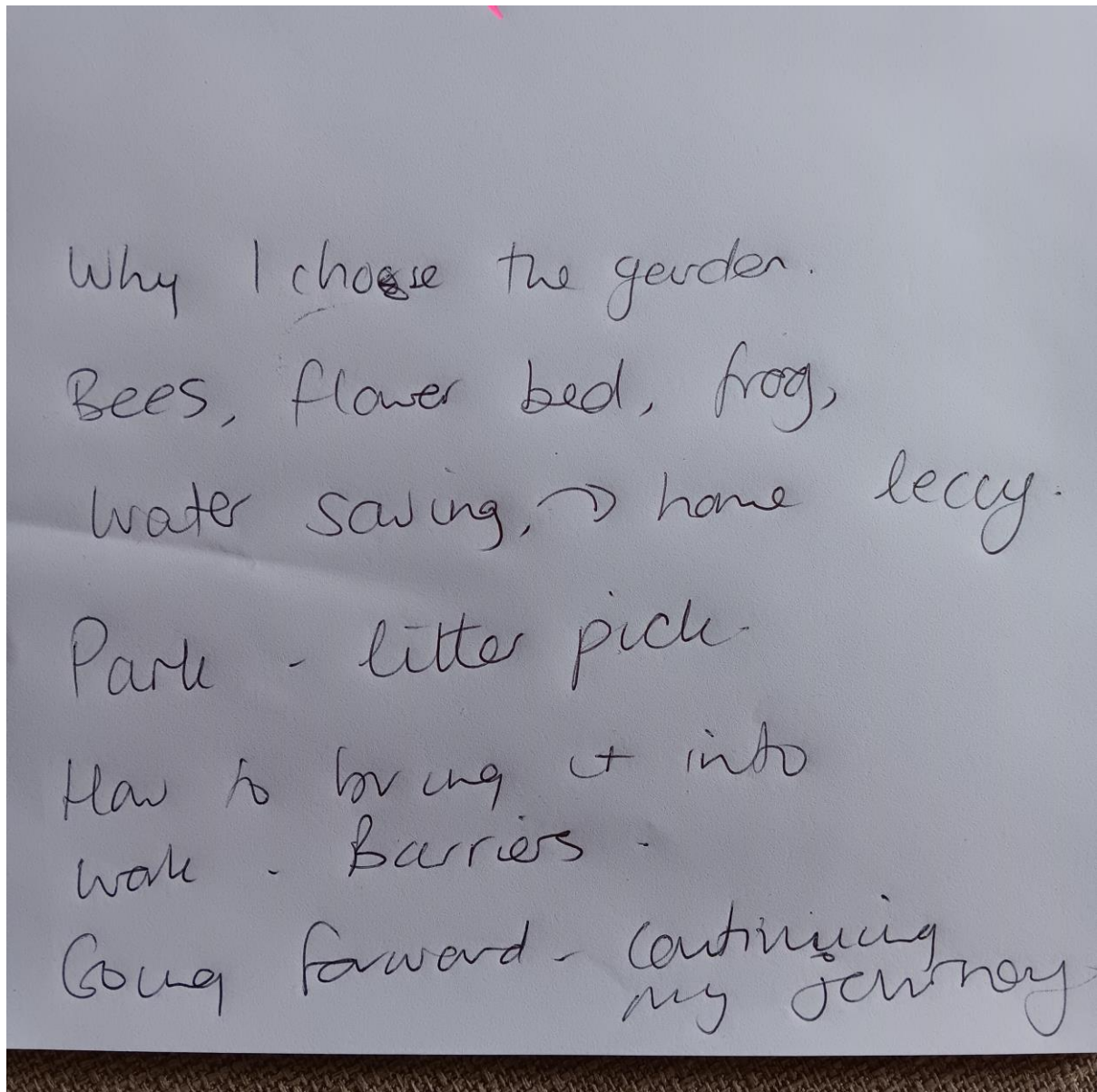


PART 2



The John Muir Award was created in 1983 and is a leading voice in the United Kingdom for the protection, conservation and restoration of wild spaces. The Trust takes its name from the Scottish naturalist, John Muir and cares for sights such as Ben Nevis and Helvellyn. Muir spent his early years in Scotland and at the age of 11 emigrated with his family to America. Muir had a passion for wild places, exploring, studying and campaigning to protect them, arguing that nature and wild places should be cared for and conserved for all (John Muir Trust, no date). This links strongly with theorists such as Froebel, Montessori and Dewey who all believed that learning in nature was important for all children to gain an understanding of, and how, to care for the natural world (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022). This also links with the new curriculum in Wales which has four purposes, one of which is to support children to become informed, ethical citizens who demonstrate their commitment to

the sustainability of the planet and who are ready to participate in their society (Welsh Government, 2022c).

The Welsh Government suggests that schools should be making links between the economy, society and the environment, encouraging children to learn about the relationships between power, resources and human rights and developing an understanding that everything that they do now has an impact on others both locally and internationally in the present and into the future. All of which comes under their guidance for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) (Welsh Government, 2008).

John Muir campaigned through the latter part of the 20th Century to encourage people to appreciate the natural world around them and to help care for it (John Muir Trust, no date), similarly, organisations such as Greenpeace campaign to defend the natural world from destruction and call on big companies and corporations to address climate change (Greenpeace, no date), however, in June, 2024, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General delivered a hard-hitting speech laying out stark truths about the state of our planet, the risks that leaders are taking and what organisations such as G7 and G20 need to do over the next eighteen months to ensure humanity has a liveable future (United Nations, 2024a). The latest Conferences Of the Parties or COP 27 has made the move from planning to implementation to ensure that the 1.5*c pledge is realised, this is the commitment to stop global temperatures rising more than 1.5*c by 2030, however, this will require greenhouse gas emissions to peak by 2025 and then be reduced by 43% by 2030 (United Nations, no date a)

In 2015 every UN member state signed up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core. The 17 goals cover global issues such as poverty, hunger, our oceans and clean, affordable energy, they are all interlinked and go hand in hand. To achieve one, all must be realised (United Nations, no date b). However, the UNs latest report on the progress of the world's move towards the SDGs raises concerns that a fragmented approach has resulted in insufficient progress towards achieving the goals by 2030 (United Nations, 2024b).

The Welsh Government has also committed itself to net zero carbon emissions for 2050 with a goal of the public sector being at net zero by 2030 (Welsh Government, 2022a). Commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 and the 17 SDGs also ensures that the Government is carrying out its responsibilities as set out in the *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* which states that national and local governments, local health boards and other public bodies must work together to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales.

The Welsh Government has also developed an all Wales 2021-25 plan which calls on all sectors within Welsh society to make pledges on how they propose to reduce their carbon footprint and help make the move towards net zero emissions. The pledges include case studies from schools across Wales where students have voiced their concerns that their future was a moot point if climate change was not addressed (Welsh Government, 2022 b), this is evident in many schools where the

voice of the child has not been heard. Croke et al. (2021) suggests that in Wales, although significant efforts have been made to embed sustainability into education through policies such as the ESDGC, *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011* and the *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, there still remains a disconnect between sustainability goals and the need for the voice of the child to be heard in major decision making processes, for example, when Britain voted to leave the European Union, children's voices were not heard during the decision-making process, the result of which will affect the nation for generations to come.

How does this affect the early years and the ideas and pedagogies that should be developed going forward?

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2020) suggests that education for the future should be centred around the survival of the planet and argues that a visionary approach to education for 2050 and beyond is needed to ensure the survival of humanity. Education should develop a person's understanding of how humanity and the state of the Earth are interlinked and how to survive well together, similarly, The John Muir Award is designed to challenge a person's ontology, how they view the world, and it encourages people to make those connections with the natural world by understanding that humans are a part of nature and should not strive for dominion over it (John Muir Trust, no date).

The Award encourages people to make those connections with nature and develop their understanding of the natural world through four steps, discovery, exploration, conservation and sharing. It encourages people to discover a wild area that they can visit regularly, this may be a person's garden, a local park, a beach, any space that a person can be outdoors, take time to explore what lives there, the ecological make up of an area and how best to enhance and conserve what is there, similarly, Froebel's theory on the kindergarten or children's garden encourages hands on experiential learning in the outdoors allowing children the opportunity to learn about the environment around them and how best to care for it (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022), The new curriculum in Wales also suggests that children who are able to spend time in and connect with the natural world are able to build empathy for the environment and develop an understanding of the potential impact they have on the world, developing an understanding of sustainability in a practical way (Welsh Government, 2022c), for example, building bug hotels, developing a community garden or planting flowers to encourage insects.

The ESDGC suggests a whole school approach to becoming a sustainable setting, ensuring that everybody within the school community is involved including children, families, staff and governors. Everyone should be aware of what ESDGC is and how the principles should be interwoven into the ethos of the school and not viewed as a separate subject (Welsh Government, 2008), similarly, Early Childhood Australia learning hub (2013) suggests that the journey to becoming a sustainable setting should be a continuous, evolution and that settings should take small steps to facilitate the engagement of the whole community surrounding the school, for example, the setting in Australia being discussed required pest control to visit the

setting regularly, however, the children had developed a spider corner for their Globe spiders that the pest control were not allowed to spray.

The ESDGC suggests a connected way of working through five elements, the first being commitment and leadership, the need for head teachers and setting leaders to spearhead and drive the ethos of sustainability into the curriculum and ethos of a setting, Montessori and Steiner both argued that practitioners must view themselves as role models as children have an instinct to imitate (Boyd, 2018). The new Curriculum in Wales similarly suggests that practitioners should demonstrate good practice and desirable behaviours, for example, exploring the natural world in their local, national and international environment with awe and wonder and discovering ways to conserve and care for the planet.

The second being teaching and learning, the need for skills across the curriculum to be embedded into everyday practice, The Flourish Project, developed by Montessori Europe (2021), is aimed at the early years and provides guidance and activity ideas to promote the 17 SDGs at an age-appropriate level, for example, to help children understand the second SDG, practitioners should encourage children to find out why humans need food? Learning about money and paying for food, discovering where food comes from and who grows it? The Flourish Model encourages practitioners to view the child at the centre looking at the layers of people and societies that influence their wellbeing outcomes, this is similar to Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model that depicts the child at the centre with their families, schools, communities and society having influence on their outcomes, however, both rely on practitioners to be reflective and adaptive to the changing needs of children and society (Swales and Bradbury, 2022) The New Curriculum in Wales encourages practitioners to be the enabling adult, allowing children the lead on and to teach in the moment and reflect on practice and make adjustments when needed (Welsh Government, 2022c).

The third principle of the ESDGC is effective school management, schools should be aware that how a school runs should look at energy saving measures, responsible, ethical purchasing, looking at healthy eating, for example, the healthy eating for schools that aims to enhance a child's understanding of the importance of personal responsibility for health and the environmental impact of local and global food production and consumption (Welsh Government, 2014). Boyd *et al.* 2021 suggests that practitioners should be aware of and understand the importance of the 17 sustainability goals and the role that education plays in shaping the future of our planet, children should be encouraged to learn about the world around them at an age and stage appropriate rate and that practitioner should develop a child's communication and understanding of the world through demonstrating good practices.

The fourth common area of the ESDGC is partnerships and community, the whole community should be encouraged to engage with the school through shared projects such as encouraging children and families to share resources (Welsh Government, 2008), for example, collecting natural items such as sticks and pinecones that can be used for play. The children within a setting or school should also be able to influence

the environment that surrounds them, (Welsh Government, 2022c) for example, identifying, exploring and designing an area to develop into a community garden in collaboration with residents. Barrable (2019) suggests several steps to achieving a pedagogy of connection with nature, regular contact with nature, for example, settings should utilise the outdoor spaces available to them, engaging in nature's beauty, encourage children to play in nature, developing compassion for the non-human and practising mindfulness. This links with The John Muir Award through encouraging people to make those connections with nature through discovery, exploration, conservation and sharing (John Muir Trust, no date).

The fifth element of the common areas of the ESDGC is research and monitoring, this element encourages schools to reflect upon practices and to develop their own curriculum and adapt when needed to meet the changing need of a child's learning (Welsh Government, 2022c). Dunne (2015) suggests that children learn best when what they learn makes sense and is relevant to them and that the voice of the child is important in ensuring that real life skills and learning about the impact they can have on their environment, both locally and globally through empowering them to make decisions and follow through on those to completion, for example, the eco turtle project that has encouraged children in deprived areas in South Africa to explore plant based cleaning products to promote health and responsibly sourced hygiene products.

Early years education has always put emphasis on the environment, learning both indoors and outdoors, Froebel developed the kindergarten which means children's garden, with dual meaning, firstly how the children learned to care for the environment around them, tending plants and developing and shaping the garden how they choose, but also, how practitioners tended to the children in their care and nurtured them (Murcia and Martinez, 2020).

The OMEP (World Organisation for Early Childhood Education) has called on state leaders to focus time and resources on a "decade for childhood education", however, it does recognise that politicians cannot solve every problem in society and funding is only a part of the answer, the need for well-trained practitioners and how societies decide to educate the next generation also has an impact on future outcomes (Samuelsson and Park, 2017).

The commitments made by United Nations member states and the Welsh Government have yet to be realised, however, practitioners that complete the John Muir Award and make their own discoveries in their chosen wild places should be better placed to support the children in their care to do likewise. The Award encourages people from all walks of life to discover the wellbeing benefits of being in nature and learning to care for and conserve those wild places for everyone to enjoy. Everybody can do their bit for climate change and the betterment of our planet now to ensure that Earth is a healthier place for future generations to come. An early years practitioners is well placed to empower children to realise their potential and begin to understand the impact that every person can have for the future wellbeing of the planet.

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