

Reflection (871 words).

Good evening. As you are aware I have recently taken on a small established sessile oak forest with around 40 oak trees that are between 80-100 years old. Here I plan to open my own forest school for early years children. Upon walking through and exploring my area there were many different things I planned to do to support children's holistic development. For the purpose of this award however, I worked with a group of people of all ages, from adults to children. Whilst walking around the forest the group noticed there were many bird boxes on the trees, and we could also hear lots of birds. The calls we could hear and identify were those of magpies, Great tits and Blackbirds. However, we could hear many more!

So, I downloaded the Merlin Bird ID app and I set up my wildlife camera. We decided to leave some bird seed on a log and went back the following day to check it. To our surprise we saw a Jay bird AND a lesser spotted woodpecker! We were extremely excited about this. The app also told us we had a range of birds around us, you'll see in the scrap book a list of the birds! With all this excitement it was decided that we were going to create a bird feeding station! So, we did some research into the types of feeders these birds needed and what best to feed them, we also contacted the RSPB to ask for some advice which we are still waiting to hear from. Now although I love to be outside and do lots of work outside, I have never really learnt much about birds.

I know the common birds, but I did not know many facts about them. For example, through observing the birds over several days we noticed that the robins in particular do not use the bird feeders? Upon researching this it became apparent that they prefer to have some where to perch rather than hang. This gave the children the idea of making bird feeders with a perch to accommodate them as well as making a bird table, this was lovingly made by

my father who has kindly donated him time and expertise to help us build what we needed.

I have also learned that many of the birds in my forest are there because the trees that are growing there. My partner also helped me create bug houses with planters on them, this was an idea to help attract bugs with the flowers and bug house, attracting more birds into the area and sustaining the habitat and biodiversity. The table and bug houses were both made from recycled pallets and donated wood from local businesses, meaning there was less money spent and less miles driven to transport it. We even had 20 bags of compost donated to us. By sharing our ideas on social media, we had lots of support locally.

This module has given me the reminder to stop. It has reminded me that through all the business that comes with life, sitting down and soaking in the environment around you, can have the most impactful effect on you and help change people's understanding on sustainability. I have been given the opportunity to not only explore this wonderful area I get to work in but look at it from a different perspective. As well as creating areas for children in this forest I have been reminded how important it is to keep areas for the wildlife.

Although we are focussing on creating a wildlife are for the birds it made me come to the decision to keep lots of areas within this forest wild and overgrown for the hedgehogs/ mice/ wild rabbits to be able to live in. As you can see from my hand drawn maps these are the areas that will be untouched. By doing this award it has given myself and the children a sense of place and belonging. I feel very privileged to be providing people with the chance to reconnect with nature.

While I thought I was very sustainable in my practice, I have learnt that there is also so much more than I can do. I am linking with local businesses that will be donating materials to support us and have made changes such as installing a solar powered wildlife camera. Recycled cardboard and plastic bottles to

create bird feeders. I am even now understanding the importance of air miles and transportation of where our products come from, something I never really gave much thought to before learning about it in lectures.

I have also decided to start up a free eco-warrior group on a Saturday that will be for children of all ages to come to and spend time outside learning the importance of nature and why it is our duty to protect it. In the words of the great Sir David Attenborough "If children grow up not knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it, and if they don't understand it, they won't protect it, and if they don't protect it, who will?"

Thank you for listening to my reflection. I will now move on to my critical evaluation.

Critical evaluation (1943 words).

According to David (2010, p2) many people view sustainability in many different ways, some see it as taking care of the environment around them. While the United Nations (N.D) defines sustainability as having the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the world for future generations. To me sustainability means taking care of the world we live in and everything in it for not only now but also for many years to come. My beliefs are supported by UCLA (N.D) who argue that sustainable practices can help to create a resilient, healthy world for now and future generations.

It also supports The well-being of future generations (Wales) Act (2015), as this policy promotes better decision making now to prevent recent problems getting worse in the future and also to prevent any further problems from happening (Welsh Government, N.D). However, there are many definitions of sustainability, meaning there is no one, set meaning. Salas-Zapata and Ortiz-Munoz (2018) suggests that due to this lack of clarity with the definition of sustainability may be the reason that its validity is affected. They also believe that while many books and articles have sustainability in their titles, there are

still no clear-cut definitions of the term. This was a barrier I came across when researching for this presentation. I was unable to come up with one specific definition and found that my definition and understanding of it has been made up from a number of sources.

The Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, also known as ESDGC aims to give everyone the skills and the knowledge needed to address the challenges they are facing with issues such as climate change and extinction for example. The ESDGC focuses on not just the local but also the global issues that can be caused by our own actions (Welsh Government, 2010). ESTYN (2014) suggests that in order to promote ESDGC in Wales it is beneficial to introduce this concept in the early years. They believe that in order to embed ESDGC planning, and implementation needs to be a key part from the very start.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) (2023) argues that there is a rise in Eco-anxiety in our younger generations now due to their first-hand experiences with the understanding on issues such as climate change. They also suggest that this is now becoming a chronic fear of the future of the planet. Engdahl (2015) believes however, that practitioners need to be mindful about not underestimating children, they often know and understand more than what practitioners realise and need to be given more credit as to what information they can cope with.

Tinney and Merrimen (2018) argue with RCPCH's (2023) research, and suggests that whilst they understand that there have been many concerns that children within the early years may be unable to grasp the concept and may begin to fear potential threats that may be facing the planet, ESDGC can be promoted in the early years through embedding the voice of children in their pedagogy and offering age and stage appropriate activities such as gardening, consumption and waste and spending time in the outdoors.

Wales institute of social and economic research and data (WISERD) (2015)

agree with Tinney and Merrimen (2018) and suggest that ESDGC in Wales should be an ethos and a whole school approach, rather than a taught subject. In many settings I have visited I have felt the whole school approach on ESDGC, this is noticeable with the policies they have in place, their practices such as recycling and water usage, and also the teachers understanding and attitudes towards it.

However, I have also seen many settings that do not have whole school approaches, which have had a direct impact on children's understanding and confidence on spending time outside in their local environment. Estyn (2014) supports my findings and suggests that when schools do not promote ESDGC and view it as a whole school approach, it can also negatively impact their view of the world and effect their respect and actions of ESDGC. They also suggest that staff are more knowledgeable and confident when delivering information to children around this subject.

Natural resources Wales (2023) believe although Tinney and Merrimen (2018) insist that ESDGC is an ethos not a subject, they believe that there is still a lot of work needed to be done to improve the understanding of this within many schools within Wales.

Hunt *et al.* (N.D) suggests that a barrier to promoting ESDGC within settings can be due to the lack of time and understanding. They believe that many practitioners do not understand the importance of ESDGC and do not see it as a core part of the curriculum.

Their research also suggests that practitioners believe there is not enough time to teach the amount of content that needs to be covered. Tinney (2013) argues that to overcome this barrier, settings should provide enough training and support through inset days and daily use. This way it becomes an ethos instead of a part of the curriculum. Also, by doing this, practitioners will be able

to see the connections with their daily activities and the principles of ESDGC, saving time in their working days.

Another way to overcome these barriers and to promote ESDGC in the early years is to participate in projects such as the HM Government's (2018) A Greener Future plan and The John Muir award which are both implemented to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy and connect with nature, for example as the scrap book shows, spending time in nature and creating a place for wildlife to thrive. The focus on this award links with goal 15 of the UN's 17 sustainable development goals (SDG's), Life on land.

Boyd *et al.* (2023) describes these SDG's as tasks that are developed in order to protect and sustain the planet for now and the future. However they encourage participants to remember that whilst working on one specific goal, all 17 are actually interconnected and support early years pedagogical approaches.

Goal 15 specifically focuses on stopping the loss of biodiversity, managing forests in a sustainable way, and reversing the degradation of natural habitats. Projects within the John Muir award are fun and engaging and helps to promote ESDGC (HM Government, 2018,p- 71; John Muir Trust, N.D; Eurostat, 2024; United Nations, N.Da).

Unfortunately, The UN (2023) suggest that only 15% of the SDG's are actually on track. When researching, some tips to help with the succession of goal 15 were to consider the reduction of paper use and to avoid the use of printers (The Global Goals, N.D). However, in my own experience I see a large amount of printing being done in schools daily, going through large amounts of paper regularly.

Sterling (2001, p5) believes that the biggest difference with a sustainable future and a chaotic future was within learning. He believed that schools were promoting functional learning and informational learning towards vocational and socialisation goals, with little or no regards to sustainability. He suggested

that they were incapable of exploring alternative methods of learning. He emphasised that education systems should dedicate frameworks to sustainability and its importance.

However, this is a dated source of information that was introduced in 2001, it is now 23 years on and alternative methods of learning such as curriculum based outdoor learning and forest schools can aid in connection with nature, understanding of the world and gives children a newfound respect for the earth they live in. With the reform of the new curriculum for Wales Donaldson (2015) places emphasis on how good pedagogy is when practitioners creating authentic, meaningful learning opportunities for children. He suggests that children need to see the world beyond the school ground to make those links. With the children having time outside of school hours to come to a forest and spend time creating bird feeders for the local birds they are showing their commitment to the sustainability of the planet and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world, this links with the new curriculum for Wales in where one of the four purposes is to encourage and support the development for all children to be ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world and supports 'Successful futures' findings (Institute of Welsh affairs, 2023; Donaldson, 2015).

The activities the children undertook in the forest were completely child-led, right from the initial idea, down to the types of bird feeders they wanted to make. By allowing children to lead their learning during our time undertaking this award, they became more confident, and connected socially with each other. All children were from different schools and only knew each other through clubs and parental friendships. It became noticeable with the children who follow child-led learning within their schools, 3 out of 4 of the children were confident in exploration and were happy to "give it a go" while one needed some extra support.

With my decision to step back and allow these activities to be fully child-led, I noticed how the children supported the child who needed this extra support. They modelled ways of creating the feeders and then encouraged the child with positive talk and praise when the feeder was completed. This observation supported Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning. When children model and scaffold each other's learning, they are learning through discovery, problem solving, and collaboration with each other, which develops confident self-directed learning and exploration (Allman, N.D, p 139-145).

To conclude due to there being a number of different definitions for sustainability, where some believe it is as simple as taking care of the environment around them, while others suggest it is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the world for the generations that come after ours (David, 2010, p2; United Nations, N.D) Salas-Zapata and Ortiz-Munoz (2018) believe that because of lack of clarity with the definition of sustainability it affects people views and opinions of it.

The Welsh Government (2010) and Tinney and Merrimen (2018) suggest that by promoting ESDGC within the early years this can promote a healthy understanding and develop passion with the younger generations to make a difference in the world they live in for now and the future, despite RCPCH's (2023) argument where there is a rise in Eco-anxiety in younger generations now due to their with the understanding on issues such as climate change. Furthermore, findings by Engdahl (2015) suggest that practitioners must not underestimate children, as they often understand more than what practitioners give them credit for. By undertaking or bird feeding project for The John Muir award and giving children the chance to connect with nature we supported goal 15 of the 17 SDG's which focuses on managing forests sustainably, reversing the degradation of natural habitats and stopping the loss of biodiversity (John Muir Trust, N.D; Eurostat, 2024; United Nations, N.Da).

When reading dated research, it was clear that there needed to be an increase in exploring alternative methods of learning about sustainability. There was an emphasis on education systems dedicating frameworks to sustainability. Fast-forward 23 years and there are a range of alternative methods of learning helping children to understand the world and giving them a newfound respect for the earth they live in. This is also promoted with the reform of the new curriculum for Wales (Sterling, 2001, p5; Donaldson, 2015, Institute of Welsh affairs, 2023). During their time in the forest creating this bird feeding station, it supported Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning where the children modelled and scaffolded each other's learning (Allman, N.D, p 139-145).

Thank you very much, this concludes my presentation.

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