Business Portfolio

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Introduction and Company Overview

Seedlings is a recently established company that I have created. I have applied and been granted access to a large open area adjacent to the local primary school. My vision for Seedlings, initially, is to establish a large outdoor area that will incorporate an allotment, then further along develop an area that can be used for den building, junk modelling and possibly some climbing apparatus using recyclable materials.

Seedlings aims to offer learning opportunities to develop children's knowledge within the early years, of the cycle and science of life, in a fun and exciting environment. Seedlings aims to develop their understanding and expertise, to enable children to grow and maintain their own harvest of fruit and vegetables. Seedlings, mission is to educate and lay the foundations for children to understand and appreciate the benefits of maintaining a healthy mind, body and lifestyle through developing and maintaining an allotment (Let's Go Gardening, 2018).

Seedlings vision is to produce enough produce to provide opportunities for the children to sell some of their produce within the community, whilst using the rest of the produce to develop and equip the children with cooking skills that will help them thrive, as they mature.

I hope to deliver my project along with the school's curriculum and timetable, whilst incorporating and embedding Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC). The aim of ESDGC is to educate children on how decisions and actions they choose, may impact on others here or abroad, via the economy and environment (Welsh Government, 2017).

It is hoped that Seedlings will be able to offer and deliver opportunities, as an after-school club, for children whose parents are working, or maybe for those parents who want to get involved and attend, they will be more than welcome to join the children with the activities.

Background

I developed Seedlings after witnessing the delight and enthusiasm the children in the early years class showed when they planted their watercress and watched with eagerness as the seeds grew. As Campbell-Preston (2018) note, many children do not have opportunities to play outside, let alone create and cultivate the land. The Government (2016) Childhood Obesity Policy highlights, that nearly a third of children are obese and overweight. The government continue to note that obesity is starting much younger in children than in previous years and they claim that it is proving harder for individuals to combat their weight problems, which in turn, costs the government millions in treatment. Obesity is also associated to children's well-being which is currently paramount on the governments agenda.

Hamblin et al. (2017) recognise that early interventions prove beneficial to combat obesity. They discuss successful interventions already in place. However, I feel they are all sport/physical orientated. I feel physical sport is not for all individuals, as agreed by Markham (2018) and Fahim (2017). They suggest that a move from physical sport towards physical activities, which are fun and engaging, such as those Seedlings aims to promote via digging and tending to the allotment, would prove beneficial to children's fitness and well-being.

My continued personal development has enabled me to understand children's developmental needs and I understand and appreciate, that the early years is a crucial starting point where children establish strong habits towards healthy eating and physical activities, a view also supported by authors, Vanderloo et al. (2015).

That is why the early intervention offered by Seedlings would prove beneficial, and what better way to educate healthy living and promote well-being with the children in the early years than through harvesting their own produce, in their own allotment.

Benefits

- Developing children skills in growing, maintaining and marketing produce.
- Developing a caring and sustainable relationship with peers and nature.
- Developing mathematical skills when planning, ordering, mapping.
- Building relationships with the outside community.
- Building and maintaining quality time with parents and carers.
- Developing language, communication and social skills.
- Building their confidence and enhancing their well-being.
- Developing their gross and fine motor skills.
- Developing their knowledge and understanding of maintaining healthy diets, minds and bodies.
- Develop and establish opportunities and an interest, that might offer as a future career that may not have been an option, if this business opportunity had not been put in place.

(Bilton, 2010; Targeted News Service, 2010; Targeted News Service, 2010a; Louv, 2010)

Challenges and Barriers

As with any businesses starting off, there will be teething problems. However, staffing and volunteers are already lined up and in place. Similarly, children's equipment/tools are in place and on standby at a very low cost.

Nevertheless, ensuring we can engage parents and carers to join their children, may prove a challenge. Time constraints, due to work commitments along with other family responsibilities may mean that they will be unable to attend. Thus, not allowing Seedlings to develop quality time and relationships for children and their parents/carers such as our aim and goals hope to achieve.

Furthermore, incorporating the allotment activity into an already busy weekly schedule of the school could also prove challenging.

Personal equipment for wet weather, could also provide complications as it is an area of deprivation, hence me wanting to provide such a valuable opportunity to the area.

Access to the allotment for children or parents/careers with physical disabilities, may also provide obstacles in the early days of starting up, until we know and can cater for the individual needs of our stakeholders. We will then however, once having met our stakeholders, be in a position to adapt and cater to their individual needs as we set about the ground-breaking working of establishing the allotment.

Safeguarding is of the utmost importance, ensuring everyone who has access to children has had a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS) before commencing any engagement or group work with children may also cause initial issues. However, it is worth noting that there is no cost for volunteers for these checks (Gov. UK, no date). However, they still take a number of weeks for these checks to come through and to be put in place.

Waivers and behavioural contract will need to be signed before entering into the scheme.

Stakeholders …… Who are they?

- Children, as the allotment would provide opportunities for them to learn and develop many new skills, whilst encouraging their creativity and cognitive skills.
- Practitioners, as it would potentially offer them the opportunity to meet and engage and develop links with the community of where their children live and socialise.
- The parents, as it would give them opportunities to develop new skills, engage in an informal way with teaching staff, that does not make them feel inadequate. Establishing and securing strong bonds with their children, whilst sharing and engaging in a common interest.
- The elderly would have opportunities to came and share their experiences, knowledge and expertise with the children. Providing opportunities to establish respect for all, and re-connect the generation divide that may have developed over the years.
- The community as a whole would also be stakeholders. Due to the fact that at the moment the wasteland attracts vermin, problems, and is an eyesore within the community.

Costings

- Initial outlay needed for gardening equipment.
- Ground is rent free, as agreed by local council. With paper work in place.
- Local businesses have offered funding and supplies.
- A minimal fee will be put in place to cover refreshments for children and volunteers for use of the afterschool club. Discretion will be observed.
- Water will be supplied by the local fire service in bowsers, initially.

My Attributes

I have a wealth of knowledge and experience of growing produce in my own allotment, therefore I am in a position where I am in contact with a number of experienced individuals who are keen and committed to mentor and support the children along the way. I am a keen advocate of forest schooling and as such, I am passionate about delivering a quality outdoor experience that will captivate and give profound meaningful experiences to children in the early years. I am a caring, diligent, approachable and patient leader, who is able to converse with ease with individuals at all levels and backgrounds. My experience in early years and enthusiasm to continually develop my own practices and knowledge of children's needs, gives me a deeper understanding on how best to meet a child's holistic and individual needs.

The Research

This segment will critically analysis the impact of providing the outdoor space, such as an allotment, to promote children's physical activity, knowledge and understanding of healthy eating and of maintaining healthy lifestyles. Along with raising their awareness on how choices they make can affect others and the environment, without suppressing their imagination and creativity skills.

The Welsh Government (2017a) document that 40% of Welsh children will be obese or overweight by the age of eleven. They continue to note that if interventions are not put in place from an early age, those obese children will become obese adults (Papoutsi et al., 2015).

Beynon (2016) further suggests that children risk being bullied, which can result in the child having low self-esteem and depression. Furthermore, research has noted that obesity can be the source of diabetes, heart disease and have an impact on an individual's well-being, to name but a few secondary issues.

This is also recognised by the Welsh Governments (2016) 'All Wales Obesity Pathway', and the UK Government (no date) 'Foresight Tackling Obesities: Future Choices', along with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2017) and Xu and Xue (2016) who all recognise that early interventions need to be put in place to reduce the immense amount of money lost by the National Health Service, due to obesity and its secondary problems. This they believe is better achieved by multi-agencies working within the community along with children in early years and their parents.

Several authors suggest adopting the perspectives and theories of early theorists such as Waldorf, Steiner and Pestalozzi humanistic approach, and offering the opportunity of an allotment, allows the individual to develop a genuine interest, which will enable opportunities to develop skills that will encourage responsibility through a social and practical engagement (Pavlovic et al., 2017; Nicol and Taplin, 2012; Knight, 2013). Similarly, Pavlovic et al. (2017) continue, giving children opportunities to develop their minds, heart and hands is an integral part of their development. Therefore, delivering children in the early years a holistic pedagogy. Steiner believed, children up to the age of seven learnt and developed through imitation. Therefore, offering opportunities to develop an allotment, whilst working with adults who have the experience and

knowledge, allows the child to feel safe and enter into their imaginative world, which Steiner believed enabled children to develop deeper concrete associations, knowledge and understandings which further develop their social and healthy habits through imitation (Pavlovic et al., 2017).

Furthermore Knight (2013) discusses Froebel, who encouraged children to construct and explore the outdoor in order for them to be active learners, whilst using open-ended resources, a concept developed by Pestalozzi and Froebel.

Similarly, Halpenny and Pettersen (2014) discuss Piaget constructivist approach that puts the child at the centre of their learning, to improve cognitive development. Knight (2013) suggests that Montessori and Reggio believed that children's sensory development could be further enhanced through use of natural materials.

Several authors agree, and support the work of early theorist Froebel, Montessori, Piaget, Waldorf, Steiner and Pestalozzi who all believe that children should have deep and meaningful experiences and chances to use real life tools, such as the opportunities being offered through the allotment project (Halpenny and Pettersen, 2014; Knight, 2013; Robinson 2008).

Similarly, several authors have demonstrated that the earlier interventions are put in place, such as with children in the early years, the more superior the cognitive development is, along with and including their health development, thus providing more successful developmental outcomes (Carson et al., 2017; Benios, 2014).

This theory is supported by the Welsh Government (2018) Foundation Phase, and the implementation of the Welsh Government (2018a) new school curriculum. The new curriculum for Wales aims to develop and equip children from an early age with the necessary skills for their future, that will help them become sustainable citizens. Such as the allotment venture. As Joyce (2012) observes, how can children grow up to be sustainable citizens who respect and value their environment if they have no experience or interest with the outdoors?

Supporting this theory is Hunt (2015) who supports the work of Ken Robinson, (2006, cited by Hunt, 2015) "Do Schools Kill Creativity?", they believe schools are suppressing children's creativity and imaginative skills. They continue to note as does Knight (2013) that for children to survive and to succeed in this modern world children need to develop new skills, and by providing outdoor opportunities such as the allotment this may be achieved.

Similarly, several authors agree that research demonstrates that children who are given opportunities to grow their own food are more inclined to show appreciation for the cycle of life and nature and are more likely to eat their produce. Likewise, enabling opportunities to cook their produce will have a firmer foundation for developing healthier lifestyles (Delta Optimist, 2016; Cosco et al., 2014; Nath, no date; Sixsmith, 2011).

Furthermore, authors (Bilton, 2010; Knight, 2013; Karabulut, 2013) note being outdoors in the sunlight and fresh air improves attention and concentration skills, along with physical fitness, and the development of gross and fine motor skills, this is achieved through the process of seeding, weeding and digging. All of which can help and support pencil control and concentration levels when back in the classroom (Weinstein, 2015). Additionally, Hu et al. (2015) note from the wealth of educational and medical research, there are many benefits to the outdoors, it can also provide opportunities to develop language, communication and social skills. Likewise, children are able to release their excess energy whether physically or verbally compared to a classroom environment.

Parker (2008) reflects that some children thrive in the outdoors compared to the classroom environment, as does Joyce (2012) and Wilson (2012) who also notes that children feel in control of their learning and feel confident and are less stressed, due to the outdoor offering a natural learning environment. Whitebread (2008) notes that children are more inclined to learn through natural experiences than being taught in a classroom situation. Authors McClure et al. (2017) argue, that opportunities to engage in an allotment provides a wealth of learning outcomes, such as concepts of science of the natural world, critical thinking skills, problem solving along with opportunities to trial and error situations. However, Hu et al. (2015) believe that due to practitioner's lack of experience and knowledge on the wealth of benefits of outside activities, this is why many schools fail to implement and deliver quality outdoor learning into their curriculum. Additionally, Hu and Roberts (2013) and Li et al. (2016) suggest that children from deprived areas are less likely to receive quality outdoor provision such as their affluent peers receive, due to funding and inexperienced staff.

Furthermore, Bilton (2010) also notes that being outdoors is harder, physically and mentally, due to working in bad conditions and constantly watching for potential hazards.

A view also supported by Suzuki (2014) who notes a barrier to being outdoors is safety, noting that parks can be locked up and are not always accessible to the public, thus not encouraging children to engage with nature.

However, authors (Lavrysen et al., 2017; Rushton, 2013; Brussoni et al., 2012; Health and Safety Executive, 2012) all agree that children need to be outdoors and exposed to an element of risk in a safe and secure environment, as it develops learning strategies to control and cope with risks later on in life. Being outdoors develops a child's perception and competence skills. Knight (2013) believes giving them challenges and risks in the outdoor, also develops respect for danger and their natural surroundings. Having the allotment in place aims to remove some of these barriers and allow opportunities to develop the skills and experience with qualified staff and volunteers at hand to guide and support. Authors, Logue et al. (2013) and Ebadi and Asakereh (2107) refer to this as scaffolding, a concept developed by Vygotsky, where the adult creates the right level of challenge for the child.

A barrier to engaging young children out of school would be trying to engage the parents and carers and getting them to change their habits and their way of thinking.

Authors Edwards et al. (2016) note from a wealth of research that 'poor parenting' leads to 'poor outcomes' for children, successful early intervention that are put in place however, provide greater outcomes.

According to Blackburn and Aubrey (2016) adopting the use of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model ensures that any intervention put in place will therefore provide positive outcomes. The use of this approach ensures that anyone who has contact with the child is included within the intervention and everyone works collaboratively to achieve and understands what the positive outcomes can have for the child. As agreed by Whalley (2007) and the Pen Green Centre team who all work collaboratively with parents and carers as they know their children better than anyone else, and Whalley (2007) acknowledges without the parents input the outcomes would not be so positive.

In conclusion, although there may be barriers to overcome initially, such as access to the site, individual involvement and finance, authors Cosco et al. (2014) and Moore and Smith (2014) research has demonstrated that producing a garden for all to enjoy

within the community can be a beneficial providing great success, as everyone wants to improve and enhance the learning outcomes for their children, whilst offering them a healthier start in life. Smith (2016) discuss and support the many positive and successful holistic outcomes for children, that can be delivered through interventions such as a nature exploration. Similarly, Campbell-Preston (2018) note other benefits of having a garden, such as it reduces crime, gets everyone out and about socialising and sharing stories, building a stronger community for children to grow and develop in.

Author's (Go Gardening, 2018; Sixsmith, 2011; Colman, 2017) note having an allotment that children can enjoy, and are interested in, is an excellent intervention that can also educate children about bugs, wildlife, whilst supporting their creativity and their contact and engagement with the environment. All of which underpins the Welsh Government (2008) Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, along with Donaldson (2015) 'Successful Futures'.

Hakoon (2017) discusses the positive outcomes for students studying early childhood after a garden activity was delivered and incorporated into their learning outcomes, as it laid the foundation and knowledge on how to deliver a quality and holistic education to children in the early years.

Further opportunities to develop the site would see the availability of recyclable materials to provide opportunities to den build, thus allowing their imagination and creativity skills to develop and be enhanced. Along with cooking equipment, outdoors and indoors equipment, if finance is available. Although this is not an original idea it is however, unique to the proposed area. Seedlings aims to provide opportunities and quality experiences to many children in the early years and their community, that may otherwise be a dream. Seedlings aims to turn their dreams into realities.

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