

Script

Hello, my name is Lydia, welcome to my presentation. I am going to reflect on my experience of this assignment. I created this scrapbook in participation in the John Muir Award. I chose Cefn Sidan Beach also known as Pembrey Country Park Beach which is 7.5 miles long—the longest beach in Wales. Cefn Sidan was also the first beach in Wales to hold the blue flag status which can be obtained if the beach meets certain criteria. Some criteria include being clean, having standard water quality, having an adequate number of bins etc. I discovered this during my initial research and it was interesting exploring the beach and discovering if the criteria are consistently met. I chose this location as it's quite important to me. Since I moved to Kidwelly in 2014, this beach has been somewhere I have frequently visited and it holds a lot of memories because of that. *It has especially become more significant in the last 4 years since I started taking my children there. With their Autism it is especially hard to find a safe location. Lack of communication and danger awareness mean that anywhere we go they need to be on restraints. Cefn Sidan is the one place where this isn't needed. They feel safe enough to explore, run and feel happy. We also have a usual route which they have remembered and has now become part of our weekly routine. It is not often I can take the girls out and feel relaxed. I am often constantly anxious and so I am especially grateful to have this beach just 5 minutes from my house as it is an escape for us. For this reason, this location is significant to me. Completing this scrapbook has even further allowed me to connect with Cefn Sidan and has allowed me to develop my understanding and practical engagement with sustainability.*

Moving on to the explore section of my scrapbook. Despite going to this beach frequently, there are a lot of things I didn't notice until I looked for them. I first noticed signs stating that particular footpaths were closed due to coastal erosion. Despite these signs and barriers in place, I watched people walk past the moved barrier and continue on the footpath. I believe these signs were ignored as no signs were spreading public awareness about the significance of dunes or the impact of erosion. Dunes act as natural barriers against wind and water erosion and also provide a habitat for various species. It was disappointing to see people not complying with the restrictions but the signs only really imply that the footpaths are closed due to safety reasons. If more people were aware of the impacts, maybe they would choose different paths. I for one have been taught these facts during my research for the scrapbook. I can now spread my knowledge and be more mindful of dunes in the future. I now see dunes differently and understand the need to be gentle and safe when walking over them. When exploring the beach I also noticed the presence of dead fish, jellyfish and birds on the beach. Through research, I discovered that this could indicate various issues related to environmental sustainability such as water pollution and litter. Although many reasons could cause this, I did further explore the beach through a 1.5km stretch to observe how much litter was on the beach. 62 pieces of litter were found. Including bags full of litter which had hedges grown around it highlighting that it is not new litter. This then raises the concern that the beach is not being cleaned as frequently as it should be. I also discovered more ways in which humans have impacted this particular environment. Including the use of forbidden BBQs and fires and the use of vehicles on the beach. Both of which negatively impact the sustainability of the beach.

Moving on to the conserve section of the scrapbook. I identified several issues during this experience and wanted to effectively improve the area. The main issue was litter. After further research now knowing the detrimental impacts litter has on beaches, I wanted to contribute to the sustainability of the beach. I started by researching what I could do to help the litter problem and found that Pembrey holds a 2-minute beach clean which they provide litter pickers if needed so visitors and staff can do a beach clean to contribute to the sustainability of the beach. I decided to get involved and so my 7-year-old cousin and I both took a walk and collected litter. As a task, we categorized the litter that we found on the beach ensuring the litter picking continued to be engaging and a fun way to help the environment. After categorizing and recycling effectively, we created posters reminding people to dispose of litter properly and spreading awareness regarding the negative impacts litter has on beaches on social media. I also followed some social media accounts that provide information and spread awareness.

I also noticed the lack of bins surrounding some of the beach entrances. I believe every entrance to the beach should have a bin so I emailed Carmarthenshire County Council requesting more bins. I also requested more public awareness regarding their 2-minute beach clean initiative. Although it is a good idea, I only discovered it on their website during my research. I have never noticed any signs within the country park. I believe that if they enhanced the visibility of this campaign, more people would get involved. Engaging in these sustainability efforts has given me a great appreciation and respect for the John Mair Award. The experience overall has allowed me to gain so much knowledge surrounding sustainability on a different level.

I will now move on to my critical evaluation.

Sustainability was first developed in 1987 by the United Nations. It was defined as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (United Nations, No date). As this definition is broad, sustainability and other relations, such as sustainable development and sustainable ecosystems, focus on the condition of Earth's biophysical environment (Portney, 2015). Overall, sustainability aims to create conditions where humans and nature can coexist ensuring that social, economic and environmental systems can support present and future generations (UCLA, 2021).

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship, also known as ESDGC, is an education approach that aims to empower all learners of all ages to understand the challenges of sustainability and global citizenship. ESDGC encourages an understanding of global issues such as environmental degradation, climate change and social inequity (t2group, no date).

The ESDGC aims to achieve several goals by 2030. They published a set policy that highlights these goals. For instance, Goal 4 section 4.7 states that by 2030 all learners should have the knowledge and abilities necessary to support sustainable development. This includes education on topics such as sustainable lifestyles, human rights and gender equality (United Nations, 2015). Introducing ESDGC in early childhood is critical as it lays the foundation for lifelong sustainable behaviours and attitudes. It promotes core values surrounding human rights and sustainable development and lifestyles (Council of Europe, No date). Young children are highly

receptive and can develop a deep sense of care and responsibility towards their environment when engaged through appropriate methods (Boyd *et al*, 2022).

Different countries have varying approaches to ESDGC based on their cultural, economic and environmental contexts. For instance, Scandinavian countries integrate outdoor education extensively, promoting direct interaction with nature, which is a core aspect of sustainability education (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). In contrast, countries with less access to natural spaces and who adopt different educational philosophies might focus more on core curriculum and classroom-based activities. For example, Chinese early years education emphasises early literacy and numeracy skills. Children are introduced to reading, writing and mathematics at a young age and experience limited play-based learning. Consequently, Chinese children are often taught indoors due to the intense focus on academic achievement (Yang and Li, 2019).

Furthermore, The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people of all ages to care for and enjoy the environment (John Muir Trust, 2024). While it is not specifically targeted at early years, its principles align well with ESDGC goals. It promotes experiential learning and direct engagement with the environment, which are effective strategies for teaching sustainability to young children as stated by theorists such as John Dewey who states that learning requires hands-on experiences (Pappas, 2023).

The Welsh Government has stated that sustainability is mandatory as part of the new curriculum for Wales and has provided funding that ensures learners are participating in the development or implementation of sustainable and environmental solutions (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh government (2020) also states that the curriculum should contribute to the well-being of future generations Act. The Well-Being of Future Generations Act (2015) aims to enhance the social, economic environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by fostering sustainable development and ensuring that current and future generations can live a high quality of life (Future Generations Wales, 2015). According to the World Economic Forum (2020), educating children in sustainable environmental practices will influence the next generation to adopt similar behaviours. Additionally, sustainability education is directly linked to children's rights. Particularly the right to a clean, safe, healthy environment (Unicef, 2023). The Welsh government claims to be committed to promoting children's rights, especially those within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Welsh Government, No date). Sustainability education aligns with these rights. Specifically, article 29 states that education must encourage children to respect the environment (UNICEF, 2019).

However, there is an ongoing debate about how sustainability should be delivered to children. While some believe environmental education is a way to encourage and support children to enhance their problem-solving skills and give them the responsibility of taking action for their environment (Davis, 2010), some believe that environmental education should be age-appropriate, considering children's emotions and reactions to learning topics such as climate change (Leger-Goodes, et al, 2022). The World Economic Forum (2020) state that children should start learning about sustainability and climate change from the age of 8 to 11 years old. However, Jordan (2022) states that climate change awareness can cause children to

experience negative feelings such as worry and guilt. This is supported by Baker and Clayton (2020) who states that it is important for practitioners to consider how they deliver sustainability education due to the emotional responses of children. Baker and Clayton (2020) go on to state that within their study, they found that practitioners didn't know how to support these feelings when they were feeling it themselves.

Moreover, despite the concerns of sustainability education being inappropriate for young children, undertaking experiences such as the John Muir Award supports principles of early childhood education for sustainability as they are learning about the environment, connecting with nature and learning to take care of and love their surroundings (John Muir Trust, 2019). However, it is important to recognise the focus on conservation over the equally important aspects of global citizenship such as social justice and equity within the John Muir Award. Some people claim this is because John Muir saw African Americans and native Americans as inferior (Byers, 2021). Consequently, the John Muir Award may not fully align with the principles of the EDSGC. Additionally, it may not resonate with children from diverse backgrounds or urban environments as an essential component to participating in the John Muir award is being surrounded by the outdoors (John Muir Trust, 2019). However, this is also a challenge for teaching ESDGC. Study shows that children who are regularly exposed to nature and outdoor environments are more likely to value and take care of nature as adults (Broom, 2017). A lot of schools find it challenging to integrate outdoor sustainability education due to the area they are based (Patchen *et al*, 2021). However, Boyd *et al* (2022) states that reading books such as 'Mother Earth is Weeping' can be a start to introducing sustainability education.

Similarly, another challenge to teaching sustainability education is due to the rise of technology use. According to Education Forum (2024), primary-age children spend over four hours a day on technology limiting the time bonding with nature. Children are not connecting with the environment and so they are less likely to care about it (Campion, 2020). Even the New curriculum for Wales integrates digital learning through its digital competence framework which encourages children to become more digitally competent (Welsh Government, 2018). This then leads to the next challenge which is time. Study shows that educators find it difficult to teach sustainability education because of time. With the current curriculum already being heavy and time-consuming, there is little time to deliver ESDGC (Tinney and Merriman, 2018). This is supported by Green and Somerville (2014) who found that teachers cannot integrate sustainability into an already overcrowded curriculum.

Additionally, Teachers who do teach sustainability to children need to be mindful of children's engagement. A study by Willford *et al* (2015) revealed that teachers who ensure children are engaged in the classroom have better outcomes. According to a study by Bulut (2020), teachers found that using educational games made sustainable education more enjoyable. This study highlights how children often learn best through play. A theory emphasised by several prominent theorists such as Piaget, who believed that play is part of the learning process. He believed that play is crucial for children to explore and understand the world around them, develop problem solving skills and construct knowledge (Ahmad *et al*, 2016).

Moreover, another challenge to teaching sustainability is knowledge and training. As stated by Samuelsson (2017), teachers should be educated on sustainability in a wide sense, not just children-appropriate knowledge. There should be a focus on professional development if the ESDGC is delivered effectively. The study found that teachers lacked science and environmental training since qualifying and had little confidence in delivering EDGSC (Jones, 2022). Qualified and knowledgeable teachers provide high-quality education, which is directly linked to academic achievement (Xhaferi, 2017). However, despite a lack of training teachers can still be good role models. According to Prince (2016), positive role models should encourage pro-environmental behaviour. As we know through the influence of theorists such as Albert Bandura in his social learning theory, children learn behaviours by observing others. He introduced the concept of 'Modelling', where children imitate the actions of others (Fryling *et al*, 2011)—highlighting the importance of being a good role model around children. Teachers and parents can practice eco-friendly habits in front of children such as recycling, conserving water, and planting trees and plants (WWF, 2022). However, it is still significant to recognise that people from lower-income families do not prioritise environmental concerns as they focus more on getting food, housing, education etc (World Economic Forum, 2020). Due to this, teachers should especially prioritise sustainability education to ensure some exposure.

Furthermore, Forest schools are a way to promote sustainability as they provide immersive, hands-on experiences that connect children with nature. Forest schools help children develop an appreciation for the environment and teach children practical skills related to sustainable living (Redford, 2014). However, there are barriers to sustaining forest schools including, funding, time and access to woodland sites (Hemery, 2019). If settings don't have access to these areas, they may consider visiting a local farm, giving children an understanding of where their food comes from (King, 2022).

In Conclusion, the integration of sustainability education, particularly through initiatives like the John Muir Award and ESDGC, plays a crucial role in encouraging environmental awareness and responsibility among children. By engaging children in hands-on, nature-based activities, these programs promote a commitment to sustainable living. The Welsh Government's idea to integrate sustainability in the curriculum shows a growing recognition of the importance of educating future generations on these critical issues. However, challenges such as limited access to natural spaces, time, funding and the need for teacher training highlights the difficulties of effectively delivering sustainability education. Despite these barriers, the role of adults as a positive role models and the use of approaches such as forest schools and learning through play can enhance children's understanding and commitment to sustainability.

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