

Sustainable development webcast

Tuesday, 27 October, 2009.

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Transcript

Jake Reynolds: Sustainability has really got an enormous amount to do with young people and children, it's one of those agendas which is inherently about their future and as a result we are very concerned that the educational experience whilst they are at school is something which contributes and helps to prepare them for taking on a number of challenges which we know that they will encounter. Now that might be climate change, it might be dealing with the impact of poverty and injustice around the world, it might be waste and the waste mountains that we are creating through our lifestyles, it might be loss of forests or loss of wildlife. Not all of these are particularly happy issues but we do know that children are destined for a life where they are going to have to deal with them. Being a sustainable school is really a long-term project. There is a concept which can bring it all together and that is the idea of care; so caring for one's self, caring for each other and caring for the environment.

Teddy Crane — Teacher at Charles Dickens School: Initially driven by the headteacher and one really committed teacher but then it quickly spread to throughout the school and we rapidly saw just how fun it could be really, growing and recycling things, singing songs about it and just kids getting stuck in and doing things and getting their hands dirty and just generally getting involved.

Jake Reynolds: There has been a move over the last few years to really enable schools that want to do this to give them the tools, planning tools, self-assessment tools, I could go on really, to actually make that happen.

Teddy Crane: What we are really trying to do this year is to make sure that staff realise it's not an additional thing, this is very much part of what we can do, so there are huge cross-curricular links to be made into literacy and maths and especially with science but we really wanted to make the point that it is not a stand-alone subject, it's not an additional subject on top of everything else that we are expected to teach.

Jake Reynolds: Schemes like eco-schools are now very popular.

Teddy Crane: This garden was developed from a piece of wasteland which the school had access to and were allowed to use for educational purposes. It did take a lot of money and a lot of time and a lot of effort but we were very lucky in getting support from local businesses.

Jake Reynolds: There are quite a lot of grant schemes and loan schemes actually, some of them government-backed which should enable schools to make the first steps in that direction.

Teddy Crane: We have a very useful and a very handy bursar who looks after our finances and who does incredible things with money that I don't understand, but I don't think we are making amazing profits because of the stuff we are growing in the garden but that's not really the point of it at the moment, it's really just so children can see that when we plant a tomato seed then it turns into tomatoes and we can eat those for our lunch and tomatoes is what we've got hundreds of this year.

Child 1: We grow them, we don't go and buy them from other shops because we think it's best if we try our best and that's why we have all these tomatoes and cauliflower. I feel like I'm in paradise, you know.

Child 2: It's great because we are in an urban environment but then there's just this lush green piece of land that has all these different vegetables and plants and flowers and bugs in it.

Child 1: Mostly the reason we made this garden was because we wanted all the other bugs to enjoy themselves and they could come and use this place as a home.

Child 3: I feel like I am in a different world because in that world is all damp and dirty and really horrible, but here it is just a nice green land and all these nice plants and wildlife and all these nice fresh fruits.

Child 1: I don't actually have a garden but at least I have one at school and I can use if properly, it's great.

Child 2: And of course there's the classroom as well, so it's like the best you can get really.

Child 4: Plants can recycle and protect the world.

Teddy Crane: We really wanted to become not a part of the school which you had to cross the road to get to but something that children can move in and out of freely when they wish to come in and do whatever they wish over here: reading, writing, drawing. I would really like to see more artwork done out here and sculpture being incorporated into the garden. The obvious impact that the garden has had is just the enjoyment that the children have here and just sometimes the amazement they see when they see a courgette that has grown to this big, they are just like "Wow, that's incredible".

Jake Reynolds: Schools that I'm most impressed by in terms of what they are achieving at the moment are ones which, instead of doing things in terms of new technologies and so forth, they have actually looked into their communities and are addressing the problems that they find.

Teddy Crane: When we were applying for funding for it we did stipulate that we would very much like the garden to be open to anyone in the community who feels like they would like to use it or help them support it. I think that any school can do it, obviously on different scales. The only limit is, I suppose there is a limit of space but that only means you work with what you've got.

Jake Reynolds: The challenge now is to move from pockets of good practice to this being a mainstream concern in the school system.

Teddy Crane: We've made lots of links with schools within Southwark and also in Lambeth to generate a network along with Southwark Council we've set up a network meeting of all schools wanting to get involved.

Jake Reynolds: And above all the students in the schools which we are talking about many of them are not only interested but are actively running campaigns in their school on things like energy and water and food. So I think when all those things come together bit by bit and it is going to be quite slow, bit by bit we will actually move towards the Government's targets of all schools being sustainable schools by 2020.