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Presentation

Hi everyone, my name is Saira Arshad. Today, I am bringing this reflection and evaluation of sustainability. The module code is ECEY....This reflection documents how my awareness of the natural environment, particularly in my garden and workplace, has grown and links directly to Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEFS) principles. Through hands-on experiences, discussions, and academic study, I have

come to see how small actions can create lasting impacts for myself and the children and communities around me.

Personal reflection

Over the past few months, I have had the chance to explore, observe and reflect on the natural environment in my own back garden as the weather has started to get warmer here in the United Kingdom, which is related to climate change. These experiences have deepened my understanding of sustainability, biodiversity, and the importance of small, conscious actions.

It started with a simple walk through the garden. At first glance, the tall evergreen trees along the black boundary seemed like a passive part of the landscape. But after paying closer attention I realised they serve an important role in acting as a natural windbreak, providing shelter for birds and insects and helping to prevent soil erosion. By trimming lower branches carefully and avoiding any disruption to the nesting wildlife, I was able to support both the health of the trees and the biodiversity they sustain.

Simultaneously, our raised garden bed became another source of learning full of living greens radishes and tomatoes it attracted various insects which I noticed from the tiny holes in some leaves instead of turning to pesticides I explored organic gardening solutions and allowed nature to find its balance. Involving my daughter and nephew in these tasks helped them appreciate where food comes from and the importance of ecofriendly habits. Sharing needs and insights with friends and family further amplified the impact.

Extending sustainability practices

Sustainability, as I came to realise also extends beyond the plantation. One day I noticed old wooden planks and broken fencing in a neglected corner of the garden. Rather than discarding them I researched how the material could be reused. After cutting and sanding the planks my husband and I turned them into extra cupboard shelves in our home. We also use old wooden pieces to make fire for outdoor oven. Which is a practice to make use of wood in Pakistan and India. This simple recycling

project gave the wood a new life and sparked interest among my family. We even created WhatsApp group to share leftover materials and inspire each other to reduce waste through reuse.

Another significant discovery came when i noticed ivy climbing up a large and across our back fence. At first, I admired its appearance but after consulting with my mother who faced a similar issue in her garden. I learned that unchecked ivy could damage trees over time. With this new awareness i am ready to remove some of the ivy allowing the trees to learn enough to support local wildlife i plan to share this information with my neighbors who have the same type of trees to encourage a balance approach to plant management.

Workplace observation and missed opportunities

Before starting this module, I never paid attention to my surroundings. I did not think about sustainability or how everyday items could be reused meaningfully. However, as I have been learning more about sustainability, I noticed things I used to overlook.

I was at my child's school last week and saw an old wheelbarrow that had turned into a beautiful planting pot. At first, I thought it looked lovely, but then I started thinking more deeply about how clever it is to reuse something that might have just been thrown away. Because I have been studying this module, I felt encouraged to check out the information board next to it, and when I realised it was part of a bigger effort to promote sustainability in the school. That small moment got me thinking I remembered I had taken pictures of a nursery garden during a forest school session I attended with my child, where they showed us these efforts and explained how they are making their compost and storing the rainwater to water plants. However, as I mentioned earlier, I did not take much note of that. That is when I wondered why we do not do this at the nursery where I work. Even though we have a garage next door to the nursery on Stratford Road, which probably has old tires, no one ever suggested reusing them for play or planting. It felt like such a missed opportunity. For now, the nursery does have spare tires, but they are just there for children to play with. It made me reflect on how much of this comes down to knowledge, as in my setting, most practitioners are level 3 qualified, but sustainability is not about something we discuss or include in our planning.

Moreover, it hit me that if we, as educators, do not know about these things or see their value, how can we pass that knowledge onto children if we cannot teach ourselves? This whole experience has opened my eyes to the realisation of how important it is for us to learn as practitioners to keep learning because when we grow, we can help children to grow too, not just in understanding the world around them, but in learning how to take care of it.

Understanding sustainability

Let us move on to the definition of sustainability by UCLA (2025), which is not just about maximising resources. It also involves future generations planning and caring for the world around them, and taking meaningful actions to prevent harm, it is about intentional changes, building a connection with the environment and showing care and respect towards all living things, also we need to recognise the importance of connecting and its impact on everyone(UCLA, 2025).

Similarly, The EPA (2024) describes sustainability as supporting human overall welfare and a healthy environment, therefore sustainability calls for preparing a safe world for both people and nature and future generations to come (EPA,2024). As we believe that educating children on how they can protect themselves and their environment has a major impact on everyone. Embedding knowledge in young minds will help them to take bigger steps in raising their voice and address issues that can be prevented with good planning ahead.

Sustainability being part of EYFS

Let us shed light on sustainability by being part of the EYFS framework. When did it come into existence in the framework? So, as noted in Boyd et al. (2018) and Gilbert et al. (2014), the focus on 'sustainability' in this area was not implemented directly or clearly in the framework. However, there were strong elements of teaching and learning about the world in the main prime areas of learning about 'social and emotional development' and understanding the world. However, it has always been part of the main areas of learning. However, it was not named as 'sustainability' but suggested to practitioners as they need to guide children, help them with their curiosity, and observe their surroundings (Boyd et al., 2018). However, awareness of sustainability and evidence of children's interest and resilience through play proved that teaching children

in the early years is important because children explore and observe their surroundings and solve problems. So, DFE (2025) has recently added sustainability action plans to the framework.

Boyd et al. (2018) further emphasise these areas of learning, for example, 'child and adult-led interactions' need to be supported to lead children to understand via play how they can explore, observe and find out the reason behind which leads to early childhood education for sustainability, ECEFS. While playing, children explore and try different ways, leading to curiosity, and they are fast learners. Wilson (2012) agrees that during play, children learn different skills, for example, how to be resilient. Play also teaches children the difference between humans and nature through physical activities. Likewise, Dwek (2011) agrees that children need to learn about the world and the environment to be prepared for any problem they may encounter in the future, so they should learn about a sustainable environment and the effects it has on them (Boyd et al., 2018).

The importance of ECEFS

Teaching children about environmental changes occurring so fast during the early years is important, as it fosters awareness of their surroundings and helps them navigate the environmental challenges that will shape their future.

Watt and Frydenberg (2025), along with Keyes and Platt (2024) and Portnet et al. (2023), emphasise that rapid changes in the environment are forcing children to grow up faster in order to contribute to sustainable solutions (Watt and Frydenberg, 2025). Through my scrapbook learning, I have observed how early childhood education for sustainability (ECEFS) supports children's understanding of these issues in developmentally appropriate ways. For example, activities that encourage children to reuse materials or care for natural spaces build environmental awareness and support them socially and emotionally.

According to Watt and Frydenberg (2025), Wright and Masten (2005) highlight that teaching children in early years can make children resilient and build on skills which can help children's brains as these are the years where the human brain adapts quickly (Watt and Frydenberg, 2025).

Linking my experience to ECEFS principles

My personal experience reminded me of how young children learn most effectively through hands-on exploration. Typically, when children encounter something new in their environment, their natural curiosity emerges. With thoughtful guidance from educators, this curiosity can be extended as open-ended questions, meaningful conversations, and active engagement. As practitioners, we have the responsibility to nurture these moments by helping children understand not just what they see, but also why it exists and how it connects to the world around them.

Reflecting on my own learning about the evergreen trees, I realised that without exploring them closely, I wouldn't have discovered their ecological role, which is providing shelter for birds and insects, acting as a windbreak, and reducing soil erosion. This deeper understanding led me to value and care for trees in a more meaningful way. Similarly, young children often need support to make these connections. Without awareness, they may not recognise the value of natural elements around them. This is where the practitioner needs to step in and guide children.

This experience clearly aligns with Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEFS), which advocates for empowering children to be actively participate in their surrounding through asking questions and exploration (Davis, 2015) Additionally, experiences like these support cognitive development by encouraging observation, questioning, classification, and an understanding of cause-and-effect relationships essential skills for lifelong learning.

By modelling curiosity and a respectful attitude toward nature, we foster in children a sense of environmental responsibility and critical thinking skills that are important as of increase in challenges in global sustainability.

Global challenges and Gaps in sustainability education

According to Hagglund and Samuelsson (2009), policymakers and many studies have tried to solve this global problem. Different approaches have been suggested, but most agree on teaching children about sustainability through global education, with proper frameworks that must be implemented. As a result of many studies being done in the past, it has been suggested that teaching children through education is the most effective way for them to gain knowledge about what is happening, so everyone can take responsibility for their surroundings globally. From 2004 to 2015, the United Nations emphasised the importance of education as part of sustainable development,

as mentioned by UNESCO (2004). Even though many studies agree that education plays an important role in sustainable development, there was still little focus was seen on what kind of curriculum should be emphasised in sustainability education.

a significant challenge in education for sustainable development is that children are expected to understand these complicated concepts about the world and how time changes, knowledge that is essential for learning how to protect resources and ensure their survival. To understand sustainable development, Children must realise that the environment and time are constantly changing, which requires a highly developed level of awareness (Hagglund, S. And Samuelson I.P,2009).

However, embedding this understanding in children is not straightforward; it demands an appropriate educational framework, trained educators, and sufficient resources to support meaningful learning experiences.

As educators, we have the responsibility to help children develop a deep connection to nature, their families, and their communities. This sense of belonging is basic because it motivates children to care about and engage with sustainability issues. However, a lack of knowledge and focus on sustainability is not practiced worldwide. We see that around us. Another challenge is that sustainability education is not yet universally introduced or prioritised for all children. While political initiatives and institutions are increasingly raising awareness about sustainability, many countries still lack the necessary infrastructure and institutional support to integrate these concepts fully into early childhood education.

Additionally, limited knowledge among parents or understanding of sustainability issues affects how these ideas are reinforced at home. Models like the John Muir Award (1983), which encourage exploration and discovery of nature, have been valuable in promoting engagement with the environment. However, the impact of such models is often used just to explore and discover, only because the insights and experiences gained are not consistently communicated or shared with the broader community. For example, yes, children are taught in class about sustainability; maybe a project of planting in cups is experienced by children and educators, but when children bring that pot home, parents do not know how to sustain it and look after the plant. This is where it stops because parents have not been educated about this. These include creating and implementing effective frameworks, access to resources, educating parents and

communities regularly, and taking care of continuous changes about sustainability beyond the classroom. Overcoming these obstacles is essential to prepare children to understand the world as it changes and actively participate in building a sustainable future.

Digital influence and educators' responsibility

According to Edward et al. (2013), teaching children about sustainability in these early years is hard because they are easily influenced by what they see on digital screens and whatever is trending around them. For example, in this case, they showed that teachers suggested children take an interest in this character, Ben Ten, as they see children copying the character, acting like the character, and learning skills from it. Teachers have seen in classrooms how children's attention gets directed towards that one child who dressed up as this character, and seeing him, other children couldn't focus on learning or playing with their interests; instead, they gathered around that child. This study suggests that digital media very easily influences children in the early years, so if we want to teach children about sustainability, it has to be done through digital media like nursery rhymes, cartoon stories, etc., as evidenced by this study. Also, this study shows that parents' involvement was very low; it could be due to a lack of time, based on parents' working, and a lack of knowledge about sustainability, which was seen as laziness of parents preferring to buy snacks in bulky packages rather than using containers to pack snacks (Edward,2013).

Conclusion

Reflecting on my personal and professional experiences has shown me that sustainability begins with awareness and action, both of which can be nurtured through education. My journey through this module helped me recognise the role of the environment in everyday life and the responsibility we have as practitioners to model and promote sustainable thinking. sharing knowledge, and encouraging responsible choices, we can educate children to care for their world and become future changemakers. Sustainability is no longer a distant goal. It starts with small, intentional steps we take today in our gardens, classrooms, and communities.

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