

That concludes my reflection I will now move on to the theoretical side of the presentation.

Part 2

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) is an approach to education that aims to embed sustainability, awareness and responsible citizenship into the curriculum to instill the knowledge and tools learners need to be more environmentally responsible. Welsh Government (2012) and Welsh Government (2008) defines education for sustainable development and global citizenship to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to contribute positively and sustainably in their communities, suggesting it encourages critical thinking as well as ethical and ethological consideration through education. According to the Welsh Government (2008) ESDGC suggests that this approach to learning encourages individuals to think about the interconnectedness of global issues, fostering critical thinking, empathy and a sense of responsibility towards local and global communities. Welsh Government (2012) and Welsh Government (2008) highlights that ESDGC is something that should be instilled in children at a young age.

Furthermore, Konieczny (2023) and Tinney & Merriman (2018) highlight the significance of introducing the ESDGC concepts in the early years, suggesting that it provides societal and developmental benefits. Konieczny (2023) believes that the early years are the most pivotal years in being able to shape the children's attitudes, values and empathy toward global issues and a sense of care and appreciation for the world and others. Similarly, Tinney & Merriman (2018) suggests that early year's education provides an ideal opportunity for ESDGC principles to be introduced due to its alignment with experiential, hands on learning that a lot of child-led pedagogies foster. This is due to hands on learning pedagogies that allow children the opportunity to think critically, collaborate and problem solve all key skills that are needed when it comes to sustainability.

However, despite its benefits, the implementation of ESDGC within early years settings remain inconsistent and underdeveloped. For example, both Konieczny (2023) and Tinney and Merriman (2018) acknowledge that their optimism in ESDGC implementation relies on the assumption that practitioner's attitudes toward sustainability are positive and that practitioners are knowledgeable in sustainability. However, this is not the case.

Harcourt and Young (2015) highlight that many early year practitioners feel ill equipped to teach children about sustainability, due to a lack of confidence in the subject as well as a lack of training on the topic. However, this challenge is further intensified by academic

pressures such as measurable outcomes which can cause practitioners to prioritize core subjects like math's and literacy over sustainability focuses activities, According to Siraj-Blatchford et al (2010) the emphasis on school readiness and measurable outcomes can have an impact on the settings priorities and how much they value sustainability within their setting. Therefore, in practice this means that sustainability and the ESDGC goals are not a high priority for practitioners. This can lead to less opportunities for children to have hands on learning. Experiential learning is something that theorists Froebel (1826) and Montessori (1912) believed was a key component in child development suggesting that learning through play and hands-on engagement with nature allowed children to develop best as they are interacting with their environment this further highlights the significance of outdoor learning and sustainable practices.

In addition, curriculum constraints limit opportunities for holistic outdoor experiential learning, as sustainability as they are less likely to be part of curriculum planning and structures (Kane & Blazar, 2019). Without allocated funding for outdoor education, many settings struggle to provide the appropriate resources needed for the children to have hands-on engagement with nature which is an essential component of ESDGC principles (Wright, 2022). Rosenberg (2023) highlights that the lack of financial support often results in sustainability been treated as a one of topic rather than it been integrated cross-curricula fully into the curriculum, which diminishes the opportunity for children to form global citizenship. To address these challenges early years curriculums such as Curriculum for Wales and Te Whariki must ensure that ESDGC principles are embedded into everyday practice rather than used as a one-time topic. Therefore, to allow practitioners to feel well equipped to integrate the ESDGC principles settings need to ensure that professional development and training opportunities on sustainability practices need to be provided to their staff to ensure practitioners have the confidence and knowledge to provide children with meaningful child-led, nature-based learning experiences. This is supported further by Tinny & Merriman (2018) who believe that professional development would allow practitioners to have the confidence in how to approach sustainability as a topic to young children.

However, the John Muir award provides a valuable opportunity for early years settings to embed the ESDGC principles within practice in meaningful child-centered ways. According to The John Muir Trust (n.d) the award encourages individuals to engage with a natural outdoor environment through four key categories, these categories include discover, explore, conserve and share. These principles are well aligned with the Welsh

Governments (2008) Education for sustainability and global citizenship principles, which emphasizes experiential hands-on learning, empathy and reflection from a young age. Therefore, supporting outdoor experiential learning the John Muir Award nurtures children's innate curiosity which is a key component of both early year's education and sustainability.

Linking back to my own John Muir Award, my outlook on Llyn Llech Owain was mostly personal and emotional but through my journey of partaking in the award I was able to develop a broader understanding of its ecological importance. Whereas if I had, had experience of the ESDGC principles in my childhood I might have already had an awareness of the ecological importance of a natural environment, and I would have been more knowledgeable about why they had cut down the trees to allow the peatbog to grow.

If I had undertaken the award with children from an early year setting, I would have ensured that the activities were inclusive, age-appropriate play-based and focused on experiential learning. Activities I would have done with the children include a nature scavenger hunt through the peatbog, ensuring that I informed the children about how we were to ensure it was protected and what wildlife we would see in it in an age appropriate and light-hearted way such as a story or a song . These activities could help to reinforce biophilia which refers to the love of nature while helping to prevent or improve a child's biphobia which refers to the fear or disconnection from nature (Tinney & Merriman, 2018).

Additionally, I would have also considered doing a water filtering experiment to demonstrate how peatland cleans water, as this would have supported sustainability topics as well as core curriculum subjects such as math's and science which align with early years education pedagogy. Montessori's () sensory based learning pedagogy suggests that children need to be actively engaged with natural materials reinforcing their understanding and knowledge through real word experiences. However, while John Muir's Award offers practitioners with opportunities to integrate sustainable practices into their curriculums. The success of the implementation would rely heavily on the practitioner's own knowledge and attitudes towards ESDGC. Wright (2022) suggests that without appropriate training and curriculum alignment educators may struggle to implement the ESDGC principles in a meaningful way, limiting the quality of children's opportunities to engage with nature

These activities would not only provide children with opportunities to develop key values aligned with the ESDGC principles but also offer opportunities for things like emotional, social and fine-motor development. However, while the experience was eye opening for me as an early year's practitioner, the award is not directly catered toward early years children. Therefore, early years settings would need to adapt the award to be age

appropriate for the children within their care however this could be difficult if the practitioners within the setting are not confident in the topic of sustainability or the ESDGC principles. This could result in practitioners only covering sustainability in one session whereas for settings to fully benefit from the award it would need to be aligned with curriculum planning and supported through professional development.