

Part 1

As a school we are very lucky to have a vast outside area, but we do not utilise all the space to its full potential. Outside the classroom where I work is the area I choose to develop. I choose this as we have amazing grounds and fields but do nothing with the areas directly outside the classrooms or pathways. I discuss with the children my idea to transform the area and asked for their input as after all it is their area, so in line with the New Curriculum and pupil voice I thought it would be good if it became the children's vision. I showed them images of bug hotels, and we talked about the reasoning behind them. A Bug Hotel is a man-made structure made from natural materials. It is built to give shelter and nesting environments for many different beneficial insects and creatures that contribute to producing a healthier eco system. By using lots of different natural materials such as twigs, bamboo, leaves, wood and bark the children can engage in a hands-on task that helps them to not only develop their knowledge about insects and nature but how we can reuse materials for a purpose. By following a plan, it provides them with independence and a chance to improve on their problem-solving skills. Team work again linking in with the New Curriculum whilst informing the children on topics like biodiversity and its relevance and importance. Bees were their main concern, so we discussed how we could attract more bees and help them with pollinating. We found out what sort of flowers would be beneficial for the bees and the colourful petals would brighten up the outdoor area. Bird feeders would help the birds to find food and are easily made. We found an unused pallet by the recycling in the school grounds, after checking that we were allowed to take it pallet we looked online for ideas on how we could use it. We decided to turn it in to a herb garden by attaching it to the railings and buying different types of herbs to grow. There is a shed that stores unused PE equipment, so the children had the idea to turn it into a little den or a 'cwtch' area. We discuss removing the door and lay down a picnic blanket or some old carpet we could take the beanbags from class and put them in there. One of the children coming up to our class in September needs a quiet area to self-regulate so the children explained how they feel it would be perfect for the child. It needed to be painted so we decided to ask other members of staff and parents if they had any unwanted outdoor paint. The children completed mind maps with their plans and ideas. I asked them to sketch their designs for the bug hotels, and we compiled a list of items we would need. We looked at what we have around the school that we could use so that we do not have to buy lots of different materials. We worked out a budget to buy some flowers and seeds.

When we went to start on our project, we discovered a wasp's nest hidden within the shed. This put a stop to our plans for the day as we had to wait for a professional to come and remove it safely. This sparked an interest with the children, so we spent the

allocated time researching wasps and discovering new facts. When we could finally start on the area, we removed the weeds that were already in the unused plant pots and placed them over by the butterfly path so that they could decompose. After sweeping and removing any debris we removed the door from the shed and painted it. At first the children engaged well with painting the shed but then they started to lose interest. I tried to re-gain focus by asking them to paint different shapes and their names. We planted flowers into the pots but one of the children were reluctant to get their hands dirty. After showing them how dirty my hands were and asking them how I could get them clean again, the child answered washing them in the sink realising that they would be able to do the same, so they finally joined in with the planting giggling the whole time. We constructed our bug hotels by gathering the materials we required from the school grounds and using recycled tin cans. The children followed the plans that they had drawn, and we worked together to make any adjustments or adaptations. We used natural colour string to tie them onto the railings. We looked up some recipes for bird feeders and started to make them. The children remembered that we could not use peanut butter as an ingredient as we are a nut free school due to some children having allergies. Placing the bird feeders outside and attaching them to the apple tree the children asked if we could pick the apples? I explained how they are not ripe yet but in the Autumn we can. We usually go blackberry picking within our grounds and make a crumble so I told them we can add apples this time. It helps them to understand we can utilise the fruit that is being grown instead of buying them from the shops. We used an old picnic blanket for the bottom of the shed as it had a waterproof underneath and the children put in the bean bags from class to sit on. They placed some reading books in there too and were very happy with their little 'cwtch'. Once the area was finished, we talked about what the children had achieved and their feelings about the area. They explained how they felt proud that they had made it their own and wanted the other classes to come and see it. It has given them responsibility tasks of the area by watering the flowers and maintaining the bug hotels and bird feeders. These tasks can be incorporated into the well-being sessions that help towards positive mental health. It is important for the children to have these experiences to help them learn and develop. It helps them to discover and understand their environment and the world around them. Working towards the Four Purposes of the New Curriculum for Wales this project has been beneficial to helping them become 'Ethical, informed citizens' and making them 'Confident, capable learners' as they are able to see how the area was created based on their own ideas and their commitment and dedication to carry out the tasks. By giving children, the opportunity to adapt and shape their own learning is what the New Curriculum promotes and allows children to develop life skills that they will carry on improving throughout their education journey and into their adult life when they have the opportunity to discover and explore the modern-day world. By carrying out this task I was able to see how you can turn the smallest of areas into an area of interest that benefits the environment and the children. It shows how even if you do not have a

garden area, there are still ways to incorporate sustainability into learning. I really liked how the children's ideas were put into effect and how giving them a voice produces results that give them a sense of pride and achievement.

Part 2

Sustainability is defined by The United Nations Brundtland (1987) as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations. It is vital children learn about sustainability, so it becomes one of their life skills. Within the New Curriculum for Wales, sustainability is now a mandatory concept that is to be incorporated into each individual child's learning journey. Learners will be able to develop their implementation of sustainability within their school environment. The Successful Futures report (Donaldson 2015) looked closely at the education system for Wales and its findings promoted interdisciplinary and experiential education supported by the Welsh Government. Incorporating the Four Purposes and alongside the Areas of Learning, Environmental Education has been factored into science, developing Ethical Citizenship. By the New Curriculum providing opportunities for children to think ethically, critically and creatively, the learners are able to consider different environmental issues helping them to make their own individual informed decisions about different issues and the contexts, this will then lead to establishing a commitment either team based or individually to mitigate environmental degradation (Stevenson et al 2013). Boyd (2023) promotes the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they belong in early childhood pedagogy. The United Nations body, named The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has the responsibility for assessing the science behind climate change. During August 2021 a report was issued that drew attention to the importance of finding a solution to the current crisis that is happening in the world and how early childhood educators need to be part of the solution. Looking at pioneers such as Montessori and Froebel and how they were advocates for the rights, equality, social justice and the empowerment of all children including the disadvantaged and girls. They were able to see the importance of the environment as a vital resource and the interconnectedness of children to their world. Although children should not be labelled as the 'saviours' of the planet they need to be educated to know and understand that they are interconnected with each other and that their individual actions alongside those around them will have an impact on the world. Research has shown that attitudes and fundamental values are formed in early childhood, stating the importance of early childhood education and laying the foundations. UNESCO stands for the three pillars of sustainability that are commonly acknowledged, Environmental, Economic and Socio-cultural. They are all connected and must not be treated as individual, as taking one pillar into account at any one time will drastically reduce the action or strategy (Elliott 2014).

Within the New Curriculum for Wales (gov.uk 2025) Sustainability is integrated as a mandatory cross-cutting topic throughout all areas of experience and learning. It is stated that children will engage with practices and concepts focused on sustainability throughout their time in school with the aim of fostering ethical, informed citizens, incorporating one of the Four Purposes. As it is not a stand-alone subject, it is interlinked with all areas of learning and various subjects including science and technology, humanities and health and well-being. By developing learners to understand the impact of their actions and dependence on the planet includes commitment to sustainability. One of the benefits of sustainability outdoors is how the children get to explore outdoor learning. Children relax in natural spaces as it becomes an environment that is non-threatening to them especially as they get older as Early Years classrooms are more child friendly. They have more space to move about and can really show their talents by interacting with hands on tasks rather than academically, noting opposite behaviour than in the classroom. There are no restraints on them, so they see freedom and the opportunity for risky play and grow in independence. Many children do not have the opportunity to dig, build dens or get their hands dirty. It is vital to children's well-being that they have time outdoors in the fresh air so they can enjoy the space and freedom of the environment. One factor that schools need to take into consideration with sustainability with outdoor learning is the location of the setting and the resources available. Not all schools are located in rural areas, and some might have limited outdoor space. Practitioners need to consider their environment and how to utilise their space to allow for sustainability education to be factored into their curriculum. The area I created would work well with limited outdoor space and concrete ground. It shows how you can use your area accordingly and by carrying out research and looking at other people's ideas it can help to adapt areas differently. Growing fruit and vegetables in pots is an option to for children to be able to discover how things grow and expand their knowledge, commitment to watering the plants will give them life skills on how to look after living organisms. Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory of Ecological Systems explains how a holistic view of child development is recognised and shaped by the interaction of not just the immediate surrounding but the various environmental systems. The theory is backed up by the five interconnected systems of, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem representing all the different levels of influence a child will have from its immediate environment.

The New Curriculum for Wales Sustainable Schools' Challenge was introduced in 2022. Its primary aim is for local authorities to work together with schools to give them the best opportunity to help design, build and care for their educational environments. It strives for all education settings to make positive contributions towards biodiversity (gov.uk 2025). Tinney (2020) states how the focus of 'Harmony' with holism and interdisciplinary approaches to include love and well-being having several parallels with play and

practice for the Early Years in Wales. Literature does not always tally emphasising or respecting the natural world for outdoor learning and Early Years play despite the everyday opportunities children have. This is due to a dualism of defined roles of adult and child relationships, arguing the views on children being seen as independent and competent learners as the direction is more adult led or dependent.

John Dewey (1959) was labelled as 'The Chief Thinker of our Days' he was influential within educational settings as he was an advocate for 'hands on' learning. He stated that 'Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself'. By children being actively engaged in an activity, learning will take place by children acquiring experience from what they are engaged in and problem solving. Reflecting on their experiences is where children will develop and have a better understanding of the world around them. Dewey emphasises the distinction between mediated and immediated experiences and how it shapes learning. Dewey believed in social learning and felt that learning experiences should be built around communities and the Reggio Emilia Approach includes this theory. By interacting with others, learners are able to discuss different ideas and learn from each other's experiences, developing critical thinking. Within the New Curriculum for Wales, Dewey's theory is incorporated by giving children the opportunity to develop their own learning and understanding by the child led approach. It has been stated that others feel that this way of learning is unrealistic and a more structured experiential theory by David Kolb would be more beneficial. Dewey's theories are still shaping education and the hands on approach provides active engagement with direct experiences with topics so that learners understanding will be enhanced for better retention. By children being actively involved in learning processes, they have the opportunity to improve problem solving skills and foster a deeper understanding and learning (Weber 2021).

Learning for Nature (2025) states 'Learning in nature', also known as 'outdoor learning', involves using the natural environment as the education settings helping towards personal development. Studies have shown that it can improve mental and physical health alongside boosting academic achievement fostering environmental authority. This approach links to hands-on learning, providing experiences and direct interaction with the natural world, helping the children to gain an appreciation and deeper understanding of nature. When children engage in outdoor learning, they are given opportunities to experience enhanced learning outcomes in many different areas of learning. As with hands-on learning children can communicate and collaborate with others, helping with developing problem-solving skills and personal and social development. As the learning takes place outdoors it can help improve the childrens focus, promoting physical activity and can reduce stress. Learners appear more motivated and engaged whilst outdoors exploring and discovering their environment. Children have more freedom outdoors and do not feel confined to a classroom, promoting them to be more imaginative and creative. Interaction with the natural world

will provide children with endless possibilities and support them in their learning and development. Learners will have immersive experiences, expanding their knowledge of eco-systems, biodiversity and sustainability. The New Curriculum for Wales promotes outdoor learning as one of its key components, understanding its benefits for skill development with the environment. The New Curriculum is designed to inspire educators to integrate outdoor experiences into their own pedagogy and planning so that they see the outdoors as a learning environment full of resources for development. Outdoor learning gives scope for development in all the Four Purposes and is relevant throughout all the areas of learning. Children being able to explore the outdoors highlights Froebel's theory that play is not considered as a past time but as a vital resource for emotional, social and cognitive development (gov.uk 2025). Contradicting to Dewey's theory, Friedrich Froebel (1837) promotes structured play for children to learn and develop deeper understanding of the world around them, exploring their imagination and creativity whilst gaining independent thinking and problem-solving skills. He believed that all different aspects of life are all interconnected and that all Early Years settings should consider holistic learning so that all concepts and subjects are linked, including meaningful experiences so that the children can develop wholeness in their learning (Tovey 2013).

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 came into force in Wales 2015 to support and work together so that improvements can be made to the economy, that provides jobs, the social and cultural aspect and the environment of Wales. The Act was put into place with the vision 'For people, for our planet, for now and for our future. This Law is unique to Wales, and it states, 'What Wales is doing today, the World will do tomorrow'. The Law is made up of seven interconnected well-being goals that forty-four public bodies throughout Wales collaborate to reach them. The goals are: - A prosperous Wales, A resilient Wales, A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of more cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, A globally responsible Wales. The Act details five ways of working for the public bodies to accomplish the seven well-being goals allowing for innovative thinking to reflect on the way people live and what they expect of public services. The five working ways of the sustainable development principle are: - Long term- balancing meeting both short- and long-term needs. Intergration- how individuals well-being objectives can have an impact on other people's goals. Involvement- ensuring diversity with individuals interests in achieving their goals. Collaboration- collaborating with other individuals to meet well-being objectives. Prevention- avert problems occurring or expanding by helping to meet objectives. It is set to provide future generations with at least or possibly better the quality of life than there is now. By more competent decision making by public bodies to prevent problems in an integrated and collaborative approach, thinking about the long term and being diverse with inclusion the Act will be proactive by following the five ways

of working. The Wales' vision of a new mindset allows for permission, legal obligation and ambition to improve the public's well-being in cultural, social, economical and environmental. The Act will promote sustainable development and collaboration so that the public bodies will work together to make Wales a better place for the future generations. By practitioners working together and working closely with young children to show them they are the future generations, teaching them about sustainable development so they can carry it forward into their adult life, making them 'Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the World' (gov.uk 2025). The UNCRC Article 29 states 'Education must encourage respect for other cultures and the environment' supporting the Four Purposes of the New Curriculum for Wales (UNICEF 2025).

John Muir, Scottish born emigrated to the United States when he was 11. He had a passion for wild environments and dedicated his life to protect wild places. He stated that wild areas had intrinsic value and should not be exploited by the human population. By people visiting wild areas, Muir believed it would help us to grow as individuals and was a vital component to recharge body and mind. People will be able to explore, discover, conserve and share their own experiences of wild areas. The John Muir Award was set up to encourage people from all different backgrounds to care, enjoy and connect with the wild areas. People participating in the award have the opportunity to learn about the wild places in their surroundings and their special attributes. It was launched in 1997 and over half a million people have completed the award. Although it is more suitable for the older years in primary school and upwards anyone can be involved with it if they can meet and understand the award criteria. The four challenges of the award include: - Discover- Discovery of a wild place and deepen personal knowledge about it. Explore- Exploration of the wild place, experiencing your wild place and the feelings you get from being there. Conserve- Conservation where people actively engage in conserving and protecting the area to enhance its natural beauty. Share- Sharing making others aware of your wild place stating its importance and celebrating how you are protecting it. Completing the award will give individuals a sense of pride and exhilaration knowing they have contributed to making the world a more beautiful place (John Muir Trust 2025).

By practitioners working together in Early Years settings they can promote a culture of sustainability, encouraging eco-friendly practices and educate children about the environment. By creating an environment for children to develop a deeper understanding and connection with nature, giving them a sense of responsibility. Practitioners can nurture a generation that will value and protect the natural world, 'Regaining Paradise'.

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