



Early Years Education and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) - Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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Summary - *Crynodeb*

This article outlines the work being undertaken by the School of Early Years at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) to engage with Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC). The article provides a context for the ESDGC agenda in Wales and then explores the practical initiatives undertaken by the School of Early Years to develop student awareness and participation in ESDGC discourse. The article makes links to relevant ESDGC and early years' literature and presents evidence to support the approach taken to engage students with ESDGC, and to support these students to be confident to explore sustainable development concepts with the young children they work with in the future.

Amlinella'r erthygl hon y gwaith a wneir gan Ysgol Blynyddoedd Cynnar PCYDDS i ymgysylltu ag Addysg ar gyfer Datblygu Cynaliadwy a Dinasyddiaeth Fyd-eang (ADCDF). Mae'r erthygl yn darparu cyd-destun ar gyfer yr agenda ADCDF yng Nghymru ac wedyn yn archwilio'r mentrau ymarferol yr ymgymeir â nhw gan yr Ysgol Blynyddoedd Cynnar i ddatblygu ymwybyddiaeth myfyrwyr a'u cyfranogiad mewn trafodaethau ar ADCDF. Mae'r erthygl yn cysylltu â llenyddiaeth ADCDF a blynyddoedd cynnar berthnasol ac yn cyflwyno tystiolaeth i gefnogi'r dull a ddefnyddir i ymgysylltu myfyrwyr ag ADCDF, ac sy'n cefnogi'r myfyrwyr hyn i fod yn hyderus i archwilio cysyniadau datblygu cynaliadwy gyda'r plant ifanc y byddant yn gweithio ganddynt yn y dyfodol.

Keywords: ESDGC, early years, sustainability, ESD

Introduction

The School of Early Years at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes linked to early years education and care. For over eight years the School has actively engaged with the international and local sustainability agenda as well as the ESDGC context in Wales. In doing so the school has developed a suite of multi-disciplinary modules and experiences designed to engage Education for Sustainability as well actively develop students' confidence to develop ESDGC within their future work with young children. This article outlines the School of Early Years approach in the context of both Education for Sustainability and early years education literature.

A brief overview of the ESDGC context in Wales

Since devolution and the Government of Wales Act 1998, Wales has placed a duty on promoting sustainable development across different departments. The National Assembly for Wales (2000) published its Sustainable Development Scheme Learning to Live Differently followed by an Action Plan in 2001 to implement the Scheme. According to several authors, one means of promoting sustainable development is through education (Huckle & Sterling, 1996; Davis, 2015) and the Welsh Government has supported the development of ESDGC across the formal and informal education sectors, from early

childhood to adult programmes, to support participation and understanding of sustainable development. In 2006, the Welsh Assembly's Department of Education and Lifelong Learning published *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship - A Strategy for Action* (DELLS, 2006). Since then it has also provided several other documents which support specific education sectors develop ESDGC (for example DCELLS, 2008a; DCELLS, 2008b). Guidance in Wales suggests that there should be commitment to sustainability across the whole setting and ESDGC in Wales approaches the teaching and learning of this area in seven interconnected themes: Choices and Decisions; Consumption and Waste; Health; Identity and culture; Climate Change; Wealth and Poverty; The Natural Environment. The Department of Children Education and Life Long Learning, DCELLS (2008a) *Guidance to Teacher Trainees and New Teachers* highlights that ESDGC is:

'about the things that we do every day. It is about the big issues in the world - such as climate change, trade, resource and environmental depletion, human rights, conflict and democracy- and about how they relate to each other and to us. It is about how we treat the earth and how we treat each other, no matter how far apart we live. It is about how we prepare for the future. Every one of us has a part to play'. (DCELLS 2008a: p. 4)

Thus, this suggests ESDGC requires educators who can develop cross-curricular, and multidisciplinary programmes able to integrate a range of social, environmental and economic issues. DCELLS (2008a) also notes that ESDGC requires an experiential, creative and problem solving pedagogy which:

'prepares learners for the new challenges that will be part of their futures such as climate change and international competition for resources. Helps them to understand the complex, interrelated nature of their world. Builds the skills that will enable learners to think laterally, link ideas and concepts such as needs and rights, and uncertainty and precaution, and make informed decisions'. (DCELLS, 2008a: p. 4)

This pedagogy would rely on active learning, problem solving and participation not necessarily in a classroom environment and thus could provide opportunities to develop innovative approaches to learning. DCELLS (2008c) developed ESDGC as a cross-cutting theme in the revised curriculum for Wales Making the most of learning.

This article will explore how the School of Early Years at UWTSU has integrated ESDGC across its programmes.

Context

Despite concerns that young children may be unable to engage with the complexity of issues linked to ESDGC and fears that discussing the threats facing humanity may overburden young children (discussed in Tinney, 2013), authors such as Elliott & Davis (2013) and Warwick and Warwick (2015) note that the principles and philosophes inherent in early childhood pedagogy and practice are closely linked to the underlying ethos of ESDGC. Furthermore Article 29 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) highlights that education 'should encourage a child to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help a child to learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people'. There is also a growing awareness of ESDGC linked directly to early year's education which is highlighted by an increase in special additions of journals (see Siraj-Blatchford & Huggins, 2015) reinforcing the opportunities and commonality between the two areas. However, making the links between early years curricula and ESDGC can be problematic, for example a small scale qualitative research study using both questionnaires and interviews by Tinney (2013) explored the perceptions and interpretations of ESDGC by teacher trainees and those already working within the early years sector and the Foundation Phase. The results highlighted barriers or challenges perceived by those questioned including: that delivering ESDGC was difficult due to a lack of time within the current curriculum; that ESDGC was perceived as an add on or extra subject; that ESDGC was a complex subject which could be too difficult for young children to engage with. The study also noted that several participants viewed ESDGC and sustainable development as part of 'greening' or environmental

awareness rather than the more holistic view of sustainability which is the focus of ESDGC policy in Wales and internationally and was noted by Brundtland, (1987 cited in DEFRA, 2005: p. 6) as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. In this context authors have highlighted that sustainable development could only be achieved by active participation by all levels of society and a recognition that environmental, social and economic development were not isolated but needed to be considered as the key pillars of sustainability (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Informal discussions with students within the School of Early Years has also highlighted perceptions that concepts of sustainability are complex, scientific, linked to environmental awareness and outside the early years arena. As a result of such data and insights the School of Early Years has developed their curriculum so that it highlights the holistic nature of ESDGC, and has sought to demonstrate to students that the early years' theory they are familiar with and their own current expertise already has several links to ESDGC pedagogy and context. This has meant developing programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level that have both specialised sustainability modules as well as links to ESDGC throughout other more generic early year modules as well. This approach thus explores ESDGC in a global context as well as in the Welsh context making links between early years education, the Foundation Phase (The early years curriculum for 3--7 year old in Wales) (DCELLS, 2008b) and ESDGC (DCELLS, 2008b; 2008c) in order to develop students own awareness of sustainability issues and to be able to transfer this interest to the young children they work with in the future.

Deconstructing ESDGC

To some extent one significant method used with students has required time to reflect upon and deconstruct the meaning of ESDGC and to engage, (as also discussed by Siraj-Blatchford and Huggins, 2015) with sustainability discourse beyond 'greening and recycling initiatives'. One approach used by the School has responded to The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2014) ESDGC guidance which notes the importance of debate and discussion. Lecturers facilitate sessions so that students can debate during lectures and thus consider different viewpoints and ideas. This allows them to acknowledge the contested and complex nature of sustainability. In doing so, the tutors also support interdisciplinary thinking and develop opportunities for students to make links between environmental, cultural, political and economic issues. This allows students to develop an understanding of how different systems interact with a view to support students to engage with systems thinking which is acknowledged by some ESD authors as a valuable tool when exploring the complexity of sustainable development (for example, Elliott & Davis, 2014; Davis, 2010). Practically this requires tutors to collect a store of resources such as games and books sourced from beyond traditional early childhood organizations. For example, resources from organizations such as Amnesty, Oxfam and World Wildlife Trust help highlight the human and environmental costs of global warming as well as debating the complex causes of some of the problems facing humanity. Students are also encouraged to read academic sources from specialist early childhood – education for sustainability authors; thus by reading the work of authors such as Davis (2015) and Warwick & Warwick (2015) students can focus on the core concepts of early childhood such as well-being, rights, equality and inclusion and recognize that these are also core sustainability values. Students are already familiar with theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1972) and Rogoff (2003) who discuss the consequences of economics, culture and government on children's lives and these authors also provide a good framework on which to explore the interconnected pillars of sustainability (economics, environment and society/culture). Tutors also reverse some ideas so that students can use Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas to explore the impact children and families have on their local and global environment, economies and society and the long term consequences of such changes.

Building on current knowledge

Due to students noting concern that sustainability is different to their early years context the School of Early Years degree has also provided opportunities (in specialized ESDGC modules) to highlight and explore the interconnectedness of the theory already familiar to students in terms of early childhood pedagogy and children's development, with the principles of ESDGC. For example, the pedagogy of ESDGC focuses on experiential learning, constructivism and social constructivism (Davis, 2015) and these approaches allow students to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills which are important

features of ESDGC as noted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2014). Students on Early Years programmes are already encouraged to explore authors such as Dewey (1998) and Piaget & Inhelder (1972) in relation to the benefits of 'hands-on' learning in real situations, where there are opportunities for trial and error and experimentation. They are also encouraged to see the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than as Sterling (2001) notes someone filling up 'empty vessels' and thus peer learning with close ties to Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1990) and social constructivism is encouraged for students while studying, as well as in their work with young children.

Early childhood practitioners and authors such as Froebel (1826, 2005), Dewey (1998) Ouvry (2003), Bilton (2004), Knight (2009) and Joyce (2012) have noted the benefits for holistic development which being outdoors provides children. Traditionally therefore students have been familiar with exploring the impact of play and outdoor learning in terms of supporting young children's well-being and development. The School of Early Years lecturers have however also emphasised the benefits for the environment and society of children engaging and developing a respect for nature. Therefore authors such as Chawla (1998), who discuss the role of 'significant life experiences' in the environment during childhood promoting environmental awareness in adulthood and Louv's (2005) exploration of 'nature deficit disorder' are also explored alongside the more traditional early years' authors. Such ideas are also developed when students attend a field visit to Down to Earth, Gower, and are immersed in a day of outdoor experiential learning which involves practical activities, games and play to encourage discussion and debate. In the second year they also have an opportunity to be involved in the John Muir Award as part of the outdoor learning module. To date this Award has been very successful in terms of engaging practically with sustainability and helps students view the outdoors beyond its benefits for children's well-being alone because it also highlights the responsibility those using the outdoors have to conserve and protect the natural areas so valued by society.

Linking to the early years curriculum

The students are also provided with resources and ideas within classroom discussion which highlight how developing good early childhood play based and experiential learning naturally engages sustainability discussion. For example gardening, building and cooking activities offer young children opportunities to support development in the seven different areas of learning within the Foundation Phase framework (see DCELLS, 2008d) but also provide opportunities to engage with the eight themes of ESDGC (DCELLS, 2008a; 2008b) including: Wealth and Poverty; Health; Natural Environment; Climate Change; Identity and Culture; Choices and Decisions; Consumption and Waste. These resources and activities counter the view that ESDGC is an 'add-on' and develop students' confidence to look at what they already do with an education for sustainability lens (Elliott & Davis, 2014). As part of the resources provided for students lecturers have developed mock schemes of work, for example cooking a pizza. The scheme makes links to holistic learning, specific Foundation Phase areas of learning as well as ESDGC themes. In doing so students can evaluate how ESDGC can be embedded and dispels the myth that it is an 'add-on' or extra area of work. Students are then encouraged to schemes of work and learning outcomes for other activities that embed ESDGC with specific areas of the Foundation Phase.

The School of Early Years lectures also focus in depth on students acknowledging the rights and voice of the child, (as noted in the UNCRC) and to appreciate how and why young children can engage in the sustainability discourse which as noted by Mackey (2012: 1) is 'honouring the young child's right to know about social and environmental issues; to be part of conversations and possible solutions; to have their ideas and contributions valued'. Examples of research demonstrating how young children are concerned about sustainability problems is explored with students (for example, Heft & Chawla, 2005; Engdahl & Rabušicová, 2010) and examples are provided in classroom discussions of how young children can engage and be active participants in change and improving the sustainability of their settings and communities. The class discussions develop students appreciation that a child being kind, willing to share, looking after another living creature are the first steps towards the empathy, respect, responsibility and values at the heart of ESDGC (Davis, 2015) and thus students are encouraged to develop this type of thinking, rather than viewing ESDGC as being too complicated for young children. Outdoor learning which forms part of many of the School's modules reinforce this with lecturers modeling empathy and responsibility when working outdoors. Students are reminded to return any mini-beasts and other invertebrate to where they found them and this is discussed in terms of conservation and empathy for

other living creatures. Students are encouraged to consider when they should use natural resources and when they should avoid for example picking branches in order to protect the tree. Such discussion, the Early Years team hope, will then form part of sustainably aware practice in settings with young children. Models such as Peterson and Warwick's (2015) Butterfly Model support these discussions and help students to understand that ESDGC is about values, respect and wellbeing for other people and other species now and in the future. It is also about a way of learning which includes experiential learning, outdoor and nature experiences, problem solving, critical, reflective and creative thinking, and thus the role and responsibility of the adult is to support these learning opportunities in a positive and stimulating way so that young children can participate meaningfully with ESDGC.

Conclusion

The School of Early Years continues to develop their engagement with ESDGC, and rather than including it as a specific part of the curriculum are developing a programme where the principles and ethos of ESDGC underpin the content. Recent developments in Welsh legislation, including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2016) which places rights, inclusion, equity and sustainability as a statutory duty for government departments, suggest that a continued focus on ESDGC will be essential to develop graduates in the early years sector who are able to have the futures thinking skills and interdisciplinary approach to support children and families with the ongoing politics, economic, social and environmental challenges ahead. Davis (1998) makes a strong case that sustainable development is a crucial issue for young children, who will be the problem solvers, politicians and campaigners of the future, and thus early years practitioners who can encourage children's creativity, participation and experiential learning could in the long term be supporting the future health and well-being of wider society. It is within this context that the School will continue to develop their ESDGC provision.

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