectives of sustainability. For instance, even when learners have the knowledge and ability on maintaining sustainability, their values have to believe in sustainable development so as to implement this concept to the best it can (Ernst and Monroe, 2004). ESDGC fulfill this issue by providing children to develop own empowerments which include making decisions, and valuing independent considerations and believes before developing their abilities on generating solutions (DCELLS, 2008a and b).

In our current curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Phase (2008d and 2015) children's problem-solving skills are always encouraged to be developed. The practitioner should provide opportunities for children to develop empowerments and decision makings. Children should be encouraged to develop creative and independent thinking skills. Besides, their ideas, concerns, believes and concepts should be valued so as to develop better confidence to progress in their learnings.

Krnel and Naglic (2009) also defined that children need to be provide the opportunity to express their opinions and to be valued. Therefore, they can learn from situations and to develop own thinking skills, empowerments, confidence and have the sense of responsibilities towards the environment. In addition, the UNCRC have the commitments to ensure all children regardless of their age, gender, religion or ethnicity to have a voice and to be respected and valued (Unicef, 2010 and no date).

The concept of ESDGC encouraging the development of children's empowerments and creative thinking may also refer to Vygotsky's theory of creativity. Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasised creativity as an essential element in children's development. He provided insights of children developing independency to solve

problems individually without fear of failure (Nilsson and Ferholt, 2014). Duckworth (1987) refers to 'Knowing the right answer' as a passive action. It limited children's opportunities to learn from experiences or explorations and diminished the process to find an answer to a question. It requires no decisions and carries no risks. Boeve-de Pauw (2011) emphasised that children should be allowed to have the opportunities for thinking and understanding the matter by themselves, or else children might only acquire the knowledge but disregarded the meaning behind matters.

Cadwell (1997) detailed that Reggio Emilia viewed adults as facilitators and children as initiators in their own learning. Children are free to explore their surroundings, where adults only supervise but not manipulate children's learning. It believed that children are creative and competent learners that learn by cooperating with others, together with interactions of the environment (Early Education Support, 2006). The concept of Reggio Emilia is similar to ESDGC where children are encouraged to develop own empowerments and their cognition abilities with the impacts of environment and their interactions with others under the supervision of adults.

Sutherland (1992) states that Piaget considered that education in early years should be child-led and child-centered. He emphasised that education should allow children to be creative and be free to explore in order to develop children's cognition abilities.

Piaget: Education, for most people, means trying to lead the child to resemble the typical adult of his society... but for me and no one else, education means making creators... You have to make inventors, innovators—not conformists.
(Bringuier, 1980: 132).

DCELLS (2008d and 2015) established that children are viewed as the core in the curriculum. The provisions for each individual should be well balanced between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Beyond, Bilton (2010) also considered that structured and unstructured experiences are both essential for children. This called the advertence with the Montessori approach, which all the activities and resources are child-led and self-corrected (Montessori, 2004). Which Spinola (2015) also emphasised that children are more motivated and can progress faster when having an unstructured target that is set by themselves. These concepts from Piaget (1926),

DCELLS (2008d and 2015) and Montessori (2004) correlated with the ESDGC approach with the concepts of child-led approach and emphasised the essentials to supervise children to become independent thinkers and creators.

Another essential concept of ESDGC is to provide sustainability learning with the implementation of active and experiential opportunities (DCELLS, 2008a and b). The ESDGC approach aimed to develop children to become active global citizens,

Developing thinking, communication, ICT and number skills as well as skills of co-operation and collaboration will help young people to become active global citizens, willing to engage with issues and take action to bring about change.

(DCELLS, 2008b: 12).

Harvey (1976) analysed that there is an essential to allow children to practice their use of knowledge, so children are capable to solve problems with previous learnings and develop thinking and action abilities. Corkin et al. (2012) believed that experiences allow children the sense of confidence, which may increase children's holistic ability and their determination to progress solutions in future.

Under the Foundation Phase Framework children are allowed more opportunities to learn with first-hand experiences and active exploration. The curriculum support children's holistic development and well-beings, it encourages hands-on experiments and provides the opportunities for children to learn about solving real-life problems, as well as the learning of conservation and sustainability.

Children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of 'play' providing the vehicle. Through their play, children practice and consolidate their learning, play with ideas, experiment, take risks, solve problems, and make decisions individually, in small and in large groups.

(DCELLS, 2008d: 4).

Piaget (1926) and Dewey (1910) believes that children learn better with practical experiences. Besides, both Piaget (1926) and Vygotsky (1978) believed that children

learn and progress better when they experience something directly. Jarvis and Chandler (2001) reinforce this concept with the explanation from Vygotsky, which he believed children who learn and explore actively may develop better abilities in establishing own understanding. Together in Kamen (2005) states that Piaget recommended children to learn with the exploration of real objects, the practical experiences of discovering concrete objects in diverse situations do assist children to understand the learning, themselves and their surroundings better.

DCELLS (2008a: 6) added that, 'ESDGC can motivate children because it provides interesting real life, topical contexts which learners can relate to, and an exciting opportunity for developing skills'. The essentials of linking sustainable learning into children's everyday life are called into attention.

ESDGC also considered children's learning in sustainability should be cross-curricular. It emphasized in the DCELLS (2008a and b) that the seven themes should not be seen as an independent subject, but must be closely connected with each other, as well as the Foundation Phase curriculum. Besides, it also emphasized the essentiality of conducting a whole school approach to involve everyone in ESDGC. The concept of inclusion is always implemented within the EYFP. The different areas of learning are presented connected with each other, beyond, practitioners always promote child-centered approach, parents-partnership approach, multi-agency approach, as well as the involvement of each individual when providing suitable learning for them (DCELLS, 2008d and 2015). This is similar to ESDGC in which sustainable development is placed in the middle and everyone work and make progress about it.

One of the most essential factor of ESDGC is that children are encouraged to have more attachments with their surroundings, both nature and manufactured environments. Besides, it also considered the necessity to inspire the relationships and considerations within children and the global citizen (DCELLS, 2008a and b). Davis (no date) believed that allowing children to build the bonds with the natural environment may develop their awareness and may start children to value their environment and its current situation (Neill, no date). DCELLS (2007) defined that providing outdoor learning experience may allow children to learn about the

environment, so as to develop their sense of responsibility to their surrounding areas, to value the nature, then develop their values to the wider world.

Thornton and Brunton (2013) defined that learning outdoor enhances children in developing life skills; their emotional and wellbeing; physical skills; socialisation and self-esteem from experiencing outdoors learning. Children learn to manage risk, to set targets and challenge themselves to develop their independence, empowerments, self-reliance, and confidence (White and Stoecklin, 2014). Moreover, the Foundation Phase Framework detailed that both indoor and outdoor environments should be 'fun, exciting, stimulating and safe promote children's development and natural curiosity to explore and learn through first-hand experiences' (DCELLS, 2015:3). It supports the development of empowerments, problem-solving and to develop the awareness of self-responsibility on actions (DCELLS, 2008).

The environment is essential for children's cognitive development in both Piaget and Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky defined the main factors that influence children's cognitive development are social aspects, cultural and economic processes, which defines as the social surroundings or the everyday environment will affect their cognitive evolvement differently (Waller et al, 2001). Kamen (2005) and Sutherland (1992) identified a stimulating environment provides the opportunities to facilitate children's aptitude on cogitation and learning according to Piaget's theory. He also explained that children having the interaction with their environment allows them to understand their surroundings and the wider world by building the connections with the environment.

Piaget also defined play as the significant process of assimilation in his schema theory, which children practice and implement their previous acquisition of skills and knowledge to change the environment stimuli to match their notions (Machado, 2016). Corresponding with ESDGC, it is about children acquiring the knowledge of sustainability and to make improvements or conducting solutions for future living (Unicef, no date). Besides, the Forest School initiative also conforms with the fulfillment of ESDGC. Above all, Forest School provides the opportunities for children to learn, and to develop the sense of connection with the nature environment. The objectives are to increase children's understanding and appreciation of the

environment, social and economic potential of the nature and developing a wider vision about the world by viewing the environment as one (Forest School Wales, no date).

Challenges while integrating sustainability in early years

Although there are a majority of concepts and practice linked within the ESDGC with the current curriculum, approaches, and those early years pedagogies, there are still factors that have called concerns which might delay the integration of sustainable development into early years education (Goosen, 2012). The main factor discussed by Teixeira (2013) was the early years practitioner who is the major route where children gain their knowledge and abilities on sustainability. Gatersleben et al. (2002) defined that practitioner has to maintain a positive value and believes in sustainability in order to deliver ESD to children. Ernst and Monroe (2004) added that practitioner's understanding and knowledge of sustainability also have impacts when integrating. Davis (no date) claimed practitioner have to understand sustainability is much more than just recycling and playing outdoors. Besides, Dogaru (2013) explained that there is an essentiality to involve the whole setting to contribute to promoting sustainable development, so as to enhance the education.

However, Krnel and Naglic (2009) evaluate that the current curriculum has too many stages and targets to meet, the practitioner might not have the suitable time allowance to plan the opportunities in learning or developing sustainability learnings in children's schedule. Yet, Nayar (2013) described that practitioner may conduct parent-partnership approach which children can develop their values and believes under the learning from parents, and to develop sustainable development with the opportunities for daily experiences.

In addition, the setting may get involve in ESD programmes such as Eco-schools which is designed for young person to participate. Eco-Schools is an international environmental education programme developed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in 1994 and runs in Wales by Keep Wales Tidy. The programme is funded by the Welsh Government and free for Local Authority schools. The initiative is a student-led programme which is designed to empower and inspire young people to be engaged in and make positive environmental changes in their

environment, by providing them the opportunity to actively protect it. Which also build their skills to encompass the learning of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.

The main principle of the programme is that eco “thinking” should become a way of life. Pupils are encouraged to develop positive attitude towards the environment, taking into account both humans and nature. It is to get children motivated and have empowerments on maintaining or making changes to their environment. The initiative promotes this learning concept with active learning opportunities, as well as promoting an all-inclusive approach involving students, teachers, parents and the local community.

The whole pogramme includes the implementation of 7 stages, which includes: Forming an Eco- committee; Conducting an Environment Review; Creating an action plan; Monitoring and Evaluating; Informing and Involving; Creating an Eco-code, and Linking to Curriculum. After the implementation of these seven stages, the setting may be able to gain four awards. Two awards are self-assessed and two are externally assessed. These levels are bronze, silver, green flag, and platinum.

Spinola (2015) presented a research showing that children and young person who have learnt with the Eco-school programme have developed the following 7 elements:

1. Affect - their understanding of environmental sensitivity, the current global attitudes towards sustainability; and those basic moral reasoning;
2. Ecological knowledge - the understanding on sustainability development;
3. Socio-political knowledge - the basic understanding of cultural relationships, political, economic and other factors to ecology and environment;
4. Their knowledge on environmental issues;
5. Skills – the pertaining to environmental problems and action strategies, their systemic thinking, and forecasting;
6. Determinants of environmental responsible behavior - such as personal responsibility; and
7. Behaviour - meaning their will to be participate in resolving problems

Eco-schools meet the objectives of ESDGC, such as including children in

sustainability; conducting the whole-school approach and involving the whole community; providing active explorations and hands-on learning; valuing different cultures and situations; as well as encouraging children to think ecologically. However, Nilsson and Ferholt (2014) argue that Eco-school does not provide enough outdoor learning experiences for children to develop the bond with the environment. They commented that Eco-schools focus more on the discussion and planning for sustainability but most of them are done in indoors rather than outdoors.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, although the current status of sustainable development in early years education is still vague within this evolution (Nasibulina, 2015), numerous of connections are seen within the ESD, ESGC concepts with the EYFP, divers approaches and early years theory and pedagogies. Yet, there is still an essentiality to ensure when fulfilling ESGC in children's learning, all practitioners and educators must equip the appropriate understanding and information, as well as maintaining those positive values and believes for children to learn from.

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