

Nurture through Nature

Introduction

The concept of a sensory class for babies is not a new one. This business plan is proposing an additional aspect to this already popular type of class.

It is known that up to the age of twelve months old a baby's brain almost doubles in size due to the sheer amount of advancements of brain cell connections that happen in this time. This is a direct result of their sensory learning from birth (Baby Sensory, no date). As Maynard and Waters (2014) state, it is also known that the outdoors is a sensory rich environment for infants and therefore children under two deserve to be as much as possible in natural outdoor environments that will challenge their emerging physical and sensory skills. With a wealth of literature on how infants learn through their senses, how the outdoors provides a rich sensory environment for a young child's learning and how beneficial these things are separately to an infant's brain development, Poppy Kneath, the director and founder of Nurture through Nature wondered why the two had not been put together. This is what led Poppy to the idea of a baby sensory class set in a natural outdoor environment using natural resources to maximise the sensory experience for the infant. Whilst there are many different types of classes for babies' development in Swansea, and outdoor activities for toddlers and older children, there is not one type of class for babies under 12 months which is based in the outdoors using only natural resources. This is what makes this business idea unique.

Mission

The mission of Nurture through Nature is to encourage and support parents and carers of babies to help aid their little one's holistic development and sensory learning needs giving inspiration as well as knowledge and understanding of how to do this using sensory resources. This is underpinned by the need to promote the outdoor environment as a sensory rich beneficial environment for infants' holistic development with the hope that the classes will inspire parents and carers to spend as much time in natural outdoor environments as possible with their babies.

Services

To start off, Nurture through Nature will offer 4 classes a week for children from newborn up to 12 months old. All classes will last 45 minutes and are aimed at babies and their parent or carer. Parents/carers can book onto a term of classes which will run for four consecutive weeks choosing either the park based class or the beach based class. The classes will be split for appropriate age ranges as follows:

Newborn up to 6 months: classes will address the delicate needs of a newborn and their parent. Activities will be designed to gently stimulate the baby's learning using song and gentle sensory play with treasure baskets full of appropriate natural resources.

6-12 months: Classes will indulge baby's natural curiosity and offer creative ways of stimulating baby's sensory learning using treasure baskets, songs, parachute play and movement activities as well as offering child led, unstructured time to explore in order to aid physical development.

This is all underpinned by the termly theme of the class which depends on whether the class is beach or park based.

Location

The classes will be held in Swansea in both Brynmill Park and Swansea bay. Parents/Carers can choose either or both locations to book a term of classes giving a choice of different and contrasting outdoor sensory experiences. Depending on the location, the natural resources and theme of the class will be different. For example, the park class will include the use of wood, leaves and flowers, whereas the beach class would include shells, sand and water. As the location for this class is outdoors, it will be made clear to parents/carers that the class will take place in all weathers and that babies should be dressed suitably for this. If it is raining then a large tarpaulin will be put up so that the class is covered from the rain. This will be promoted as an additional sensory aspect of the class as the babies will get to enjoy the sensory experience of the sound of the rain on the tarpaulin above them.

In order to be able to hold a profit-making class in an outdoor location, function rooms have to be hired weekly for each class as if the classes were to be held in these rooms. The two outdoor locations have been chosen due to them having available function rooms to hire. As these rooms will not be used but have to be hired in order for the class to take place in the outdoor locations, they will be available for the storage of prams and possessions during the class. The class held at

Brynmill will use the Brynmill Discovery Centre function room and classes held on Swansea bay will use the 360 café's function room.

Market Analysis

The surrounding areas of Brynmill park and Swansea bay are primarily dominated by young families. Despite the amount of rich natural outdoor environment in Swansea, currently there is no similar class serving parents with babies up to 12 months in the outdoors in the area.

According to Swansea Council (2019), Swansea's last census in 2011 estimated that there are 13,110 children aged between 0-4 in Swansea making up 5.5% of Swansea's overall population. However, Swansea Council (2019) gives some updated facts of Swansea's population, stating that in mid 2017 there was an estimated population of 245,500 in which 2,364 of this number was babies born in 2017. This is an increase of 13,000 people since 2007 giving Swansea an average annual growth of 0.6%.

Nurture through Nature intends to target all of Swansea areas but with specific focus initially on the areas surrounding Brynmill park and Swansea bay that are dominated by young families. This is because Nurture through Nature intends to build a customer base built from a base of happy customers.

Economic Viability

To start the business off, an application has been put through to the Welsh Government for a start-up loan which is a repayable loan available to all persons over 18 who have a viable business idea. It is available for the first 2 years of trading at 6.2 APR and between £500 - £25,000 can be borrowed (Welsh Government, 2019). As detailed below, this business requires very little financial backing to start and consequent maintenance, only £1000 has been applied for. This needs to be repaid within 5 years but as such a small amount of money has been applied for this business intends to repay the whole amount back within the first year of trading. The projected break-even point is 5 weeks. This shows that this business is economically viable

The start-up costs consist of:

Function room hire for both Brynmill Discovery Centre and 360 Café,

Business resources I.e. parachute, Tarpaulin, bubble machine,

Marketing: leaflets

Implementation

Nurture through Nature will start by posting a leaflet to all houses in the surrounding areas of Brynmill park and Swansea bay inviting all families with baby's up to 12 months to an open house session held in both the park and the bay. There will also be leaflets put up in all local doctor's surgeries, community halls and cafes. All attendees to these open house sessions will receive a 20% discount code to book onto their first term.

Sales strategy

Nurture through Natures' sales strategy will be to build upon a base of satisfied customers. Any current customer that successfully refers a friend to Nurture through Nature will receive a 20% discount applicable to their next booked term.

Management Summary

Poppy Kneath is the director and founder of Nurture through Nature. Poppy is about to graduate with a BA Honors in Early Education and Care and previous to this, has spent three years working in a Montessori pre-school. Poppy has a child the age of two and has spent a lot of time going to baby and toddler classes which were all held in an indoor environment. Having studied the early years and finding particular interest in the importance of the outdoors for children's development, the idea for Nurture through Nature came about. There seemed an obvious gap in the baby class market to Poppy not only from a business point of view but also from the point of view of an early years graduate. Poppy felt passionate about the importance of promoting the outdoors and felt that there was nothing out there for babies that utilized the outdoors as the rich and stimulating environment that it is for babies' sensory needs and holistic development.

Part 2

Currently, there are many baby sensory classes available. These sensory classes for babies are a modern but beneficial concept for baby's holistic development as it is known that in the earliest years of life, a baby learns about the world around them through their senses (Goble et al., 2015). Perhaps this modern concept of sensory classes for babies has developed since perceptions of babies have advanced to them being seen as complex beings that interact with, and subtly adjust to, the world around them through their senses (Philbin et al., 2000). Murphy and Moon (2010) continue on this point and add that early sensory experience underpins a child's perceptions, values and understandings of the world. This is because what a child has enjoyed most in the earliest years of life will be retained in long term memory. This results in some adults recreating their earliest sensory experiences through guiding new generations of children. This is what links the outdoor element of the discussed business concept. The previous statement made by Murphy and Moon (2010) holds importance, as it shows that if a child's early sensory experiences have frequently taken place in the outdoors, then this will instill a love of the outdoors which will be passed down through guiding future generations of children. However, whilst there are many sensory classes to benefit a baby's sensory learning and development, there is an obvious lack of these classes for babies that take place in the outdoors. Gascoyne (2012) suggests that perhaps this is because until very recently, there has been a lack of understanding of how babies' brains work resulting in babies being viewed as helpless beings that need to be protected from the environment. However, new understandings have been gained through advances in neuro science. It is now understood that this outdated perception needs to be challenged so that babies are thought of as sophisticated sensory beings in need of this important early sensory stimulation.

Fjortoft (2001) states that the outdoors as a learning environment provides opportunity for children's holistic development in various ways. In fact, research has shown that children who have had greater outdoor experience have shown more advanced skills in play, concentration, creativity and motor skills. There have also been studies which have shown that children who have had greater outdoor experience tend to develop less infections and allergies (Bilton, 2010). Adding to this, White (2014) states that babies belong in the outdoors. This is because babies exist in a sensorial state of experiencing the here and now. The sensory experience they gain from their surroundings affects how they experience life and make sense of the world around them. As each sensory system develops rapidly in the first year of life according to experience, frequently offering

rich sensory environments to be in such as the outdoors, results in more opportunity being given for a baby to learn about the world around them. White (2014) further states that with the outdoors offering such a rich sensorial environment, for example, the warm or cold feel of the breeze, the smell and taste of the air and the play of light and shadow, it shows itself to be the perfect environment for a baby's sensory development.

Adding to the list of benefits the outdoors offers for babies, Hughes (2012) makes the point that from a Montessorian perspective, the outdoors provides an infant freedom to move and explore. As babies tend to spend a lot of time in their first year of life being transported around and moved from pram to high chair to car seat, their movement is restricted resulting in reduced physical development happening in this first year of life. The Montessori approach offers an effective way to counteract this in allowing babies plenty of free, unstructured time in a natural outdoor environment where these valuable opportunities arise to freely move and explore. Striniste and Moore (1989) agree with this adding that from a Piagetian perspective, the sensorimotor stage is thought of as the most important learning stage for a child. Within this stage, a sturdy foundation is built for the rest of a child's life. Effective sensorimotor learning must take place in a physical context where there is plenty of room to move, as movement is a basic element of human development. If there is too much restriction on a baby's physical development, the baby is prevented from developing their physical skills which in turn results in restricting a sturdy foundation from being built from their earliest sensorimotor development.

More recently, Waite (2011) furthers this by adding that in today's modern society, due to changes in life styles such as parental work patterns and heightened concerns for safety, children between the ages of 0-3 are in danger of having very little contact with the natural world. When they do go outside, it is often being pushed in a pram or strapped in a car in order to make journeys quicker for the fast-paced society they live in. This all results in a separation from the natural world and children right from babyhood are missing out on everything the outdoors has to offer. This would suggest that the business proposal in discussion would be of benefit for babies' development especially in this modern society as it not only incorporates the sensory exploration that the class supplies, but also as it is based in a natural outdoor environment, there is an added sensory aspect as well as the opportunity and time being given to freely move and explore the natural surroundings that the outdoors has to offer.

Another aspect of this concept that makes it unique is that it is not weather permitting. The class will go ahead in all weathers and this will be promoted as an additional aspect to the sensory experience provided for the babies in the class. Maynard and Waters (2007) state that the natural outdoor environment is the optimal environment for sensory learning to take place yet it does not seem to be utilized as this and is therefore a missed opportunity. If infants are in the outdoors, they are able to experience the world first hand and experience natural occurrences such as shadows, the weather and the changing seasons. This all adds to a sensory experience for a baby. Ergler et al. (2013) however, put forward a barrier for young children being in the outdoors as what parents believe is unsuitable weather. This understanding of weather being unsuitable needs to be challenged and being in the outdoors in all weathers needs to be promoted to parents by early years educators in a bid to change this common belief. Otherwise young children are missing out on valuable outdoor experiences, as what is believed to be suitable weather only occurs infrequently throughout the year. This is what the discussed business idea intends to do.

However, Ernst (2014) disagrees with the previous suggestion of changing parents understanding of what is suitable weather by sharing study findings that suggest that in efforts to increase the use of natural outdoor environments for children's learning and development, the focus should not be on influencing beliefs and values of parents about the outdoors. Rather, the focus should be on promoting practical ideas that reduce what is seen by parents as barriers to being in the outdoors in winter weather. For example, waterproof clothing and finding sheltered areas. This links with the discussed business idea as previously stated it does not see weather as a barrier, instead it sees all weather as additional to the sensory experience a baby may have in the class providing suitable attire is worn and shelter is utilized if needed. This all-weather permitting attitude of the class is intended to inspire parents that weather is not a barrier to being in the outdoors, but instead an additional experience that the outdoors offers.

A further aspect of this business concept that offers a uniqueness is that it strives to use and promote natural resources for the babies to explore freely from the given environment. Not only for the developmental benefits they provide, but also from a sustainable living perspective. Davis (1998) made the point that children are learning to be consumers from an early age, to expect instant entertainment from their plastic toys and to be stimulated by the trivial instead of the natural. The time has come for the early childhood field to take on the environmental concerns that are ever growing and take a leadership role in an area in which an early years educator could make a difference, by equipping children from the very beginning of life with the skills, knowledge,

understanding and values necessary to change current patterns of unsustainable actions. This is what this class intends to do by using natural resources and promoting these rather than electronic, plastic ones, in the hope to change the current unsustainable, consumerist attitudes that are being passed down to future generations.

More recently, Howe (2005) suggests that parents must be forgiven for thinking that their baby's development is best supported through buying into the ever-expanding range of man-made plastic toys as they claim to be specifically tailored to a baby's developmental needs. However, there needs to be a concerted effort made by everyone working in the field of early years to change this perception and promote the use of natural resources for babies to explore. This is because natural materials are open ended and have unique shapes, sizes and textures. This richness and variation cannot be replicated by a manufactured toy. In aid of this need to promote the use of natural resources for babies, Thornton and Brunton (2018) suggest that inspiration should be taken from the educators of Reggio Emilia who suggest that natural resources are intelligent materials that although come at no cost, are priceless for an infant's cognitive development. This way of thinking of natural resources should be endorsed to parents from the beginning of a child's life in order for children to benefit from the sensorial rich experiences, to endorse sustainability and reduce the buying of plastic.

Hughes (2015) continues on this point and adds that we currently live in a world of a two-dimensional screen to be tapped and swiped. However, in order for babies to develop their thinking, concentration and learning skills, they need unique three-dimensional objects to taste, touch, smell and feel. Due to the unique textures, smells, shapes, sizes and colors of natural resources, these are the best kinds of resources to allow for all of these sensory explorations. Elliot and Davis (2008) agree, and add that there is a growing concern amongst early childhood educators that in this modern technological society, children from birth upwards are losing touch with nature and are therefore being denied the many benefits that the outdoors has to offer, including the promotion and practice of sustainable living. This is why the discussed business concept is needed in today's society in the hope to not only service babies sensory learning needs, but also to change parent's perceptions with the ultimate aim of these new understandings of the importance of the outdoors being passed down to future generations.

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