

Good afternoon, my name is Linsey Smith. Over the past 3 weeks I have been taking part in the John Muir Award. The John Muir Award is an UK environmental award created to celebrate the environmental achievements of the Scottish born American naturalist John Muir. The award has been designed for individuals of all backgrounds to connect, enjoy and care for wild environments. The award has been set up with 4 purposes, to discover, explore, to conserve and lastly to share your experience about a wild place. Today I will share my experience with you.

Previously one of the largest opencast mines in Europe, and now one of the 3 racecourses in Wales, Ffos Las has had numerous changes over the last 50 years. Located within this area, I chose to discover is my back garden. Over the past few years my garden has been a sanctuary, due to covid. This area is a place, which we as a family can relax and enjoy each other's company in a busy world. It is tranquil and enables a sensory experience, due to its colours, aromas and the sound of bird song.

On exploring this area further, I became aware of the vast array of biodiversity, that ranged from numerous insects, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, flowers and shrubs. This range of life expanded from ants, flies, magpies, black birds and the usual cats and dogs to buzzards, red kites, toads, lizards and bats. At every stage of the day, different bird sounds can be heard, from the dawn and dusk chorus of the black bird, robin and song thrush to the midday song of the sky lark high in the sky. Throughout this explorational experience, it came to my attention that there has been a reduction in both bee and butterfly activity within my garden this year.

As my conservation action I have taken it upon myself to try and overcome this issue. Although previously I have ensured that there is a high number of both bee and butterfly friendly plants such as lavender, and sweet peas within the garden, I recognised that the waterlogged area at the rear fence line was a bare and barren area covered in gravel.

To rectify this issue, my husband and I decided to create 2 vertical gardens and an insect hotel. Within this process, sustainability was our focus, by utilising reclaimed items from neighbours and repurposing others. We created 2 structures, one made of the pallet secured in place with 2 fence posts and another attached to the garden fence, comprising of 2 re-used fence posts, wooden bed slats and 3 pre-used plastic troughs. After ensuring both were structurally stable, we continued to wood stain the structures with environmentally friendly wood stain. On completion, we attached the weed membrane to the interior of the pallet and proceeded to plant both structures with insect friendly flowers and herbs.

The insect hotel was however a purchased build your own kit. On completion, it came to my attention that although this product was intended for environmental purposes, it contained a vast amount of single-use plastic bags to hold the individual components. Although they were recyclable, these items could have been easily replaced with cardboard alternatives.

I have shared this experience in practice with my husband, and verbally with our daughters and other family members. I have additionally shared photographs of the finished product to my neighbours.

Although I have a hands-on approach to sustainability, and environmental issues, I still believe that as a family we can do more.

Living in Wales has caused us as a family to be less efficient where water conservation is concerned. Having previously living in Cyprus and having person experience of water shortages and the effects of wildfires due to drought, I should use this experience wisely. As our next conservational task, we are going to prepare the area for water conservation, with the introduction of a water butt.

This is the end of my reflection, I will now move onto my critical evaluation, by discussing how environmental experiences, such as the John Muir Award (JMA) can support Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC), the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of the practitioner within the Early Years.

Tinney And Hurst (2017) state that nature related moments, during outdoor experiences, have beneficial outcomes on many aspects of a child's development. Stating, that nature-based learning provides practitioners with opportunities to develop a child's eco-literacy and social- emotional development.

Before continuing it is essential that clarity is made on the definitions of both Sustainability and Global Citizenship.

Greenpeace UK, (2023), explains that sustainability is the ability to support or maintain a continuous process over time, by ensuring that Economical, Environmental and Social Sustainability are supported equally. When nurtured, individuals can meet their present needs, without compromising the needs of future generations. However, **Keeling and Lehman (2018)** believe that due to the Anthropocentric behaviour of some countries, their immediate economic needs outweigh environmental concerns **(Cocks & Simpson, 2015)**. Although not addressed directly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, supports this behaviour, by prioritising the needs of human beings over that of the needs for sustainability **(Elliot & Davies, 2020)**.

Purvis et al (2018) discusses sustainability as a three-legged stool concept, stating that Economical, Environmental and Social Sustainability, are interconnected and that to attain a stable system, all

three must be balanced, as each leg is essential. Tinney, (2020), explains this by stating that when there is an imbalance, the weakness caused can compromise the system, making it unstable.

Oxfam GB (2024) explains that as Global citizens, it is our responsibility to uphold human rights, to be compassionate informed individuals, who understand global issues and take positive actions that promote a real-world impact. UNICEF (2019) states that global citizenship, enables UNCRC articles 3, 6 and 12 to be achieved, by ensuring that every child has a voice in all decisions which affect their best interest and development.

Due to this interconnection, the United Nations recognised a need to establish an international blueprint for sustainability. They proceeded to set out the SDGs to address global challenges within the three areas of sustainability and create a fair, just and impartial world by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024). These 17 goals became a global framework, impacting both local and global aspect, to achieve sustainability, therefore the Welsh Government (2008b) encompassed them within the ESDGC. Although the SDGs are necessary, some however are unachievable by 2030, due to the vastness of the situation. These include Goal's 1 and 2 for zero poverty and hunger, however, when equipped with international dedicated and decisive action, these challenges can be overcome (Murphy & Waters-Davies, 2022).

Due to Wales being at the forefront of Sustainable Practice, attributing to Wales's, One Wales: One Planet scheme (Welsh Gov, 2008a) the Welsh government recognised the importance of ESDGC and made it compulsory for every educational setting, stated within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), Environmental (Wales) Act 2016 and the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Gov 2022 & 2024).

(Tinney, 2023) explains that ESDGC prepare children to become responsible global citizens. Integrating the three aspects of sustainability and the awareness, critical thinking and action required, to become a responsible global citizen, within an interconnected world. As described by Symons (1996) the ESDGC enables children to feel a sense of self-worth, confidence and involvement. It has been designed to encourage a sense of empathy and responsibility towards human beings, non-human and planetary needs (Dyment et al., 2013).

Alternatively known as Early Childhood Education for Sustainability and Early Childhood Education for Global Citizenship, the ESDGC has combined both, due to their interconnection (Tinney & Merriman, 2018., and Hedefalk et al., 2014).

Tinney & Hurst, (2017) states, that prior to the rollout of the new Curriculum, practitioners encountered difficulties in incorporating ESDGC as a subject, due to the previous curriculum's inflexibility and time constraints. However, the exclusion of ESDGC within the curriculum could also be associated with the Biophobia and significant life experiences of practitioners, in addition to the lack of resources, due to funding issues or space (D'Amore & Chawla, 2020).

However, Tinney, (2023) states that ESDGC should not be classed as an additional subject but belongs in everyday life and practice. Due to ESDGC's flexibility and that of the new curriculum, there is now the ability for it to be incorporated in a cross-curricula manner, therefore elevating time constraints (Welsh Gov, 2020., and Strafford-Smith, 2016).

ESTYN, (2014) believes that the inclusion of ESDGC within the curriculum is essential, to overcome global issues and to contribute to a

sustainable world for future generations. In addition, ESDGC enables settings to achieve both UNCRC article 29 and SDG 4, where all children will be provided with an education to promote a better understanding of the needs of the world for current and future generations (Welsh Gov, 2008b). Although this is paramount within Wales, it is however difficult for other countries to achieve, due to inequalities (Gill, 2021).

The JMA encourages individuals to focus on natural and wild places. It provides a hands-on, project-based learning approach, in which individuals gain real-world experiences (John Muir Trust, 2019).

Incorporating environmental awards such as the JMA, provides both children and practitioners with a means of gaining sustainability and global citizenship awareness. Although, the JMA ethos aligns with that of ESDGC, it does not support Global citizenship in a modern sense, due to generation related issues such as the beliefs of colonisation (Ferdinade, 2022). It does however embody core values, such as environmental awareness, sustainability practice and conservation.

The JMA reinforces the Reggio Emilia Approach, where emphasis is made on the importance of collaboration and environmental responsibility (Edwards and Gandini, 2018).

Through its discover, explore, conserve and share concept, JMA provides a structured, yet adaptable scheme, which embraces the 'Unique Child' approach (Samuelsson & Park, 2017).

Aligning with the beliefs of both John Dewey and Te Whāriki, that when children are encouraged to explore natural environments, it enables them to foster both a sense of belonging and responsibility to the world, human and non-human aspects (Tarrant & Thiele, 2016 & Ritchie, 2018).

& 2021). Although no reference is made within the JMA to the Early Years, it does however recognise the importance of early introduction to natural environment and conservation.

Gericke (2022) maintains, that to achieve an effective sustainability approach, it must be a whole school commitment. Within this situation, practitioners are in a prime location to nurture and scaffold a sustainability mindset, providing children with opportunities to observe sustainable practice within a real-life setting, as suggested within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Armstrong, 2015., & MacDonald, 2015).

However, some practitioners find approaching this topic difficult, this may be due to a lack of self-confidence, a lack of experience in the subject, or a fixed mindset due to a negative emotional attribution to nature (Olivos-Jara et al., 2020). To overcome these issues, as part of their professional development, practitioners should be provided with an opportunity to access environmental awards such as the JMA, in addition to shared experience (King, 2021). This award process enables practitioners to reflect on their professional practice (Boyd et al., 2018).

To accomplish this whole school approach, Eco Schools (2023) believes that platforms such as Eco clubs and School Councils are vital. Having the ability to raise awareness in an environment which promotes child empowerment, inclusion and hands-on learning. However, groups such as these can be somewhat problematic, due to time-constraints, resources, and the limited impact that can be made due to unrealistic ideas (Elliot and Davies, 2024). Wals et al., (2024) states that, within a whole school approach there can be additional challenges, such as practitioners lack engagement, causing, individuals with biophilia and a

passion for sustainability, inevitably being tasked with mentoring the topic (Pauw et al. 2015).

Despite this fact, unifying environment approaches such as the JMA and ESDGC, enables practitioners to provide open-ended, child-led, holistic outdoor learning experiences. Davies & Elliot (2014) discuss that practitioners need to be mindful on how they approach the topic of sustainability. Providing an Eco pedagogy, through schemes such as the JMA, enables practitioners to tackle issues such as climate change and Eco diversity through means of the curiosity approach (Bourn, 2021).

Demonstrated within the authors activity, these issues have been addressed within a cross-curricula manner. Providing opportunities for children to discover local ecology through the means of gardening and conservation (Seeley, 2024). When provided with a project-based approach, it enables children to explore and investigate in a child-led holistic manner (Hirst, 2018). When provided with holistic learning opportunities, Steiner explains, it enables children to become empowered, empathetic and informed citizens (Sele, 2021).

Within the activity, 5 SDGs have been achieved. These include Zero Hunger, Quality of Education, Climate Action, Life on land and Partnership. Although zero hunger has previously been discussed, by educating children in the importance of habitats, climate change and the importance of bees to the food chain, this goal can be achievable in the future (Patel et al, 2020). Due to the sharing aspect of the JMA, children and practitioners are provided with the opportunity to become a partner for the goals by sharing their experiences.

As practitioners, opportunities like these are important in gaining an understanding of sustainability, however in addition a settings

environment is also essential. Hadland (2020) explains that by following an eco-friendly approach, like Montessori, children become accustomed to playing and interacting with natural materials, such as pinecones, shells, and stones (Boyd et al, 2018). With the inclusion of items such as these, it enables the reduction in the quantity of plastic within the setting. Many practitioners will dispute this fact, by stating that plastic provides a durable, cost-effective and hygienic addition to the setting (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014). However, plastic items especially single-use plastics are a significant concern due to its environmental impact. Plastic may be a durable, cost-effective item; however, it does not possess the biodegradable qualities of natural materials, which are essential for a sustainable healthier planet (Goodall, 2021).

The authors activity demonstrates to both children and practitioners the flexibility of repurposing reclaimed natural materials such as wooden pallets and bed slats. Johnson & Watts (2019) explains, that if children are shown that items can be utilized in different means, it can spark their curiosity, resulting in a higher success rate of future generations repurposing and upcycling items instead of replacing (Davis, 2010 & 2015).

As discussed within this presentation, the link between ESDGC and environmental awards such as the JMA, provides both practitioners and children the means to approach the subjects of Sustainability and Global Citizenship in a hands-on approach. It is essential that practitioners incorporate ESDGC into everyday life and within a cross-curricular manner, which the JMA can achieve. Although the JMA has its generation-related issues regarding global citizenship, it does however incorporate sustainability, CDGs and the need for collaboration of others. When children are provided with confident interactions with practitioners

on topics such as sustainability, they are provided with the voice to enable positive change for future generations.

Thank you for listening to my presentation.

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