

The opportunities and challenges faced when imbedding ESDGC within the curriculum

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO for short is responsible for the coordination of international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication (The Higher Education Academy, (2012). The Higher Education Academy (2012) further suggests that UNESCO believe that sustainable development is about teaching children to meet the needs of the present without comprising those of the future generations. Children need to learn how to live with the current social and environmental problems to learn how to live sustainably (The Higher Education Academy, 2012). Also, according to the Welsh Assembly Government (2017) Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship which is referred to as ESDGC for short, is an educational framework which aims to teach learners about how decisions have an impact on the environment. Davies (1998) also adds that environmental education involves children, communities and

environment.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2017) further adds that ESDGC also aims to challenge learners to determine what contribution can be made to other people's lives. Also, within the curriculum there are seven key areas of development to ensure that children learn through a wide range of areas which are the natural environment, consumption and waste, climate change, wealth and poverty, identity and culture, choices and decisions and health. For ESDGC to be recognized within the curriculum today the Welsh Assembly Government have produced the Common Understanding for schools document aimed at practitioners to help them imbed ESDGC within the curriculum (The Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). Also, produced was The Well-being of Future Generations Act Wales in 2015 to improve lives of the present and future generations of Wales (Welsh Government, 2015). Davies (1998) supports this by stating that the world is not given to us by our parents but it is lent to us by our children. This can suggest that children are

essential in the future and teaching them early on will have a positive impact on the future generations (Davies, 1998).

However, there are many issues involving the deliverance and effectiveness of ESDGC within the curriculum today. The challenges and opportunities of imbedding ESDGC within the curriculum which this article will explore are a pupil led approach, the use of the outdoors within the curriculum and whether or not ESDGC is perceived as too difficult for young children. I will be writing this article from the Welsh perspective which includes the Foundation Phase. Although there will be clear links to international approaches to support my findings through the article. This is to ensure that comparison are made between Wales and other educational approaches. (Unicef, no date) supports this through article 29 of the United Nation Rights of the Child as article 29 highlights that all children should be provided with an education to foster and develop abilities to full. The education must also encourage the child's respect for those around them, other cultures and the environment (Unicef, no date). This article will also be supported by the Eco Schools organization in relation to how ESDGC can be delivered to children within today's curriculum.

The Eco-Schools Organization

Eco Schools (no date) details that Eco Schools is a global organization which engages millions of children across the 64 countries who are involved within the organization. This makes the organization the largest program used by schools in the world (Eco-schools, no date). The Eco Schools organization aims to improve children's skills by raising the awareness of environmental awareness and improves the school environment for both children and practitioners. Eco Schools help schools to deliver this to children by providing seven step processes to follow to achieve the Eco Schools status (Eco Schools, no date). The seven steps are eco committee, environmental review, action plan, monitoring and evaluation, informing and involving, linking to the curriculum and eco code (Eco Schools, no date).

Eco Schools (no date) further adds that the organisation offers an award scheme to schools which involves the schools obtaining different coloured flags which enables the school to reach different levels of the Eco School status. There are three different awards which are the green flag, bronze flag and silver flag. A school will only obtain the green flag if the school has achieved all seven steps set out by the organization (Eco Schools, no date).

There are many benefits and challenges to Eco Schools that schools face when participating (Eco Schools, no date). However, these will be outlined in further detail throughout the article.

Allowing children to participate in a pupil led approach

One opportunity of integrating ESDGC within the curriculum is it allows children to participate in a pupil lead approach. The Eco Schools organisation which aims to imbed ESDGC within the curriculum for children outlines this key point in the sixth step. Eco Schools (no date) outlines in the sixth step that children should participate in pupil led activities to improve the school's environmental performance.

This can closely link to Foundation Phase which is the curriculum in Wales for children aged three to seven years old. The Welsh Assembly Government (2015) implies that the Foundation Phase allows children to participate in first hand experimental learning through the means of play. Through play children are given the opportunity to practice ideas and take risks to overcome problems. This is highlighted through the Outdoor Learning Handbook in which the (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009) clearly outlined that outdoor learning should not be risk free but should have considered and evaluated risks that children can undertake. This is like the Forest School approach as (Knight, 2013) also

suggest that within the Forest School approach children also learn how to take evaluated risks whilst keeping themselves safe. Knight (2013) goes onto further imply that by doing these children learn to respect the environment.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2015) further adds that first hand experiences allow children to gain an understanding of themselves and gain a deeper understanding of the environment and world they live in. This is supported by Piagets theory as Piaget stated that children are little scientists, who explores and experiments with the world around them (Olley, no date). Piaget's theory is different when compared to Vygotsky's' as (Olley, no date) also argues that Vygotsky's theory was based on children learning through social interactions. Vygotsky's theory has the adult as they key role in children's learning and development (Olley, no date). However, Montessori's theory is based on little input by the teacher and how the teacher should teach little but observe a lot (Taylor,2013). Also, the role of Montessori teacher is different when compared to a teacher in a mainstream class as (Association Montessori International of United States, 2017) discusses how a Montessori teacher is a guide for the child as well as maintaining the environment in which the child works. This can suggest that the children oversee their own learning and make their own decisions within education (Association

Montessori International of the United States, 2017).

This can be associated with the Eco Committee and school council which is imbedded within the Eco Schools Organisations. This aims to allow children to voice opinions and have an input on the education they receive and the school in which they learn in (Eco Schools, no date). Eco Schools (no date) further adds that the Eco Committee should meet formally at least once per term. One important point highlighted through this is at least one child per class should be part of the committee to make it equal for all children (Eco Schools, no date). This helps integrate ESDGC within the curriculum as children can come up with ideas of their own to have an impact on the decisions made. This can be supported by (Engdahl and Rabušicová, 2010) as within this study it was discovered that parents were asking the question 'why do we ask children?' and in response to this a child responded, 'why not ask we know things to?' (Engdahl and Rabušicová, 2010). This can suggest for ESDGC to be implemented within the curriculum then children need to have an input to. This also can imply that children's voices should be heard at all times.

Allowing children time to explore the outdoors

Learning Outside the Classroom (2008) implies that the outdoors plays an essential role in children's learning and how the outdoor classroom enables children to experience the nature around them. Estyn (2011) cited in The RSPB (2012) further discusses how most practitioners have discussed how the outdoors promotes children's engagement and improves enjoyment within their learning. The Welsh Assembly Government (2015) links to what (Esyn, 2011) has discussed as the Foundation Phase outlines that children need to experience indoor and outdoor environments to aid with learning and understanding (Welsh Assembly Government, 2015).

There are two international approaches which place clear emphasise on the outdoors as a means importance to children's learning and development. The two approaches are the Forest Schools approach and Froebel's Kindergarten approach.

Knight (2009) suggests that a forest school is different when compared to a mainstream school and how it is the practice undertaken by the school that makes it a forest school regardless of whether it is forest or not (Knight, 2009). This due to the setting following the forest school rules to ensure that children are getting taught the forest school way (Knight, 2009).

Also, a key issue highlighted by this approach is that there is no such thing as bad weather or clothing. This can imply that children are out in all sorts of weather with the correct clothing to do so (Knight, 2009). From experiences, I have undertaken within practice today in Wales if it is playtime and the weather is slightly bad then the protocol is not take the children outside. I have witnessed this where there has only be a drizzle of rain then the children are not allowed outside to play.

However, this is far from the Forest School approach as the Institute for Outdoor Learning (no date) also supports this by further adding children who attend forest schools are always outdoors. That forest schools are not done as an add on subject it an education in itself. Children who attend forest schools participate in long term sessions no just one-off sessions (Institute for Outdoor Learning, no date). This can suggest why the Forest School approach is so successful due to children being in the outdoor environment all the time this is supported by (Institute for Outdoor Learning, no date). However, this is not the case in Wales today as children are restricted when using the outdoors. Although, the Foundation Phase (2015) states that children need to learn in both indoor and outdoor environments there is still room for improvement. This may influence the success of the Forest School approach in Wales as

(O'Brian, 2008) indicates that schools in Wales and within the rest of the United Kingdom only tend to send children to Forest Schools for a short period of time usually 6-12 months depending on the school and that children only attend for a morning or afternoon (O'Brian, 2008). This is completely different to the Scandavian approach of Forest School and this could be seen to be the reason why it is so successful there and not here.

The second influential approach is the theory in which Froebel introduced with the Kindergarten approach. Tovey (2013) outlines the importance of movement by discussing movement is essential for brains and bodies Froebel emphasised this point by highlighting there is a clear connection between movement, thought and feeling (Tovey, 2013). Froebel was the founder of the Kindergarten approach which was first founded in 1837. The Kindergarten approach allows children to grow and develop a connection with the garden and the nature in which surround their environment (Tovey, 2013). Children these days do not connect with their environment enough compared to children from other countries as (Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2016) discusses how less than 10% of children play in natural environment today this suggests that there has been over a 75% decline over the past 40 years (Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2016). This can also be seen in Wales as well as (IPOS,

2017) states that 29% of children under five in Wales are not playing outdoors every day. This is due to the lack of resources and the adult's attitudes towards the outdoor environment (IPOS, 2017).

Associating it back to the Eco School Organisation outdoor education is clearly emphasized through the organisation. (Eco Schools, no date) supports this by adding children worldwide take part in an outdoor classroom day. This allows children to celebrate and inspire outdoor play and allow children to work outdoors all day. This can be seen a criticism as the outdoor classroom is only for one day. Therefore within Wales today through the successful future documents issued by Donaldson (2015) the curriculum in Wales should teach children to become four things ambitious, ethical citizens, enterprising and healthy beings. Paying close attention to children becoming healthy the report outlines that children need to participate in physical activity (Donaldson, 2015). This can suggest children should have the opportunity to participate in physical activities outdoors and in turn becoming one with nature. This will then in turn help children learn ESDGC as children need to learn to look after the environment for the future (Donaldson, 2015).

Is ESDGC too difficult for children?

The misconception of ESDGC being too difficult for young children is the reason why some children do not have ESDGC within the curriculum. (Tinney, 2013 cited in Boyd, no date) empathizes this point by stating that ESDGC is often perceived as too difficult for young children to understand. Also, how organisations centered around ESDGC often focus on older children compared to younger due this reason (Tinney, 2013 cited in Boyd, no date). Estyn's baseline report in 2006 can support this by further adding that from inspections undertaken it was found that secondary schools were much better at delivering ESDGC to children compared to primary schools (Estyn, 2006). Although, (Boyd, no date) highlights the Eco Schools approach aims to target children of any age and that children should have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment close to them and at a global scale Boyd (no date) furthers suggests that the Eco School Organisation believes that all children regardless age or ability should have the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding and the skills needed to thrive in the future and succeed in a more sustainable world (Boyd, no date).

From further research undertaken by (Tinney, 2013 cited in Boyd, no date) it was found that

teachers believe that there is not enough time within the curriculum to properly deliver ESDGC to children. Also, how there is a lack of resources tailored to young children. This can suggest teachers have very little to go on in regard to ESDGC (Tinney, 2013 cited in Boyd, no date).

However, if ESDGC is too difficult for young children to understand why is it so successful in Wales. Merriman et al. (2014) indicates that out of all the schools who participate in the Eco Schools approach Wales is the most successful. Currently Wales have 430,000 schools who are registered and have 8% of the worlds green flags. Also, how the oraganisations has strong impact on social, environmental and economic issues across the whole of Wales (Merriman et al. 2014). Merriman et al. (2014) further adds that this successfulness is due to the project officers who deliver the support needed for the school. This can suggest that community and a whole school approach is important when delivering ESDGC to young children. (Merriman et al. 2014).

In relation to what has been mentioned above (Ferreira et al. 2006) implies that the whole school approach allows children to recognize that sustainability and ESDGC is important through all aspects of school life. Also, how the whole school approach provides schools with the opportunity to practice what they preach

(Ferreira et al. 2006). Furthermore, in association to the Kindergarten approach which has previously been discussed the Kindergarten approach places a clear emphasise on the influence that the community has on children's education. (Tovey, 2013). Also, how Froebel created a community of workshops which had an impact on the successfulness of ESDGC being delivered. Bennel (2012) supports this by adding communication and sharing ideas between staff and children is important in relation to effectiveness of ESDGC. Students should have the opportunity to participate in community work and global community work to aid development of the skills needed for the future to live in a sustainable world (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)

The Eco Schools organisation also places a clear emphasise on community involvement as (Eco Schools, no date) suggests that in for schools to achieve a flag award children must participate in work which involves the whole school and the community. Also, how community projects play a role in the school achieving the awards. This can clearly have been seen in step five of achieving the awards as the children need to inform and involve the rest of the school as well as the community to ensure movement onto the sixth step and one step closer to the flag (Eco Schools, no date).

This article has given an account of the opportunities and challenges faced by practitioners in Wales today in association to delivering ESDGC to children. Also, explored throughout the article is the relevance these challenges and opportunities have on Wales today and how they compare to international approaches. It has also been discussed how the international approaches can be used to benefit ESDGC being imbedded within the curriculum. Throughout the article there has also been clear links to legislations, theorists, educational approaches and the impact these have on the effectiveness of ESDGC being delivered to children in Wales today. For further information please follow the reference list to help you with any further questions!

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