

Good evening, my name is Faye Davies, and I am here today to deliver a two-part presentation to you.

To start I will be reflecting on my experience taking part in the John Muir Award.

As a child, I grew up in a house where our garden backed on to lush green fields. I remember fondly the times spent with my brother searching for insects and picking flowers for our mum and the days in the summer spent birdwatching from the patio with my parents.

I didn't count myself as being lucky then, but upon moving to the centre of Carmarthen, the realisation struck. Although I am fortunate in many aspects, the vision outside my windows now does not compare to them of my past. Now what I see is a 360-degree view of houses and flats.

The only greenery that catches my eye is my garden. I reveled in the delight of having an established garden passed on by the previous owners and although I tend to it and keep it looking relatively pretty, I have not stopped to ponder what lives in my garden, which is why I chose this area to discover, explore and conserve as part of this award. We are a busy family and although I advocate for connecting with nature, I've realised through this experience that I don't do it enough.

I thoroughly enjoyed sitting in my garden, feeling the warm sun on my skin, hearing the sounds of the many birds and the busy bees, smelling the sweet perfume of the many roses that find themselves in my care and having my hands physically connecting with the soil as I planted flowers. As you can see from my scrap book, I have ten roses, plenty of brambles that the bees adore and many other shrubs that all attract different insects and birds.

Upon exploring my garden, I found all sorts of insects. One that surprised me, or rather I was surprised by my reaction to it, was the spider. Usually I fear spiders, however upon seeing them in the garden I felt happiness. On reflection, I think this is because I was in their environment and I respected that, I am yet to see a spider indoors since, but I am confident that my reaction towards them when I do will be of kindness.

Another thing that surprised me was that I didn't see even one butterfly. I was quite disappointed as it's usually a delight seeing them flitting about. This is why I decided to reflect on ways that I could encourage butterflies into the garden. I made seed bombs with my children and shared them with neighbours and family. This opened conversations about butterflies with them and so they were able to reflect on whether they also had seen any or not. We also purchased some flowering plants that will hopefully attract butterflies too, these were chosen by my children who, upon reflecting on their own experiences, chose plants that had a significant meaning to them in relation to butterflies.

I also noticed the lack of variety of small birds in my garden, with sparrows being the only ones that I saw visiting. Reflecting on my childhood, I remember seeing an abundance of bird species and class myself as being quite knowledgeable on the common garden birds.

This made me reflect as to how I could entice more birds into the garden. I thought back to what my parents had in their garden, and We decided to make a bird box out of scrap wood, to enable birds to nest and rear their future generations.

I have always had bird feeders in the garden, although at times they are empty, so we ensured they were full and also provided a different variety of seed to what I normally put out. This is with the aim of encouraging tits and finches into the garden.

I have always been a keen recycler and try to reduce my plastic waste and reuse materials where I can, in order to live a more sustainable life,

However, I didn't fully appreciate the small creatures that keep our world going. I definitely have a different vision every time I look out of my window or walk out my door, it is no longer envy of the times gone by, but instead I appreciate the creatures that I co live with, vowing to never use chemical pesticides again and to tread carefully when tending to our garden.

Thank you for listening to my reflection, I will now move on to present my critical evaluation on how undertaking experiences can support the philosophy and principles of early childhood education for sustainability.

To start with, the term sustainability will be explored. According to Potvin and Richards (2015) sustainability is about fulfilling the requirements of today's generation, without compromising future generations to be able to fulfill their own needs. Purvis, Mao and Robinson (2018) agree, stating that sustainability is frequently considered to be dependent on the interconnectedness of actions on social, economic and environmental wellbeing. The Welsh Government (2019) also recognises these three dimensions of sustainability, however adding cultural wellbeing as a fourth dimension to sustainable development in Wales. Despite recognition of the three pillars of sustainability, Purvis, Mao and Robinson (2018) claim that the origin of the concept is not theoretically founded, which could be due to the diversity of opinions relating to sustainability. According to Davis and Elliott (2014) sustainability is a universal problem that needs addressing urgently, with future generations and children of today suffering the consequences. UNESCO (no date a) recognises that to improve the lives of people and to protect nature, all educational settings are encouraged to deliver education for sustainable development. This holistic approach requires a transformative pedagogy which promotes collaboration, self-directed learning and problem solving which enables learners to act with integrity towards the environment and make informed decisions regarding economic viability and a fair society for the generations of today and the future (UNESCO, 2017).

This leads me on to explore the term, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, hereafter referred to as ESDGC. According to Welsh Government (2012) ESDGC is delivered with the principal goal of providing individuals with the awareness, understanding and skillset to tackle the challenges that the world faces, preparing global citizens to live sustainably. According to Tinney (2013), ESDGC is influenced by national and international policy with the aim of making a society that is more sustainable. Miller (2012) claims that through education, children are supported to think critically about relationships between groups of people as well as the relationship

between people and place, thus enabling them to act sustainably as responsible global citizens. The Welsh Government (2008) state ESDGC is relevant to all parts of activity within schools, and settings should take on a whole school approach towards it, although from experience the responsibility of sustainability is usually given to one member of staff, under the heading of 'eco lead'.

There are five common areas that should be considered for ESDGC to be actively implemented. Two of which are commitment and leadership and school management. Headteachers are encouraged to promote a positive ethos whilst demonstrating commitment, if the implementation of ESDGC is to be successful (Welsh Government, 2008). Bennell (2015) found that head teachers that showed enthusiasm and motivation, actively coordinated staff development, provided support and collaboration to implement ESDGC throughout the life of the school. However, this type of leadership may not be seen in every setting, where leaders are not inclusive and fail to listen to the thoughts and opinions of staff and children in their setting (Booyesen (2021). Welsh Government (2008) state that ESDGC is successfully implemented when realisation of the connections the school has to global and local issues is met, only then can the school management show commitment to cultural diversity and sustainable practices through entwining it's values throughout its curriculum.

Another common area is partnerships and community, not only is the school responsible for educating the pupils and the staff about ESDGC, but awareness can be raised in the community (Welsh Government, 2008). The Welsh Government (2022) also states that through collaboration with communities, young children develop their sense of belonging, which is an essential component to their wellbeing. It also enables them to gain a wider knowledge about culture, society and the world. By encouraging collaboration with communities, settings are showing that they are meeting their duty under the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. It is also noted by Tinney and Hirst (2018) that not all settings are afforded the luxury of green space where the children can explore the natural environment, instead they are surrounded by concrete playgrounds and minimal space. However, in instances such as this and where settings are part of an urbanised landscape, Chin Ng (no date), states that practitioners and

children can visit community spaces such as neighborhood gardens or taking walks to everyday places such as bus stops. This can develop the children's awareness of the impact humans have on the world, practicing their ability to decenter and rethink the way materials and technology are used in the modern world.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to an education that develops their abilities to their full potential, developing their respect for the natural environment (UNICEF no date a). However, not all countries have ratified the convention and so some children are left without these rights (UNICEF no date b). The Welsh Government (2022) embeds the rights of the child throughout the Welsh curriculum, aiming to develop the child's awareness of their impact on the planet through engagement and connection with the natural world through outdoor exploratory play. Through these hands-on experiences, young children begin to explore ideas of sustainability, preparing them to become ethically informed citizens of Wales and the World. However, it is noted by Tinney and Hirst (2018) that some individuals may present with phobias about being outdoors, which if ignored, could result in them suffering with biophobia as adults. Prince (2010) states that bio phobia can arise from individuals feeling a disconnect with nature, which is more apparent in the modern world where children lack the opportunity to be outdoors due to reasons such as indoor entertainment and working parents. Tinney (2020) agrees stating that children are becoming disconnected from nature and more engaged with the digital world.

Furthermore, Oldfield and Boyd (2018) state how an education following the beliefs of Steiner Waldorf can help children to connect to the natural world, without the distraction of modern technology, putting them on the path to becoming biophilic. Additionally, Tinney and Hirst (2018) claim that supporting children in feeling comfortable being outside is important in building their understanding of sustainability and can be done by building positive outdoor experiences in spaces that are significant to them.

In addition, Elliott (2015) states how in the current state of the world, there is a need for humans to equally value all living and non-living things. This ecocentric view allows for connections to be made with nature that can support the development of a sustainable future. Elliot (2015) states that early year's practitioners are in an optimal position to

provide children with opportunities to build trusting relationships with nature. Take for example, the activity that was carried out in part one where my son and I made a bird box out of scrap wood. We were connecting with nature, through providing shelter and a space for birds to nurture their next generation. Not only this but we were also repurposing wood that would otherwise have gone to landfill.

Seventeen goals have been devised by UNESCO that are aimed to be actioned by all countries, regardless of income status, that will result in a prosperous world whilst preserving the planet. Goal fifteen is named, 'Life on Land' and aims to conserve Earth's ecosystems. It is noted that there is a requirement to change the attitudes of humans to foster a better relationship with nature. One way to protect the biodiversity of the planet is to be more respectful to wildlife (UNESCO no date b). The John Muir Trust (no date) encourages individuals and groups of people to connect with wild places whilst caring for them and enjoying them, thus supporting people in fulfilling the sustainability goals of UNESCO. However, the Award they offer as a result is only available in the UK, moreover, It has been well documented among scholars that John Muir's actions of removing indigenous people from their habitat have left him being perceived as racist, which could be part of the reason there is no mention of global citizenship within the award (Pesses, 2018 and Powell, 2020).

The John Muir Award is noted as not being suitable for children of nursery age or in the lower level of primary education (John Muir Trust, 2019). However, Prince (2010) acknowledges that future decisions will be made by children, and as such, the importance of sustainability needs to be embedded at an early age through the education system. Tinney (2020) states that children in the early years can be supported in developing an understanding of the natural environment and interconnectedness of the world by practitioners working in early years education and care. However, Samuelsson and Park (2017) state that the type of pedagogy required to support education for sustainability, where young children are encouraged to use initiative, think and reflect, requires an education of high quality. It is recognised that not all children across the world are afforded this opportunity, with the quality of education provided being dependent on the knowledge, understanding and confidence of early

years professionals (Dyment *et al.*, 2013 And Samuelsson and Park, 2017). Agenda 21 of the UNCED recognises the need for children and adults to be supported in their understanding of sustainability through education, so that it can be actioned, delivering environmental, social and economic sustainability (United Nations no date). Tinney and Merriman (2018) state how undergraduate and postgraduate students studying programmes related to the early years are supported in their studies to explore concepts of sustainability. This is done with the goal of developing practitioners' knowledge so that they can confidently explore sustainability in their future work with children in early years. Gilbert *et al.* (2014) support this, stating that for young children to develop an understanding of the importance of sustainability and for it to become a cultural norm, practitioners need to become agents of change, which can arise through higher education programmes that give opportunities to develop knowledge and promote transformative mind-sets. However, this is dependent on early years practitioners accessing higher education, according to Dallimore (2019), the qualification status of practitioners in the early years education and care sector in Wales is less than the average for developed countries. It is also dependent on whether the leadership team at a setting are inclusive and open to listening to the suggestions of practitioners, appreciating their knowledge and allowing them to use initiative (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet, 2014). Practitioners working in the early years reported challenges to incorporating ESDGC into the learning program as they made claim that it was too difficult of a subject for young children to engage in (Tinney and Merriman, 2018) However, Cutter-Mackenzie *et al.* 2014) state that education for sustainable development can be delivered through a play based pedagogy, which is encompassing of the Curriculum for Wales, where it is stated that children develop empathy and learn about the world around them through play, particularly in the outdoors (Welsh Government 2023). It is also noted in the curriculum that allowing children to have real-life experiences enables them to identify problems, and find solutions which in turn builds their resilience, self-esteem and wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2023). These are all attributes that are connected to the *Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. This was evident in my own experience, where my daughter was choosing flowers for the garden that would encourage butterflies. She remembered trying to catch

butterflies as a young child, finding many of them attracted to the purple flowers in a neighboring friend's garden. Her curiosity and exploration in the outdoor environment developed her understanding of butterflies and as such informed her decision in the present day as to how to promote biodiversity in our garden. This is supported by Froebel who emphasized the value of play and the importance of learning through nature in the natural environment (Bruce, 2012).

Although it is recognised that the curriculum for Wales includes parts of ESDGC, WCIA (2022), claim that not enough emphasis is put on international perspectives to learning, which could be detrimental in developing ethical citizens of the world. It is also noted that children who are not born as Welsh may feel excluded as Welsh culture appears to be given priority over cultures from elsewhere. This could result in some pupils not reaching their potential to become confident individuals.

To conclude, it is apparent that connecting with the natural world through undertaking hands on experiences that are part of a play-based pedagogy are beneficial to children when trying to develop their understanding of sustainable development and global citizenship. It allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the surrounding world, developing ecocentric citizens that are able to overcome issues whilst looking after each other and the planet.

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