

Sustainability presentation script

INTRO

Good morning. My name is Amy and today I am going to present my scrap book I have completed for the John Muir Award.

Share and discuss my John Muir scrapbook.

My trip to explore Ferryside on a welly walk, demonstrates how being immersed in the natural world ignites a natural curiosity, encouraging insightful thought and reflection. Throughout my journey, I felt that foundational elements of what sustainability is were being considered, in a way that was organic and didn't feel forced. I was kept active through walking and exploring the beach, woodlands, fields and local village streets. I engaged my senses through seeing, smelling, listening and feeling as I explored the outdoors. I also had the opportunity to explore my creativity as well as embracing some quiet reflection time. All these factors contribute to positively impacting my mental and physical health. I was able to enjoy the experience and consider the many elements of my surroundings. I could discuss elements of sustainability I witnessed first hand and even consider bigger issues we face as a society. The final activity in the scrap book, 'My Conscious Living Pledge' was a reflective piece, showing evidence of the thoughts my welly walk had provided. All these aspects of my welly walk around Ferryside, tie in nicely with the goals set by the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship or 'ESDGC'. (Welsh Government, 2018).

Although Ferryside is a great example of a community who are doing well to respect their environment and cultivate sustainable living, I found myself questioning how achievable is it to obtain sustainable communities on a wider scale? Looking at the trains for example. The wildlife and our air would benefit immensely from there being less cars on the road. However, until train companies bring down their inflated ticket prices or until the Government implement positive strategies, people may always opt for using their car, which is often more convenient and currently cheaper to pay petrol than for a train ticket! These wider issues within society can sometimes feel overwhelming. When considering the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development goals to be achieved by 2030, arguably the scale of these goals is so large, it can make you feel unsure on where to start and how much

change can we as little individuals make. For example, goal 11 is stated as 'Sustainable cities and communities (United Nations, 2024). Critically, as there are so many complexities that would need to be addressed to achieve such a goal, it is unclear whether the Governments within the United Nations will be successful.

Though as an adult I have considered these broader issues at length, young children are at the level of simpler concepts. Whilst it is vital children grow up to understand the complexities of issues like world poverty, dying species of animals and global warming; It is important that they are introduced to age-appropriate information in relation to sustainability, that they can relate to. For example, exploring what other transport options are available in their community or simply what are different and more sustainable ways of doing things. On this welly walk children could be considering where their food comes from, exploring other means of getting food than going to the supermarket, whether it be buying eggs from the local market hall, signing up with the local milkman, growing their own vegetables or thinking about having a fun local camping holiday, that doesn't require going on an aeroplane! Reflecting on my own professional practice in school, our nursery children are from a highly populated area of Cardiff. Their realities are living in flats often with no garden- their favourite place to eat is McDonalds and they often played mcdonalds drive through on their bikes in the school yard. We used this simple interest as an opportunity to teach them about French fries. We grew our own potatoes in the garden, then cooked and served our own version of mcdonalds chips.

I think for young children to start to understand the world around them and their impact on the world they need these tangible hands-on learning experiences. How are children to understand how bees are important for pollination and their role in our existence, if they haven't ever seen a real-life bee fly from flower to flower? How are they to fully understand the negative impact our rubbish has on our oceans, having never seen rubbish washed up on the beach? The world around us is arguably our greatest teacher, particularly for sustainability. Research has shown that real life, experiential learning used within ESDGC, is an effective pedagogy for children to properly embed their knowledge and understanding (Tinney and Merriman, 2018).

Traditionally, theorists including Friedrich Froebel supports this view, as he was a huge advocate for hands on authentic learning. Although

Froebel did not directly address sustainability in the way it is understood today, mainly given that he lived a very long time ago in the early 19th century! However, his education-based philosophies are very much relevant to our modern-day concepts of sustainability and can be interpreted to support the idea of teaching young children about ecofriendly and sustainable living (Clipa and Cimpan, 2020).

Froebel emphasised the importance of nature in education. He believed that children should learn through direct interaction with the natural world. He had the view that all aspects of life are interconnected, which is a concept that aligns with modern views, where social, economic, and environmental systems are interrelated. Furthermore, Froebel's idea that children learn best through play and exploration in nature encourages an appreciation and respect for the environment from a young age. Froebel advocated for hands-on learning experiences, which are essential for teaching sustainability. Children can do activities such as gardening, observing plants, insects and animals, exploring their habitats and engaging with natural materials which all help children understand ecological processes and their roles within them (Sakr and Kaur, 2024).

Froebel's approach to education focused on the holistic development of the child, supporting their social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. A holistic approach supports sustainability education by emphasising the development of responsible, well-rounded individuals who are aware of their impact on the world. He believed in encouraging a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world, which can translate into a lifelong commitment to learning about and caring for the environment, which directly aligns with the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021).

Froebel argued that education should cultivate a sense of community and teach children social responsibility. Teaching children about sustainability involves teaching values such as cooperation, empathy, and stewardship, all key elements of Froebel's pedagogy. He believed in the importance of children understanding their place in the community and the natural world, fostering a sense of responsibility to care for both.

Similarly, Maria Montessori, best known for her educational philosophy, again did not specifically address sustainability. However, her educational methods inherently do support sustainability. Montessori believed in the importance of connecting children with nature. She highlighted the value of outdoor activities and learning from the natural world, creating space for children to develop real respect for the

environment. Montessori classrooms often include lessons on caring for plants and animals, giving children that sense of responsibility for living things and the environment. It is important to plant those simple seeds of empathy in young children. For example, a child I work with recently found a bee and deliberately squished it under his bike wheel. This prompted an honest conversation and some sessions of learning on the importance of bees for our ecosystem. Once the child had developed this understanding, there was a noticeable shift in their behaviour towards minibeasts in our garden. The child paid special attention and care to any bugs he found and would encourage his peers to do the same. Even at a young age, children can develop their understanding, they simply must be given the opportunities to do so.

Much like Froebel, Montessori puts great value on the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. Again, looking at learning through that holistic lens, which aligns with the three main principles of sustainability. This also promotes global citizenship and a shared responsibility for our planet. Children are encouraged to problem solve collaboratively, which develops that creative thinking required to solve wider issues in the world, which is a skill, arguably politicians and activists have; as well as teaching children the importance of respecting others and ultimately looking after each other.

Furthermore, practical skills such as gardening, cooking, and recycling are often part of the Montessori curriculum, promoting those sustainable living practices. Children learn to use resources carefully and mindfully. Activities like recycling, composting, and conserving materials are common, which teaches children the importance of managing their resources well. Montessori resources are often 'real life' objects rather than 'child friendly' often plastic ones, such as metal cutlery and China crockery. Although these items bring more 'risk', it teaches children that things can get damaged and encourages children to treat items with care from a young age (Elliott and Davis, 2014). Integrating these principles into early years education can help cultivate a generation that is committed to living sustainably and caring for the planet.

Sustainability now underpins the whole curriculum framework within Wales, ideally being intertwined with all cross curricular areas of learning (Hwb Wales, 2024). The new curriculum has fostered some similar, arguably slightly Montessori inspired pedagogies of learning. Firstly, it is encouraged that learning should be achieved with a holistic approach, putting the child at the centre of their learning, using more relevant 'real life' learning experiences, getting children active and encouraging their

learning to be explored in the great outdoors, and overall emphasising the importance of ethical and global citizenship. Arguably, there is room for interpretation within the new curriculum, so whether all schools across Wales are being consistent with how they explore sustainability is difficult to measure.

That being said, these pedagogies align with the goals set by the Welsh Government in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, ensuring that children are having meaningful and regular experiences outdoors, benefiting their well-being and promoting environmental stewardship to prevent future issues arising (Welsh Government, 2024).

Most schools in Wales now have edible gardens. Children are learning the basics of self sufficiency and learning how to plant, grow and cook their own vegetables. They are fully experiencing the entire cycle of harvesting their own food and experiencing the satisfaction that that brings. Arguably, instilling a 'can do' attitude and desire to take these practical skills further as they grow up. There has been a huge influx of forest school learning in primary schools. Even when classes aren't specifically doing a 'forest school' session, many teachers are now basing their learning outdoors. Educators are moving away from plastic and incorporating more natural and calming resources inside and outside the classroom. Wales is doing well in bringing children through the education system with a deep care for the environment and a confident self-awareness of "I am valuable, and I can make a difference to the planet".

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