Learning for sustainability (Oakgrove Primary) - Transcript

**Jane Cerexhe, Head Teacher, Oakgrove Primary School**: I was very fortunate because I came into a school where there was already a very strong pupil voice, and the pupil council are very well established and had a very big role in what we do in the school. And there was also a very well established fair trade committee, and Eco Schools was just kind of getting off the ground. For me, coming into this school, the thing that was immediately obvious to me was our fabulous grounds that we have here, because they go all the way round the building. They weren’t being used that much, to be honest, and things were a wee bit tight, you know. In some ways we really needed to get outside, for the children to move and to get a bit of fresh air, and for the staff to get a break from working very, very closely with each other. So, the opportunity was there to go out, and the opportunity was there to develop the grounds. And it was something – having come from a school where it was tarmac’d and, you know, those chances weren’t easily available - it just seemed like a great chance to get out. So, that’s really, you know, really where I started with learning for sustainability.

**Douglas Chambers, Principal Teacher, Oakgrove Primary School:** So, natural play has been taken over, or taken forward, in Oakgrove Primary School over a number of years, and it didn’t start out as a drive for natural plan. It became about getting outdoors and making the most of the space that we have here. And, as time went on and we developed success within that and we were seeing the benefits for the learners, it became, really, more about developing the natural play. We started to understand a bit more about the context that the kids were coming from, the fact that we’re in a very inner-city environment here, we’re right next to one of the busiest roads in Scotland - it’s right on our doorstep, you can probably hear it just now … And about 90% of our kids, in fact more than 90% of our kids live in flats. So, for the kids who come to our school, this is their park, this is their garden, and this is their opportunity to get in touch with nature and to experience things that, otherwise, they wouldn’t have the opportunity to at home.

**Jane Cerexhe**: I mean, I think, first and foremost, I have to say that I have been very lucky in my staff. You know, there has been real enthusiasm and engagement in learning for sustainability. So, I haven’t had to work that hard at giving people… you know, pointing people in the right direction. But, where staff have been new to the school, we’ve just always had to articulate things, you know, from the outset. So, at the beginning of a session, when we’re all sort of having time together and going through all the usual things like child protection, that is articulated that this is what we do here.

**Sandra Lyons, Class Teacher:** The right word is culture. You’ve really got to create a culture for sustainability, and our head teacher gets it. She really, really does get it, and so does the rest of the management team. So, it you come into work in our school – you would be lucky – but if you do come into work in our school, that’s it, that’s the way it is. She really, really gets it. You only have to look around our grounds, and all the stuff that’s going on with play, and natural play, and all the stuff that … all the different committees that are going on, The head teacher embraces all that stuff, and she encourages you, when you come into the school, to take on a role. So, ‘What would you like to join?’ Oh, and you get teachers going, ‘Oh, I didn’t think of that’, and then they do: they join the Eco Committee or they join the Fair Trade Committee, and they just see how empowered our children are. So, it’s really, basically, if the culture’s right at the top, it’s easy after that, it really is.

**Jane Cerexhe**: I think, fundamentally, everything is about your school values, ok, and how you celebrate that as a community, and how, you know, teachers put that into action. So, the bottom line is the ethos has to be there.

**Douglas Chambers**: I think any understanding of sustainability, and … or of nature, can only really be developed by experiencing it and being out there. Our children have a wonderful experience of experiencing seasonal change and changes through the weather and how seeing how materials change. And, actually, by introducing loose parts and natural materials in the playground, they also have an experience of how those break down over time, and how the use of them has to change over time. One of the lovely things that we’ve got in the playground is the Christmas tree, that was in George Square a few years ago. We contacted Glasgow City Council and asked them what they were doing with it, and they very kindly donated it to the school. And the children were made aware of that journey, and it was shared with them, and they understood that if we didn’t have it to play on, that it would actually have gone to landfill, and we talked around some of the consequences there. But that tree, over the last few years, has started to change, and some of the bark has come off it, and it’s starting to evolve, and so the children’s play evolves with that because they have to be more careful, there are surfaces on it that might be slippy as opposed to rough and well textured. So, by experiencing the natural environment on a day-to-day basis, by understanding the changes, by understanding that if something goes wrong it can harm or change or damage the environment, they have a very innate understanding that they can apply as they go beyond the perimeter of the school grounds.

**Jane Cerexhe**: I always felt really strongly, when you looked at the Es and Os, and even the draft Es and Os when they first came out, that you couldn’t deliver the Curriculum for Excellence indoors. You know, there’s so much that really demands that children have the experiences – that they have to get out, that they have to explore, first-hand, what the community has to offer.

**Douglas Chambers**: One of the most successful partnerships that we’ve had is with a local business who are building an office block at Charing Cross, and we approaches them with the Eco Committee because they were going to be taking away some biodiversity in the local community and we were looking to increase our biodiversity here. If they were going to be cutting down some trees, could we have some logs from those trees in our playground? If they were going to be taking away trees that could be re-planted, could we have those trees and have them re-planted? Because, at that point in our journey, the kids were starting to get that the more we have, the more interesting the playground is, the more fun it is, the happier a place it is.

**Jane Cerexhe**: But there has also been the opportunity – because we’ve developed quite a lot of very strong partnerships – to support staff by inviting people in to work with staff. We have really good links with Woodside Community Gardens and they have volunteers who have Forest School training. So being able to invite them in and they can take a class out and about and do [unclear] work, and just by that kind of working in partnership, you know, good ideas rub off.