

A Proposal for a School-Based Community Garden Project

Introduction

A school's involvement with community engagement is suggested to support learners to develop holistically and aid with pupil progression (Great Schools Partnership, 2019). Velez-Agosto et al (2017) appears to agree with the Great Schools Partnership and suggests that when an individual is involved in community interactions, progression is made in all areas of a child's development.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed an 'Ecological Systems Theory'. This is where the child is shown to be affected by community interactions, through both direct and indirect interactions. This theory suggests that there are systems which influence a learner and their development. Bronfenbrenner appears to believe that good community interactions between the system for a child is key for a child to develop holistically. Holistic development is paramount for aiding pupil progression and is suggested by Brodie (2018) to be the most important way to support a learner to develop. Gray and McBlain (2015) appear to agree with Brodie and state that when a child develops holistically it means great education for them.

The Welsh Government (2022) reported that they aim to develop community-focused schools in hopes of raising attainment. They recognise that community interactions provide a significant influence on learners. They continued to state that an important benefit of community collaboration is creating solutions to meet the needs of the school and its wider community. Working together, having a collective vision will support individuals to develop trusting relationships and work as an effective community. The curriculum for Wales is built upon the four purposes, where the aim is for a school to support each learner to develop each purpose (The Welsh Government, 2022a).

Key characteristics of a school community project is that they prioritise social, emotional and health for the learners, works with families using a family support service in school where appropriate, engagement with the wider community, integrated provision of school education, integrated management often supported by an integration manager, services delivered according to a set of integrated objectives and measurable outcomes (Estyn, 2020).

The school in discussion will be known as 'School X' to ensure anonymity during discussions. The proposed community project is a school-based community garden which would be in the grounds of School X. School X appears to be in an area of high deprivation where 69.6% of households are in deprivation (Census, 2021). There are approximately 200 pupils on-roll in the school with 44% of them being eligible for free school meals (Estyn, 2019). A school-based community garden could provide the local community with fresh nutritional food as they may not afford high quality food (The University of York, 2021).

Literature Review

School X shared an annual report stating that 93% of the local area is living in the top 20% most deprived areas of Wales ([REDACTED], 2021). Following this statement, along with previously discussed statistics of school x's local area, there is clear evidence of deprivation within the school and its community which alone poses many limitations to the community and most importantly, the children in the school.

The Welsh Government (2021) report that one limitation of living in deprivation is poor outcomes for children and adults in education. They state that these individuals experience unequal opportunities resulting in unlikelihood to gain qualifications causing negative impacts on physical, emotional and mental health.

Another limitation of living within deprivation posed by the Welsh Government is a challenge within education, suggesting that living in deprivation can involve inadequate homework environments which results in disengagement and lack of belonging (Marshall, 2017). This is known as the attainment gap, as previously discussed, Wales are aiming to reduce this. It is said that Children experiencing deprivation often become adults in deprivation who then raise their own children in deprivation, the cyclical impact. Downey and Condrón (2016) discuss the cyclical impact stating that deprivation is passed on to each generation leading to fewer opportunities within communities and education. Living standards are significantly decreased when living within deprivation, which the Welsh Government argue may cause food insecurity. This then causes a lack of nutritional knowledge and cooking skills due to the inability to pay for food or have use of cooking facilities. Fuel poverty, where an individual cannot afford to heat their home at a reasonable cost (Department for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs, 2022) is common for individuals living within deprivation leaving people in deprivation resulting in poor living conditions and poor health. Health is severely impacted by deprivation, causing both poor physical and mental health (Marsh et al, 2000). The Welsh Government further report that

participation rates in community activities is decreased for individual's living in deprivation, leading to less socialisation and little to no involvement to events that may affect them.

It may be argued that School X and its community are not experiencing social justice due to its levels of deprivation and the devastating impact of this. This is especially devastating for children, as stated in Article 2 of the Children's Rights Act, every child should have equal opportunities and access in society despite their race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual background (UNICEF, 1989). If social justice is not present, individuals can experience physical and mental illness (Prilleltensky, 2001).

One of the Four Purpose's from The Welsh Government (2022a) that has influenced the proposal of the school-based community garden is the Four Purpose to create healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society in their learners. The Four Purposes have proven to be the main driver behind another school's community project, Pontardulais Primary School, who developed a community project, 'Working Whispers'. When planning the project, the school created an audit to assess how embedded each of the Four Purposes were in their curriculum. As a result of the audit, the school was able to chose a Four Purpose that influenced the driver behind their project the most (Pontarddulais Primary School, 2019).

A school-based community garden project is argued to have both opportunities and limitations. Firstly, an opportunity of a school-based community garden is that it will encourage positive social interactions between individuals. This is argued by Bronfenbrenner (2000) to be important for a child at the center of the 'Ecological Systems Theory'. The series of systems are as follows: The Microsystem, direct interactions with the child such as parents, caregivers, family, teachers and class peers. The Mesosystem, this is the interactions between individuals within the microsystems such as the teacher and parent interactions. The Exosystem, indirect interactions for the child, such as a parent's workplace. The Macrosystem, where Laws, public policy and cultural beliefs sit in the systems theory. Finally, the Chronosystem, a system for sociohistorical conditions. Looking at this theory, the project may have a rippling effect not only on the child and the individuals involved in the school-based community garden, but also those who would be indirectly involved. Vygotsky (1978) shared similarities with Bronfenbrenner, as they both seem to believe a child's development is heavily influenced by social interactions. Vygotsky posed the theory 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), this is where a child can develop receiving guidance from a more knowledgeable other. Therefore, learners could work within their 'ZPD' with a variety of more knowledge others in the garden.

Therefore, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's theory appears to support the idea of a community project, in this case, a school-based community garden. The learners, their families, peers and other community members will influence one another which will have a rippling affect through each system as stated in the Ecological Systems Theory. The learners will also develop from guidance of the more knowledgeable others in the project. Antony (2022) suggests that it is important not to overlook potential limitations with the Ecological Systems Theory, that there might be an oversight on additional learning needs and cultural differences.

Cultural difference is an important factor when considering the community project as 10% of the community area surrounding school x identifies from a different ethnic group than white (Census, 2021a). Townley et al (2011) reports that everyone deserves a sense of belonging in their community, if community members from different cultural groups can socialise positively it will increase mental health and participation rates. Therefore, it will be important to represent all different ethnic groups and cultures when discussing and creating posters and resources for the project. Everyone has the right to fair treatment and equality, which is Government legislation (The Equality Act, 2010). Not only will it allow all individuals to feel valued members of the community, but it will also raise participation rates, which The Welsh Government suggested are low in communities like this with high deprivation.

A theorist who also shares the ideas of social interactions is Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961). They suggest a theory from the 'Bobo Doll Experiment'. It suggests that children will learn by modelling behavior from adults and from reinforcement received after a behavior. As a result of this theory, Cherry (2022) suggests that learners from school x may learn from modelling the members of the community in the community project. They could model socialising, communication, healthy food choices from produce, exercise, education and even how to make better environmental changes. Newman and Newman (2017) state that a limitation with this theory is that children are also able to model negative behaviors, which is a limitation to be mindful of when proposing this project. Skinner (1964) appears to share similar beliefs with Bandura that reinforcement can influence behavior and development. He created an experiment where he determined that behaviors were often repeated when reinforcement was applied. Therefore, if the learners and community members are receiving positive interactions and reinforcement it should encourage them to continue participating in the project.

There appears to be a theory which underpins the school-based community project and its purpose, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). His theory states that there is a hierarchy of needs that an individual possesses in which they move through. To move to the next hierarchy the individual must be met. These needs begin with physiological, responsible for

sleep, food, water and shelter. Then there is safety, where the individual is safe and secure from harm. After that, love and belonging, relationships with family, friends and the community. Esteem needs are next, where an individual feels confident and competent. Finally at the top of the hierarchy, self-actualization, where purpose, creativity and expression belong. Looking at the theory, it suggests that school x and the local community are not able to satisfy their own physiological needs, due to the limitations from deprivation, resulting in poor mental and physical health (Pichèrea and Cadiat, 2015).

Project Aims

Overall, the school-based community garden project aims to reduce the challenges that the learners and wider community face living in deprivation by involving learners, their parents or caregivers, wider family, teachers and members of the community. The garden would be located on school x's premises, which the learners would be able to access daily. Having the community garden based on the school site offers a range of benefits for the school alone. This would promote outdoor learning across a range of the curriculums 'Areas of Learning and Experiences'. Learners may be more willing to learn which could support their development holistically (Federation of City Farmers and Community Gardens, n.d).

Class teachers and/or teaching assistants would be able to take learners to access the garden daily whereas the wider community would be welcome to use the garden on a timetable basis during the schools' opening hours. A questionnaire would be used for members of the community to provide their preferred times to use the garden and to gather volunteers to lead the community sessions. A questionnaire is a quick and cost-effective way to gather data (Coe et al, 2021).

Keep Tidy Wales (2024) offer a development package where they provide the necessary resources required for a school-based community garden. There is an application process which school x meets the requirements to apply, schools in deprived areas are more likely to receive the development package. Welsh Parliament (2023) discusses current challenges in Wales, inadequate funding for schools. Therefore, if unable to secure the development package, school x will complete a fundraiser event inviting the community in to support to raise money to begin the project. Keep Tidy Wales state that they require the gardens created from their development packages to be maintained for at least 5 years. To ensure sustainability, the produce resources from the school-based community garden will be available to purchase at an extremely small price, this will allow the project to continue developing with a continued production of high-quality food for the community. Algert, Baameur and Renvall (2014) report

that this would support the people living in deprivation within the community as it is a more cost-effective way for high quality foods to be bought. This is an opportunity for school x as it is reported by Selhub (2022) that high quality food increases mental health, which The Welsh Government believes to be poor due to the area's deprivation.

Measuring Impact

It is vital to measure the impact of a community project to understand its effectiveness, if the project is not effective it serves no purpose. Another benefit of measuring impact is that it allows for learning and development (Jones, 2023). EGIN (2023) agrees with these benefits but further suggests that measuring impact allows the project to be shared with others, allowing others to see the benefits of the project. They continue to state that this can support the project to gain grants and/or extra funding, this is extremely important as schools are under extreme financial pressures (NAHT, 2024).

Brown (2018) reports that monitoring pupil well-being is key pedagogy and can be done using a daily check in with pupils, observing pupils or more formal ways such as well-being assessments or interventions. Impact of the project will be measured by observation of engagement from the pupils using the school-based community garden as increased engagement levels could suggest the project is effective (Foster, 2023). Observing the students' lunch boxes might also suggest effectiveness in the project as it would reflect more food security at home, better nutrition at home where the individuals and their families may be making better food choices.

Another way the project will measure impact is by creating questionnaires for parents and teachers. Questionnaires are a fast and cost-effective way of gathering data which could represent the project's effectiveness, as Coe et al previously suggested. Another benefit of questionnaires is that they allow the participant to remain anonymous, this could be helpful to collect honest and accurate data (Denscombe, 2021). Limitations are posed with questionnaires; participation rates could be limited, which means data is inaccurate, leading to poor impact measuring (Davies Hughes, 2014). Following BERA (2024) guidance and ensuring ethical considerations, participants will remain anonymous. Participants of the questionnaire can provide voluntary informed consent after receiving information regarding the project's research and importantly they are able to withdraw from participating in the questionnaire if they wish to do so (University of Oxford, 2021).

Impact could also be measured by pupil presentations. Pupil presentations are an excellent way of demonstrating learning (Hayton, 2016). Pupil presentations will allow for audience

engagement from the school's stakeholders and the wider community. The presentations will allow the learners to share the projects' objectives, outcomes, experiences, insights and achievements. EGIN shared their beliefs on raising awareness of the project and its importance. Following Pontarddulais Primary School's project the 'Working Whispers', pupil presentations would raise awareness of the project and the impact that the project has had upon all individuals of the community as it would be a great source of evidence for the school to display on their website which could raise its awareness.

Evaluation

A 'SWOT' analysis was conducted on the school-based community garden. "A SWOT analysis is a way of understanding the Strengths and Weaknesses of your schools; the Opportunities that might be available; and the Threats that they might face" (Ridgefield Schools, 2010, para 1). It is clear from the SWAT analysis (see appendix 1), that the project poses far more strengths and opportunities with fewer weaknesses and threats, despite this it is important to account for the challenges.

Firstly, an internal strength of the project is that school-based community gardens improve physical and mental health. Scruby and Chalmin-Pui (2024) reported that gardening is a physical activity where the calories burnt can compare to a game of volleyball, with much lesser effort. They further state that it significantly reduces depression, anxiety and supports social development, which is what the Welsh Government reported as a challenge for a community like school x's community living in deprivation. Taking away the stigma of parents asking for help, the learners could have nutritious food at home (Dickins, 2022). Another great strength of the project, supporting school x to be environmentally friendly. The garden will allow the school to increase biodiversity, reduce food waste, reduce food miles and to increase the air and soil quality (DeMuro, 2013). Socialisation between individuals should increase when engaging with the project, this promotes a sense of belonging for each individual and in turn can increase participation rates within school x and its wider community.

The external opportunities that the school-based community garden offers are similar to the internal strengths. This project could be a paramount way to support the parents and wider community with their mental and physical health, just as it could with the learners and staff internally. The garden can offer nutritious food could take the stigma away from parents asking for help as they would be able to join in on the project without 'standing out', it could also support as the reduction of food insecurity (Vogel and Wade, 2009). Community cohesion is key for a community to flourish; this project could support the development of cohesion among the

community which will allow for a sense of belonging and inclusion for all (NPfA, n.d). Offering the parents and wider community an opportunity to join cooking classes as the project's legacy will provide great socioeconomic contributions which supports the social capital of the community (Balatti and Falk, 2002). Balatti and Falk continue to state that this can develop individual skills leading to employment opportunities. This is vital for this particular community as over 40% of the community report that they have never worked and 50% of the community reported that they had not worked in the last 12 months (Census, 2021b).

Like the strengths and opportunities, the weaknesses and threats intertwine. Both internal and external factors pose a risk of vandalism due to learners and members of the wider community. In an attempt to reduce this risk, the garden will be on the school grounds. When learners are using the gardens, they will be accompanied by an adult and the community members will have access during designated school hours.

Time is another challenge for both factors, ensuring teachers and community members can spare time to support the garden's development and upkeep as it is suggested that teachers are overworked with limited time to offer (Steiner, Woo and Doan, 2023).

A lack of engagement is a weakness and a threat to the learners and the wider community. With poor engagement levels the projects could suffer and will be unable to be upkept, this also poses a challenge to the potential funding from Keep Tidy Wales offering a development package as they require the garden to be upkept.

Deprivation may pose a threat to the project due to insufficient funds from the community members purchasing the food. Community members living in deprivation are often unable to afford food due to low or no income, resulting in them using food banks. Although the school community garden will provide food at a reduced cost, community members may still need the food banks. Without the small profit of the food sale the school may be unable to continue developing the garden or allow a constant roll-over of food to be produced due to lack of funding (Department for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs, 2023).

Conclusion

A school-based community garden appears to allow for a sense of belonging to be developed, mental health can be supported, improved physical health, even becoming more environmentally friendly. Key theory has highlighted the influence of community interactions on a learner, such as Bronfenbrenner's 'Ecological Systems Theory', recent literature has appeared to agree with such theory. The opportunities and strengths of the project align with

Wales' curriculum and what the Welsh Government are trying to achieve from its learners, to be healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives. There are challenges with the project, as there are with any community project although the benefits appear to outweigh them.

Working in partnership between the school and its wider community appears to be the recipe for success. It is evident that community cohesion is beneficial to learners and their wider community when developing a community project (Whalley, 2007), especially a school-based community garden. Deprivation levels are devastatingly high in this community which pose many challenges, this type of project appears to be an appropriate project to address these challenges, it offers an opportunity to each challenge that the Welsh Government state are challenges of living in deprivation. The importance of holistic development was introduced at the beginning by both the Great Schools Partnership and Velez-Agosto et al. Throughout the discussions from theory and literature, it could be suggested that the school-based community garden will aid pupil progression as it supports the learners to develop holistically.

The research of this project supports a standard of the QTS standards (Qualified Teaching Status). "Pedagogy: Refining Involving partners in learning: The importance of positive parent/carers involvement is understood and opportunities are taken to observe and evaluate processes" (Welsh Government, 2024).

Appendices

Appendix 1

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
INTERNAL (within the school)	Strengths - Local community links, with parents, caregivers, wider community. - Improved health and Well-being (physical and mental). - Improve child behavior. - Environmental – supporting the local environment. - Socialisation for the children, developing belonging in their school and its community.	Weaknesses - Risk of vandalism from the learners - The cost of the project and its resources, due to financial pressures. - Time taken from teachers or support staff - Availability of available resources
EXTERNAL (outside the school)	Opportunities - Support from wider community - Volunteering opportunities from the community - Improving mental, physical health and wellbeing of the community members - Increasing socialisation between all members of the community, serving sense of belonging - Environmental impact in the local area - Teaching skills which may lead to further opportunities - Less stigma on families asking for help as the project is open to all.	Threats - Risk of vandalism from the community - Taking time from community member to support the project - Appropriate engagement levels to ensure sustainability of the project - Having enough volunteers to ensure a smooth running of the project

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