

Script:Reflection:

Good afternoon, Prynhawn da!

This afternoon, I want to discuss my personal reflection of my experiences while completing this module and the John Muir award before discussing my critical evaluation of early childhood education for sustainability.

This award has provided me with time to reflect on my own life, how I use and interact with the world around me – my footprint if you like. My use of water, fuels, food and other resources. As well as my professional practice and pedagogy.

The location I chose to explore for this module was the nursery garden where I work. Which is set within a school in a town called Risca.

I chose to use my own setting as I quickly realised when starting this module, just how man made the nursery's garden is.

We are fortunate to be set on large school grounds with lots of greenery around them and I felt it beneficial to explore them in more depth.

I decided to explore this area as I felt this would benefit me, the children I work with and my future practice as well as being able to share this tangibly with my team.

By doing this, the module and award has become part of my practice. So, for me the discover, explore, conserve and share almost merge.

Exploring the location:

Risca is an area surrounded by natural beauty that provides many wildlife habitats. These include:

Sir Howy Valley Country Park with its two nature reserves,

Cwmcarn Forest Drive with its lakes, woodland trails and mountain bike tracks,

The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal,

Twmbarlwm hill.

Despite this, Risca is an area with some deprivation, and there are many children in our setting who receive free school meals.

Lots of our children will tell us that they rarely leave our town. What's more some have not even experienced the natural beauty of these wonderful local sites.

Which for me, makes it all the more important that we are providing them with the opportunity to connect with nature while they are with us in setting.

Exploring and discovering the setting:

We offer a large indoor and outdoor setting with a variety of spaces, accessible resources and areas to promote fine and gross motor skills.

Our floor surfaces are mostly covered in Astro or soft safety flooring.

There are no plants growing directly outside of our door. In fact, the only things growing are in 3 big planters in the space around the side of nursery. These contain flowers and shrubs which were kindly donated and planted last year.

As I explored the grounds and how these are used by the children, I noticed that these are positioned in a part of the garden that is busy and used for bikes, scooters and cars.

This is not conducive to quiet time, for the children to stop and notice the events of nature and it is so noisy and lively it may not attract the butterflies or wildlife that we would like it to.

One small area which has been added to the outdoor space in the last few years provides more of a natural area with grass, mud and bark surfaces, a large tree stump and a few wildflowers growing where it has been untouched for most of the school year due to staff reservations around the risks within the area.

However outside of our fence the school has bankings with trees and flower areas, newly planted fruit trees, 2 small woodlands, a field and lots of large, planted pots.

Discovery and Conservation:

I noticed the area beside our fence, under the trees, had been left as a no-mow area for the wildflowers to grow and as I explored, I realised that the trees in this area were full of birds and stopped to listen to the bird song. This became almost a morning ritual.

The children soon asked to explore, so I discussed this with the staff, and that is what we did. We used some tree identification resources from the Woodland Trust (2015) which the children loved using, with clipboards, magnifying glasses and little explorer hats, to spark their curiosity and engage them.

We were able to identify some of the trees around our boundary – these are birch trees and sycamore trees. Then we spotted the birds we could hear using these trees for food and shelter.

We also discovered the patterns made by the tree in its shadow. I loved one comment, from a child who is usually quiet in group situations. He said “Mrs Newman the tree is making a shadow”. It was lovely to think that such a simple activity was sparking so much curiosity in the children, noticing then what had been there many times before but gone unnoticed.

While out and about we discovered pigeons in one tree and some bird houses put up by children from key stage two. We soon got to work on some bird food after seeing small birds on the patio and discussing what the birds were doing on the floor next to where the older children ate their dinner!

We created cheerio bird feeders with remnants of string and wool that we found in the arts and crafts resources, making sure we were reusing and reducing our waste, and we hung them around the school in the trees. The children were able to use needles to thread these and helped to position them.

The children were keen to keep tabs on whether these had been eaten, and we were pleased to see they were soon all gone!

We also spotted a four-legged friend coming into our school from the canal next door. We thought it was a mouse, but we could only see its nose, we didn't see its body, feet

or tail to try and distinguish which it was! This was a treat for the children and sparked conversations about mice, rats, water voles and habitats around the canal.

While there the amount of rubbish along the boundary fence shocked me. I stopped the children and pointed this out to them and said it makes me sad to see this - one child said "Why, Mrs. Newman?" to which I explained they could be blown into the water of the canal. There was lots of discussion but best of all saying "It makes me sad too. We pick them up?" So, this prompted a class litter pick to tidy up the area.

Sharing:

I am pleased that the team of professionals I work with have embraced my learning and ideas that have come from this module. Each week I have discussed with them some of my learning and we have implemented changes to our weekly timetable. I am pleased that the children are now using our nursery natural space and can explore nature and rediscover our outdoor area.

A critical evaluation of early years education for sustainability:

Williams (2013) states that the way that people use the land, and all its resources now, has grave consequences on how the world will look for our children, grandchildren and all future generations and states immediate commitment to change is needed to retain the wildlife and nature of our country and the world.

Iolo Williams is not the only person to express concern over how the planet is being treated, its natural resources, habitats, fuels and water are used, and the damage this is causing.

Earth.org (2024) agrees and lists 15 current issues impacting the environment including climate change from burning fossil fuels, poor government guidance and a lack of support for green fuels, plastic causing damage to our water and the loss of habitats and biodiversity because of the changing use of land.

Louv (2016) states that there is a growing disconnect between children and nature and agrees with Williams (2013) stating that this has grave consequences for our planet.

The Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act 2015 tells us that environmental wellbeing and carbon footprint are just some of the responsibilities for all, to ensure that Wales reaches the shared vision and duty to improve the well-being of Wales (Welsh Government, 2024).

UNESCO (2022) agrees and explains the importance of ensuring that the current generation is mindful of its actions on the planet with its attempts to thrive, to ensure that the planet is not adversely affected for the generations to come which can be linked back to Williams (2019)'s speech.

That said Welsh Government (2024), UNESCO (2022) and Davis (2010) tells us that sustainability is not solely concerned with environmental factors, but with gender inequality, war and conflict resolution, cultural issues, health and poverty. This is prioritised in the United Nations sustainable development goals (United Nations, no date).

Moreover, UNESCO (2022)'s 3 dimensions, which are economy, society and biodiversity mean that it is important to recognise that these are all connected, meaning that they need to be of equal importance, not just a focus on the environment.

United Nations (2023) tells us of Agenda 2030 where they implemented 17 Goals which have 169 targets to create a sustainable world where they commit to creating a world which has respect, equality, justice, peace, clean drinking water, sustainable economic growth, conservation of natural resources. It states it is looking to create a world where "humanity lives in harmony with nature"

United Nations (no date a) tells us of 17 goals to a sustainable world and within goal 4 places and importance on ensuring quality education for all. UNESCO (2024) states that Goal 4 emphasises the importance of equality and inclusivity in education in order to promote sustainability and equality across the world. Additionally, Boyd (2018) states that there is a need to ensure equality in the access to quality education for girls and boys on a global scale.

UNCRC article 29 tells us that education plays a role in ensuring that children develop the ability to respect their rights, the rights of others and their cultures as well as the environment (Unicef, no date).

Currently in Wales, with the role out of the curriculum for funded non-maintained settings and the Curriculum for Wales, Global Citizenship and Sustainability are at their core, with practitioners needing to ensure that their curriculums and the experiences provided opportunities for children to become "Ethically Informed Citizens" and "Healthy Confident Individuals" as two of its four purposes. These put children's rights, choices and impact, diversity, sustainability, lifestyle and health as significant values to the curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b).

They aim to develop children to be resilient and able to understand and manage their emotions, be healthy individuals, have a strong sense of self, their place in the world and foster a sense of belonging – or *cynffin*, having pride in Wales, using the Welsh language as part of the culture of Wales (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh

Government, 2022b) all of which supports achieving the sustainability goals in goal 3, 4 and 16.

This is supported by Donaldson (2015) and Boyd, Hirst, and Siraj-Blatchford (2018) who tells us that the curriculum needs to support children to become culturally aware, with their own identity and understanding of their rights and those of others, that all learners should access learning which promotes sustainable development in order to become a global citizen.

Moreover, when thinking of the rights of the child, the sustainable development goals as within United Nations (no date b) which include Goal 3 - Health and well-being, Goal 6 - clean water and sanitation and goal 11 sustainable cities and communities also link to the child's access to health care, clean and safe drinking water in Article 24, or their adequate living conditions in Article 27, and their knowledge of their own rights as stipulated in Article 42 (Unicef, no date). All of which can be linked to the seven goals of the Well-being of future generations Wales Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2024).

Tinny and Hirst (2018) suggests that the teaching and learning of sustainability to children, is important to ensure that behaviour around sustainable development changes and tells us that this is compulsory within education settings within the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship policy.

Furthermore, Tinney and Hirst (2018) and Boyd, Hirst, and Siraj-Blatchford (2018) suggest that this should be embedded in the nature of the setting, taught as a cross-curricular, holistic approach within the setting's usual routines and not as a standalone activity and tells us that this must also be a whole setting approach, ensuring that staff and children are onboard and that all aspects are considered such as events, school gardens and transportation is considered not just practice.

However, Boyd (2018) suggests that there is also a need for change in pedagogy and practices to achieve this quality practice and Davis (2010) states the importance of practitioners ensuring that they engage with sustainability in early years practice, as this has a positive effect on the sustainable thinking of the children, their families and the community.

According to Tinney and Merriman (2018) the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) seeks to ensure the same values as those of the new curriculums.

Welsh Government (2022a) has an emphasis on providing children with engaging, authentic experiences, there is a strong connection to being in the outdoors, learning through the seasons, ensuring that children are experiencing hands on approaches to learning and not being taught. This is supported by Maynard, Walters and Clement (2011) who tell us that children need to make connections to real experiences to embed learning.

This is not a new concept however, Froebel believed that allowing children to learn through doing would enable them to reach their fullest potential, by allowing children time to think and opportunity to be curious (Tovey, 2020).

Tinney and Merriman (2018) additionally tell us, despite some apprehension over whether global citizenship and sustainability are issues which are too complex for young people to engage with, that these overlap with the pedagogies of quality early years environments and that they have much in common.

Cutter – Mackenzie *et al.* (2014) agrees in part that the early years play based pedagogy supports the learning of sustainability, however, places an importance on teaching authentically with effective environments and a knowledgeable practitioner.

Moreover, Tovey (2020) tells us that Froebel believed that the practitioner needed to be engaged in the outdoor environment to create curiosity for the children and engage them, supporting connections with nature through their play, caring for living things and experimentation with material properties believing that this could all be achieved with connections with nature – for example puddle jumping and plant lifecycles.

D'Ascoli and Hunter (2022) and Tovey (2022) suggest that connecting with nature and being outdoors has a beneficial effect on wellbeing, engages all senses and offers autonomy to learners.

Froebel believed that children need to understand the impacts on nature and become more able to recognise their place in the world, global citizenship in simpler terms for younger learners, with more time spent outdoors (Tovey, 2022).

This is also the view of Louv (2016).

However, Cutter-Mackenzie *et al.* (2014) and Tovey (2022) argue that simply being outdoors, perhaps even trying to imitate other environments or natural occurrences such as tough tray activities with nature scenes in the garden, is not enough to create ethically informed citizens. Instead, it is important that the children engage in truly authentic experiences such as visiting the beach or the river, climbing trees and creating dens, learning through nature. Therefore when children are allowed to grow or collect water, see insects and so on they can learn about things which support becoming sustainable such as where food comes from, how we have clean drinking water and life cycles.

Maynard, Walters and Clement (2011) agree and states that authentic contexts and quality pedagogy with skilled practitioners is needed.

There are barriers to this however, which include practitioners being weary of allowing children beyond their boundaries or even in their outdoor areas due to the risks involved and fear of being blamed for any accidents (Gill, no date; Kings College London, 2010; Button and Wilde, 2018).

I have also seen this firsthand.

As discussed earlier, my setting only has one small natural space in the boundary and this has been untouched for the most part of the year as before this module myself and the setting staff had previously been nervous about the balance of risk and learning opportunities, and this had hindered its use.

However, with some improvements to the boundary fence and with the confidence and knowledge from this module I am pleased that the children have started using this area.

Since then, the children and I have discovered many insects living in the tree stump, we have seen butterflies come into the wildflowers and stopped to notice the bird song throughout our day.

The John Muir Award aims to encourage learners to be hands on. It encourages the exploration of nature and its conservation, such as nature walks and litter picks (John Muir Trust, no date).

Through completing the award, I have seen that my engagement in the work has sparked curiosity in the children too and so I have shared this journey with them, and we have all stopped to take notice of the area directly outside of our boundary fence. The children are keen to get outside and are fascinated by the awe and wonder of the natural world we are blessed with in our setting.

I have seen the benefits that this area has to the children's learning and reconnection with nature, something that I have read about and thought I was encouraging before this module however have now come to realise that these more authentic, real life experiences support the children to make stronger connections (D'Ascoli and Hunter, 2022).

The Froebelian approach has always been of interest to me, and I think that the John Muir award has supported and enhanced this.

Experiences such as the John Muir Award encourage hands-on exploration of nature and being authentic learners. However, as previously discussed, sustainability is about more than just nature.

Cutter–Mackenzie et al. (2014) argues that sometimes education is concerned with nature and eco school–based work rather than an anthropocentric lens

When considering the sustainability and the John Muir award in this way, the award considers many of the UN sustainability goals, but there are some that it does not factor in.

Thinking about child poverty for example, the John Muir award has made me think about my personal use, ensuring I waste less, and this has been a value which again

has filtered into practice with a good recycling system in the setting and encouraging the children to reuse resources as well as the addition of sustainable resources such as natural playdough which can be composted with flowers and plants that can be pruned and used within play, but this does not specifically allow for exploring global poverty with the children.

Furthermore, thinking of other goals such as goal 8 and 9, while these may be able to be explored with quality educators, the John Muir award does not directly support these.

I enjoyed this module; I hope you have enjoyed my presentation.

Thank you for listening, are there any questions?

Reference List:

Boyd, D. (2018) 'Early childhood education for sustainability and the legacies of two pioneering giants', *Early Years: An International Research Journal Special Issue*.

Boyd, D., Hirst, N. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2018) *Understanding sustainability in early childhood education: Case studies and approaches from across the UK*. London: Routledge.

Button, J. and Wilde, A. (2019) 'Exploring practitioners' perceptions of risk when delivering Forest School for 3- to 5-year-old children', *International Journal of Play*, 8(1), pp. 25–38. doi:10.1080/21594937.2019.1580334.

Cutter – Mackenzie, A., Edwards, S., Moore, D. and Boyd, W. (2014) *Young children's play and environmental education in early childhood education*. London: Springer.

D'Ascoli, H. and Hunter, D (2022) *Re-engaging with nature*. Available at: https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT_Re-engaging-With-Nature_Pamphlet_INTERACTIVE_REV-1.pdf (Accessed: 29 June 2024).

Davis, J. (2010) *Young children and the environment*. Cambridge University Press.

Donaldson, G. (2015) *Successful Futures*. p. 28. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/successful-futures.pdf> (Accessed: 3 July 2024).

Earth.org (2024) *15 biggest environmental problems of 2024*. Available at: <https://earth.org/the-biggest-environmental-problems-of-our-lifetime/> (Accessed: 29 June 2024).

Gill, T. (no date) *Balancing risk and benefits in outdoor learning and play*. Available at: https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/160606_PROJECTDIRT_ECD_BOOK7_A4-1.pdf (Accessed: 3 July 2024).

John Muir Trust (no date) *Impact and updates*. Available at:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award/impact-and-updates> (Accessed: 3 July 2024).

Kings College London (2010) *Beyond barriers to learning outside the classroom in natural environments*. Available at:

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4524600415223808> (Accessed: 3 July 2024).

Louv, R. (2016) *Excerpt from last child in the woods*. Available at:

<https://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/excerpt/> (Accessed: 7 July 2024).

Maynard, T., Waters, J. and Clement, J. (2011) 'Moving outdoors: further explorations of 'child-initiated' learning in the outdoor environment', *Education 3-13*, 41(3), pp. 282–299. doi:10.1080/03004279.2011.578750.

Tinney, G. and Hirst, N. (2018) 'Early childhood education for sustainability within Wales' in Boyd, D., Hirst, N. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2018) *Understanding Sustainability in Early Childhood Education: Case Studies and Approaches From Across the UK*. London: Routledge.

Tinney, G., and Merriman, E. (2018) 'Early years education and education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) - Two sides of the same coin?', *Wales Journal of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education 2018*, 1(1), pp. 71-76

Tovey, H. (2020) *Froebel's principles and practice today*. Available at:

<https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf> (Accessed: 2 July 2024).

Tovey, H. (2022) *An introduction to Froebel, children and nature*. Available at:

<https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/An-introduction-to-Froebel-children-and-nature.pdf> (Accessed: 7 July 2024).

UNESCO (2022) *Sites for sustainable development: Realizing the potential of UNESCO designated sites to advance agenda 2030*. Available at: <https://unesco.org.uk/wp->

[content/uploads/2022/09/sites for -sustainable development main report.pdf](#)

(Accessed: 2 July 2024).

UNESCO (2024) *Sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4)*. Available at:

<https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/sdg4> (Accessed: 30 June 2024).

UNICEF (no date) *A summary of the UN convention on the rights of the child*. Available

at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf

(Accessed: 2 July 2024).

United Nations (no date a) *Make the SDGS a reality*. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/>

(Accessed: 2 July 2024).

United Nations (no date b) *The 17 goals*. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

(Accessed: 3 July 2024).

United Nations (2023) *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable*

development. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (Accessed: 7 July 2024).

Welsh Government (2022a) *A curriculum for funded non-maintained settings*. Available

at: [https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-](https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf)

[d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf](https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf)

(Accessed: 2 July 2024).

Welsh Government (2022b) *Developing a vision for curriculum design*. Available at:

[https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/developing-a-](https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/developing-a-vision-for-curriculum-design/#developing-a-vision)

[vision-for-curriculum-design/#developing-a-vision](https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/developing-a-vision-for-curriculum-design/#developing-a-vision) (Accessed: 2 July 2024).

Welsh Government (2024) *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the*

essentials. Available at: [https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-](https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html#60676)

[essentials-html#60676](https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html#60676) (Accessed: 2 July 2024).

Woodland Trust (2015) *Tree ID for kids*. Available at:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/tree-id-kids/> (Accessed: 30 June 2024).

Williams, I. (2013) *State of nature*. Iolo Williams. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnJQjtvngqA> (Accessed: 29 June 2024).

2216693

ECEY6005