

Reflection

Good Morning

My name is Temara Glynn. My aim for today's presentation is to share with you my experiences from taking part in the John Muir Award and how these experiences can uphold the philosophy and principles of early years education for sustainability. For this project I was involved in discovering and exploring the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Lampeter Campus.

(Brief description of Lampeter and why I chose the area)

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David Lampeter campus is located in Lampeter, a small town in Ceredigion, Wales. It is the oldest campus of the University, dating back to 1822. The campus is known for its natural surroundings, with the River Teifi running through the town and the nearby Cambrian Mountains providing a stunning backdrop. As part of the campus there is a wellbeing walk which I choose to explore and the surrounding areas of the campus. I chose this area to explore because it reminded me of the lush green vegetation back home in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

(Talk about what I explored, how it connects to my childhood and how it connects to children and natural environments - linking to different aspects such as hands on learning, child-led also link in theorist)

During my exploration at Lampeter Campus, I was captivated by the diverse landscapes, including trees, flowers, rivers, and animals. I divided my exploration over two days to allow me to explore the campus deeper. This experience fostered a newfound appreciation for the natural environment. I also took note of the different plants present and used an app to capture their images and learn more about them. This activity brought joy and made me realize that children would also enjoy it. As a result, I am now inspired to learn more about the plants back home in St. Vincent and involve my relatives and friends in a similar activity to learn more about the natural environment and what it has to offer.

The John Muir Award involvement included a conservation project focused on planting flowers and building a bird feeder on the Lampeter Campus. The project aimed to support the ecosystem by providing food for pollinators and birds, as well as reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The experience led to the realization that involving young children in similar activities could spark their curiosity and appreciation for nature. This involvement could help children learn about different types of flowers, their growth stages, and the importance of caring for the environment. Additionally, building bird feeders was an enjoyable and novel experience, indicating the potential for engaging children in similar activities.

The John Muir Award was an eye-opening experience that emphasized the importance of the environment and sustainability. It deepened my connection to the natural world and I believe it would benefit anyone looking to engage with nature and contribute positively to the environment, especially in early years settings. This experience has motivated me to create similar opportunities for children in my home country. Rather than just visiting natural areas, such experiences can help children slow down, appreciate nature, and learn about the diverse landscapes around them. I highly recommend the John Muir Award to those seeking personal growth and a chance to make a difference for the environment.

Academic Piece

I am now going to critically evaluate how participating in experiences like the John Muir Award, can uphold the philosophy and principles of early years education for sustainability. I will be looking at what sustainability is, how it links to early years education and provide a few recommendations.

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages individuals to connect with, enjoy, and protect wild places. It was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 and is named after the Scottish-American naturalist John Muir. The John Muir

Award encourages individuals to take part in exploring and discovering their wild places or natural environment and sharing their experiences with others (John Muir Trust, n.d).

Education for Sustainable development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is closely linked to the John Muir Award, which encourages individuals to discover and explore their natural environment and resources that they are interested in (Welsh Government, 2012; Arts *et al.*, 2022). As individuals learn more about the natural environment and its ecological and social value, they can become aware of how their activities impact the environment (Scott, Amel, and Manning, 2014).

Robertson (2021) defines sustainability as the means of enduring into the long term future, it refers to systems and processes that are able to operate and persist on their own over long periods of time with this definition in mind sustainability involves developing and implementing strategies that promote long-term benefits and resilience while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society on a whole.

In order to promote sustainability in the early years, adults can educate children about the importance of their environment and resources (Huggins and Evans, 2018). This can include creating a learning environment that encourages children to explore, discover, conserve, and connect with the natural environment around them while fostering a sense of responsibility toward its preservation (Burke and Crocker, 2020). However, factors such as climate change, poverty, deforestation, biodiversity, pollution, and other environmental issues are impacting the environment (Azevedo, 2020). According to Donaldson (2015), it is considered important for education to be designed in a way that fosters an awareness of sustainability and global citizenship. In this instance early years setting has a key role to play in shaping the mindset of their children, by encouraging them to think beyond their immediate surroundings and to take into account the global impact of their actions. In order to achieve this, the curriculum must be designed to provide children with a comprehensive understanding of the interdependent relationship between the environment, society, and the economy. By doing so, children will be better equipped to make informed decisions that take into

account the long-term consequences of their actions. However, Tinney and Hirst (2018) believe that many practitioners may not prioritize sustainability in their work due to the perceived workload associated with incorporating sustainability into an already demanding curriculum. This suggests that there is a need to raise awareness about the importance of sustainability and to provide support for practitioners to integrate it into their work (Chawla and Gould, 2020). Therefore, it is considered important that the setting implement a whole school approach where every individual works together to promote sustainability in the setting (Lewallen *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, when it comes to sustainability it means finding a balance between meeting the current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Kohon, 2018). It is about making choices that promote the long-term health of the environment, rather than sacrificing the environment for short-term or personal gains.

The John Muir Award is available for individuals to take part in however they believe that children should be at a late stage of primary or secondary school (John Muir Trust, n.d). However, taking part in activities like the John Muir Award can help young children to develop their sense of awe and wonder and also appreciation for the natural environment and the world around them (Washington, 2018). Furthermore, by taking part in the John Muir Award children get to explore, discover and experience the natural environment in an fun, interactive and engaging way which then can spark curiosity in young children (Vallor, 2019). On the other hand, as children take part in the activities they can learn about the natural environment (flowers and trees), its wildlife (bees and worms), and the importance of conservation and preservation (planting fruits or vegetables). Moreover, children can learn that the resources that are available should not be wasted and it can be reused in a different aspect. For example, banana peels should not be wasted, instead can be used as fertilizers for plants. However, children may not have access to materials or resources to engage in sustainable practices, or their parents may not be aware of or interested in promoting sustainable practices (Debrah, Vidal and Dinis, 2021). However, as the new curriculum for Wales stipulates children should be ethical, informed citizens as it can play a role in promoting sustainability at an early age (Welsh Government, n.d) . Therefore, by following the

curriculum practitioners can teach children how to make choices that can benefit them and the environment on a whole. For example, they can teach children to use the three R (renew, reuse and recycle). By teaching and promoting sustainable practices such as recycling, reducing waste, planting food, and conserving energy, early years educators can help lay the foundation for a more sustainable environment (Siraj-Blatchford, Mogharreban and Pak, 2016).

The philosophy and approach of early years education for sustainability places a strong emphasis on empowering young children to shape their future and the future of the environment (Doyd, 2019). Davis and Elliott (2014) states that children are capable of learning the concept of caring for themselves and others however this should be reflected through the setting. It has been recognized that children have the ability to learn and understand concepts, like sustainability and that this concept can be introduced in a way that is interactive and fun for their holistic development. It is stated that children should be allowed to make their own choices (Croke *et al.*, 2021).

According to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 12 every child has the right to participate in decisions that affect them and have their views taken into consideration (Unicef, n.d). Therefore, allowing children to make choices fosters interest and participation. Additionally, Unicef (No Date) states that every child has the right to participate in shaping their own future and should be included in conversations regarding the environment and climate change as this will allow children to be introduced to sustainable practices at an early age.

The importance of sustainability in the early years is viewed as children should be taught about the interconnectedness of all living things, making active discovery and the importance of preserving natural resources for future generations. According to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sustainability is a key principle, which is essential for the well-being of future generations. The act aims to conserve and protect the resources and systems that support human life and well-being for the long-term. It promotes sustainable practices to create a resilient, prosperous, and healthy Wales for generations to come. By introducing these concepts in a meaningful and developmental way, children can learn to value and respect the natural world, and

develop a sense of responsibility for the environment. Early years education for sustainability can take many forms, from outdoor play and learning in nature, to hands-on experiences with gardening and composting or reading stories (Bhagwanji and Born, 2018). Moreover, the United Nations in 2015 introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which are to be met by 2030 (UNESCO, n.d; Samuelson and Park, 2017). However, it is unclear whether we are meeting the deadline with the implementation of these goals. However, enhancing education and training is crucial for sustainable development as it would improve employability, productivity, innovation, and workforce competitiveness and then would be meeting goal 4 (SDG) quality education (Comyn, 2018). Additionally, this approach emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of community and partnership, as children work together to explore and understand sustainability concepts (Trott, 2019). Therefore, by prioritizing early years education for sustainability, practitioners can encourage young children to become advocates for a more sustainable future.

Young children who participate in activities (gardening or making bird feeders or the John Muir Award) that link with sustainability are aligned with Froebel views. Froebel philosophy was built on the idea that children learned from direct experiences, they should be allowed to develop their curiosity by participating in exploration and hands-on learning through play in natural environments (Froebel's, 1826). Moreover, Froebel's ideas align with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which seeks to encourage individuals to take action for a sustainable future for everyone involved (Elliott and Young, 2016). Education for Sustainable Development places emphasizes on the importance of exploration learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are all central to Froebel's approach. Froebel believed that children should be encouraged to engage with the natural world and to connect with their environment (Odegard, 2021). However, there has been a shift in encouraging children to participate in outdoor learning. As technology and indoor activities have become more prevalent, children are spending less time outside, and as a result, missing out on outdoor experiences (Woolley and Griffin, 2015). However, outdoor learning has been shown to have a holistic developmental impact on children's

cognitive, physical, and emotional development (Dankiw *et al.*, 2023). It provides them with opportunities to learn about the natural world, develop their creativity and imagination, and engage in physical activity. It also helps to foster a sense of appreciation, respect for the environment and promotes sustainable developments (Otto and Pensini, 2017). Therefore, children and practitioners can both benefit from spending time outdoors and learning more about their environment. For example: the school can create a greenhouse to allow children to plant different fruits and vegetables.

Additionally, early years settings can also be role models in sustainable practices through their practice, such as reducing energy or water consumption (Hedefalk, Almqvist and Östman, 2015). However, a weakness is that early years settings may face challenges in implementing sustainable practices due to resource limitations. For example, some settings may not have access to outdoor spaces or gardens, which can limit opportunities for nature-based learning and exploration. Additionally, there may be a lack of funding or support for sustainable initiatives, which can make it difficult to invest in eco-friendly materials or infrastructure (González-Ruiz, Botero-Botero and Duque-Grisales, 2018). Early years setting can be a game changer when it comes to sustainability as they can find ways on overcoming the weakness and build on the strengths to improve sustainable practices in their settings.

Salvia *et al.* (2019) and Leicht, Heiss and Byun (2018) shared similar views that there are several ways in which the weaknesses of early years settings in promoting sustainability can be improved. Here are a few recommendations:

1. Collaboration: Early years settings can collaborate with other organizations, such as local environmental groups or community groups to access resources and develop sustainable initiatives. By working together, settings can form a partnership with multiple agencies which would allow for knowledgeable others to share information.

2. Professional development: Staff at early years settings can benefit from professional development opportunities that focus on sustainability. Training and workshops can

provide staff with the knowledge and skills they need to promote sustainability in the classroom and beyond.

3. Advocacy: Early years settings can advocate for sustainable practices and policies at the local, national, and international levels. By speaking out and raising awareness of the importance of sustainability, early years settings can help to create a more sustainable future for all.

In conclusion, the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum for early years education is an essential aspect of promoting a sustainable future for everyone. The John Muir Award is an excellent example of an environmental award scheme that encourages individuals to connect with, enjoy, and protect wild places. Children who participate in the John Muir Award can develop an appreciation for the natural environment, become informed, ethical citizens, and develop skills that link to sustainable development, such as observation, communication, and teamwork. However, early years settings may face challenges in implementing sustainable practices due to resource limitations and practitioners perception of workload. To address these challenges, early years settings can collaborate with other organizations, provide professional development and advocate for sustainable practices and policies at the local, national, and international levels. Therefore, it is recommended that early childhood educators and stakeholders prioritize sustainability in early years settings by adopting a holistic whole school approach that considers the diverse needs and interests of young children. Furthermore, by promoting sustainable practices and behaviors, early years settings can help children develop a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that will serve them in the future.

Thank you for listening to my presentation
Are there any questions?

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