



# ESD in PSHE

## Developing learning and responsibility through ESD

This case study looks at how an infants' school used Education for Sustainable Development as a catalyst to develop pupils' skills of independent thinking, cooperation and responsibility, while fostering an awareness of cultural diversity. It tells how they developed their PSHE programme around key concepts of ESD, and built progression through the year groups while using a parallel assembly programme to consolidate learning and to ensure coherence. Decision-making activities such as circle time and an Eco-schools Committee enabled pupils to put their increasing awareness and concern to care for each other and the environment into practice.

### Background

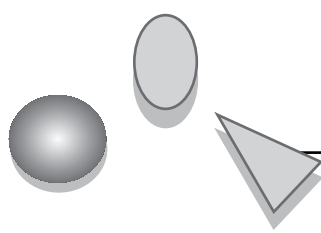
**“Those elephants are cooperating aren't they?”**

Pupil, age 5, while watching a wildlife video

Two years ago, hearing this comment would have been unlikely in our school!

Woodfield Infant School is situated in a suburban area of Shrewsbury and has 230 pupils. The children are predominantly middle class and are generally bright and articulate. At the time we joined the WWF 'Making it Happen' scheme – which offered funding, training and consultancy to support schools in their ESD journeys – our school was enjoying improved SATS results and we were looking at ways to maintain and further develop learning. Our Eco-Schools Committee was becoming well established, with a representative from each class meeting monthly to discuss environmental issues related to their school.

The PSHE coordinator was looking for ways to adapt the current scheme of work, which was perceived as lacking in some areas, to meet the specific needs of the children in our school. The staff saw a need for improvement in pupils' listening skills and attitude to learning. The children seemed to lack opportunities to think for themselves and their lack of independence was evident not only in their learning, but in general activities such as changing for PE, hanging up coats, etc.



When staff were introduced to the values elements of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), it was generally agreed that these values would help to meet the needs of our children and promote, in particular, independence, cooperation and responsibility, while fostering an awareness of cultural diversity. Many of the skills, knowledge and attitudes implicit in ESD are present within any good educational practice and, indeed, were present in the aims and ethos of our own school.

### Step one – the staff

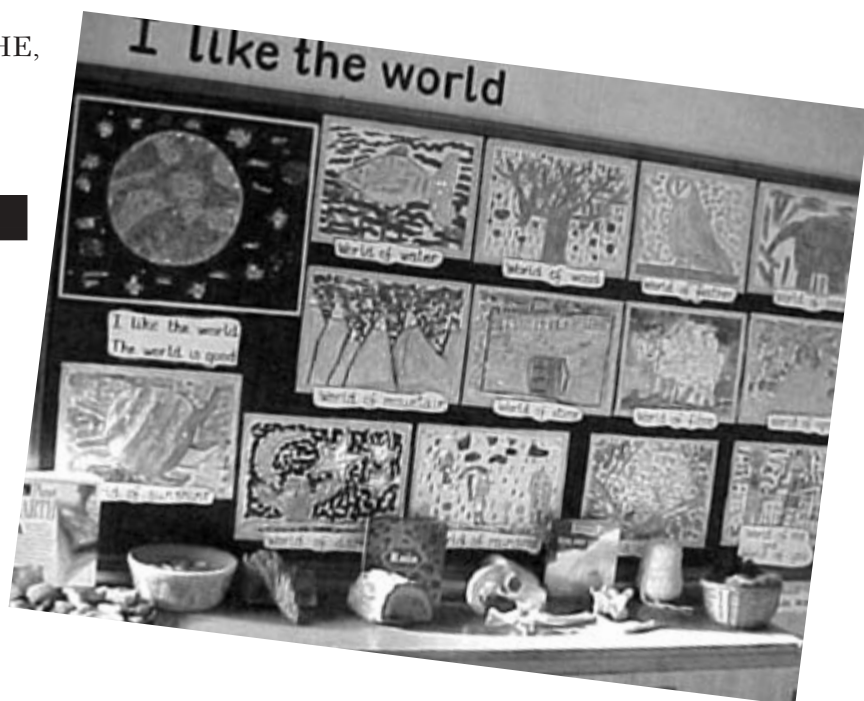
One aim throughout the scheme has been to avoid frightening the staff! Their support is vital to the success of the scheme and it was important that ESD was not seen as an extra subject to add to an already overloaded curriculum. Staff meeting times were allocated to increase the understanding of ESD. Teachers, governors, parents, support staff and staff from the neighbouring junior school attended two introductory meetings. Other directed time was used to deepen staff understanding and for planning.



Once it was established that ESD could be incorporated into the curriculum – particularly through PSHE – with adjustments made to existing planning, the staff's support continued to increase. Staff meeting time was allocated to develop understanding of the links between ESD and PSHE, and assemblies celebrating our wonderful world were planned for the Autumn term.

### Step two – the children

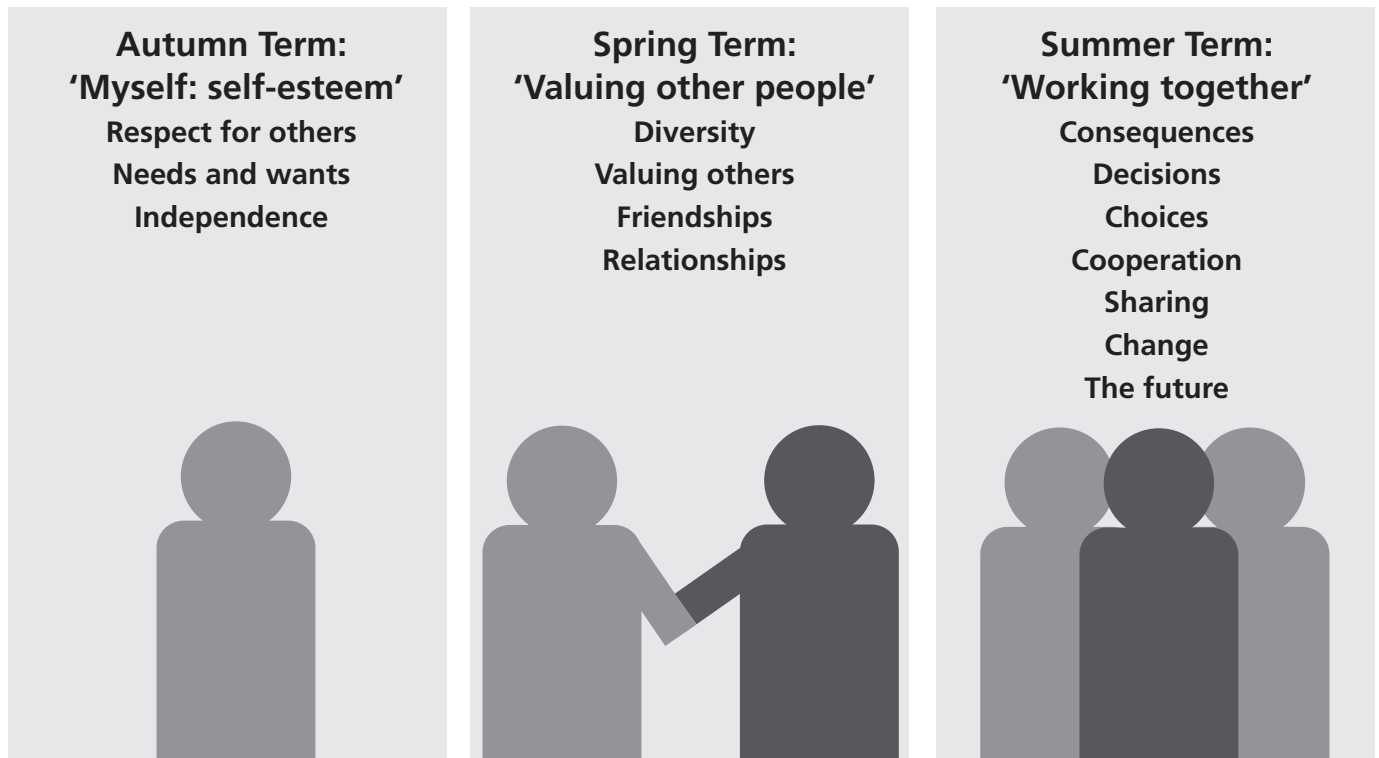
We felt that to start with global issues would be inappropriate for young children and were anxious not to frighten them with problems and concerns that were, at the moment, beyond their experience and control. Instead, we decided to celebrate ourselves and our wonderful world, and to foster a desire to protect it and each other. As well as assemblies, displays were used as a visual means of deepening understanding.



Our 'Wonderful World' display

### Step three – planning

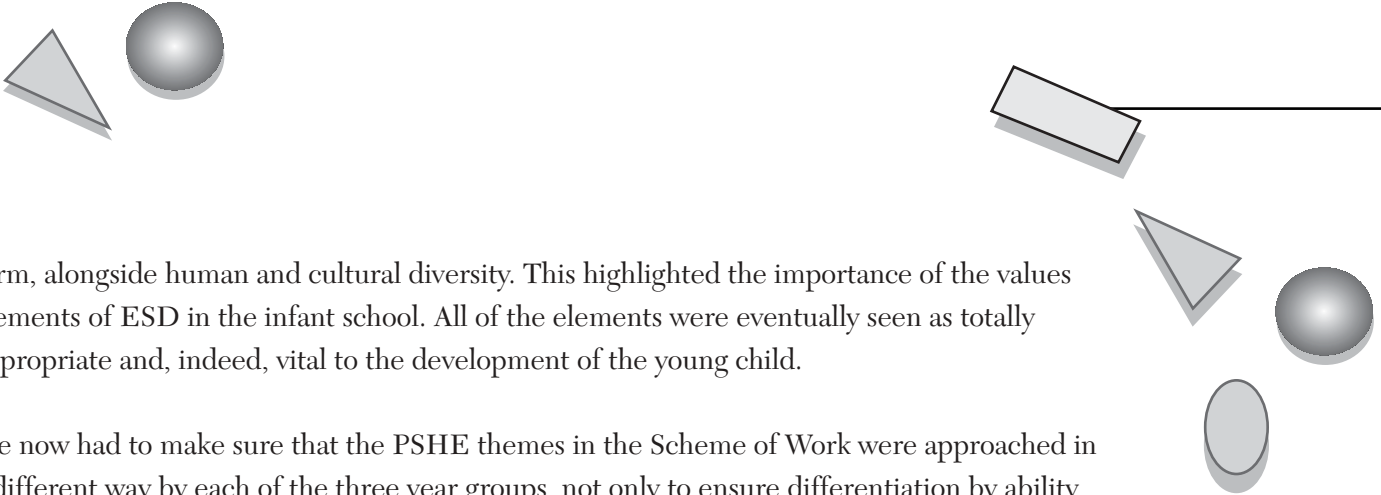
The ESD and PSHE coordinators met to create a list of themes that would incorporate ESD values into our PSHE scheme of work. The theme planned for a particular week would also be the assembly theme. This is the how we structured the themes, over the year:



When dealing with the theme of diversity, for example, the children's lives are compared to those of children around the world. By looking at similarities and differences between peoples' lives, discussion develops about what gives us quality of life; for example, good health, clean air, food, family, friends, etc. When considering these issues, the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability are inevitably highlighted. When looking at how far children in Africa have to walk to school, the issue of transport is raised and consideration is given to the economic reasons and environmental impact of the two examples through questions such as "Why don't we walk to school?".

### Step four – evaluating and improving

As with all new initiatives, one or two adjustments were made as the need arose for a slight change in the order of topics, namely the need for an early and stronger focus on 'independence' and 'cooperation' in the first term of each year, with 'respect for others' being moved to the second



term, alongside human and cultural diversity. This highlighted the importance of the values elements of ESD in the infant school. All of the elements were eventually seen as totally appropriate and, indeed, vital to the development of the young child.

We now had to make sure that the PSHE themes in the Scheme of Work were approached in a different way by each of the three year groups, not only to ensure differentiation by ability, but also to ensure that the Scheme of Work could be repeated annually. It would not be productive if the Scheme of Work had to be changed each year.

### Example of differentiation

#### Spring term (first half) planning

**Materials:** We used three books in our PSHE class sessions for each year group:

***Wake Up World***, Beatrice Hollyer, Oxfam, 1999 – an excellent resource for Reception age children which fosters an awareness of other children’s lives around the world by using photographs of their activities throughout the day.

***Millennium Children of Britain Just Like Me***, Dorling Kindersley, 1999 – this book looks at the diversity of children’s lives around Britain and is used for our Year 1 children.

***Children Just Like Me***, Dorling Kindersley, 1995 – this book looks at the lives of children around the world and is used by our Year 2 children.

Each of the books used to promote understanding of human and cultural diversity were found to be age-appropriate and very suitable for each year group. The children were extremely receptive to learning about other children’s lives and their knowledge and understanding of diversity was deepened. The staff were also very enthusiastic about using these resources and this helped to increase their support.

#### Step five – assemblies

The PSHE coordinator worked with the RE coordinator to plan assembly times. The assembly theme for each week is the same as the PSHE theme, consolidating and deepening understanding across the whole school. The theme is presented in a different way over four days, thus ensuring that interest is sustained. One day each week is set aside for a class to present an assembly on the weekly theme to the whole school, enabling the children to be actively involved each term.

#### Step six – using circle time

Staff meeting time was given to discussions on circle time sessions which we felt could help to empower the children, as well as providing a vehicle for them to express and deepen their understanding of the values and attitudes promoted by ESD.

Once the children have considered a problem, a collective responsibility is developed and peer pressure becomes an effective tool which deals with any problems. Initially circle times enhance confidence, self-image, friendships, speaking and listening, and cooperation. As children take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour, a more positive ethos is established which makes learning more effective. The aim is to increase motivation and personal responsibility, so that learning is no longer for the sake of the system, but for its own sake.



One of our circle time sessions

### Participation in decision-making

Empowering the children through decision-making is encouraged whenever the time is appropriate – from decisions about whether to wear coats at playtime, to choosing a class representative for the Eco-Schools Committee. Hustings are held at the beginning of the year or, in the case of the Reception classes, on a termly basis. The children talk about their ideas on how to improve their environment and elections are held. The child with the most popular idea is chosen by their peers to represent the class. In the Reception classes in particular, great efforts are made to ensure that it is the idea that is chosen and not the child (an early lesson in diversity!).

The child then acts as the representative for their class and communicates with them about the work of the Eco-Schools Committee.

The Committee, which includes a teacher, parents, the school cook and a local councillor, meet once a month to discuss school and local issues, and carry out practical activities such as poster-making, letter-writing, etc.

One important issue for the Eco-Schools Committee was playtime – always uppermost in children's minds. The staff agreed that this was an important issue and the Head offered an amount of money (£50) to each class to spend on play equipment. We hoped that a feeling of collective ownership would encourage responsibility, and that more care would be taken not to lose or spoil the equipment. Each class looked at a list of equipment and decided what to buy with their money. This proved to be a very valuable lesson in using and applying Maths. The teachers were provided with a list of possible questions about sustainability:

"When children learn to express themselves thoughtfully and without fear, when they learn to listen and take an interest in what others have to say, they have developed a skill that probably correlates with success in life more than anything else taught in school." *Dr William Glasser, Schools Without Failure, Hooper & Row, 1969*



The Eco-Schools Committee sporting some of our 'Walk to School Week' sandwich boards



## Sustainability questions

### What would you like to buy for your class box?

#### Questions to ask yourself

- Do we like it?
- Is it sustainable (will it last?)
- Would we play with it often?
- Will it be affected by bad weather conditions?
- How much does it cost?
- How will we care for it?

The children made decisions based not just on the fun value of the equipment, but on its sustainability. The majority vote was taken and the equipment was duly ordered. Each class was given their own box with a list of the contents. The arrival of the boxes caused much excitement, and questions about care and responsibility were raised. Play equipment has been provided before, but there is no doubt that this new initiative has led to increased responsibility. In adverse weather conditions, each class decides whether or not to take their equipment out. Questions raised by the children provide opportunities for discussion, negotiation and problem solving: "What if something goes over the fence?" led to a discussion about the consequences of actions; "What if it goes into the wrong box?" led to a decision to provide a box for lost equipment.

The Eco-Schools Committee also discussed other playtime issues such as children who have no-one to play with and a 'friendship bus stop' was made for children wanting to join in a game. There were some initial communication problems with this, namely very large lines of children rushing around, pretending to be buses! (Great fun, but the cause of accidents.) The purpose of the 'friendship stop' was therefore discussed in assembly and has been used properly since!

A special box of equipment has also been provided using the children's ideas. An area of the field has been designated for football and the class of the teacher on duty is able to play when the weather conditions are good. (This is decided by the committee.) The list of 'special' equipment continues to grow, whilst efforts are being made to ensure that the children are also able to play cooperatively without equipment. The committee is compiling a list of playground games for use on wet days.

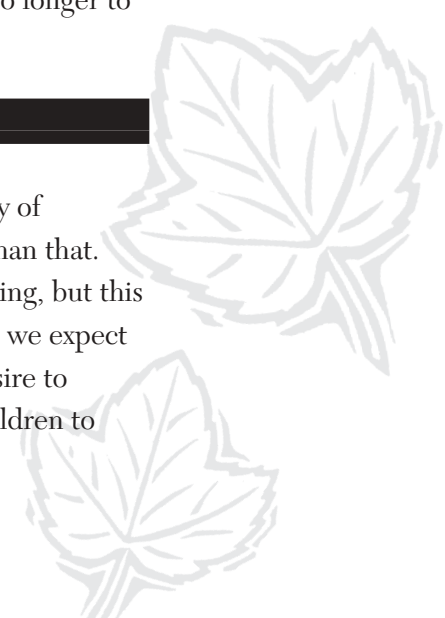
The staff all agree that playtimes are now a happier experience and duty days are no longer to be dreaded.

"I have rarely seen such quality of playtime in a school."

*Candidate for deputy-headship post at the school*

### Benefits of the work

When we started to introduce ESD into the school, it was seen as an important way of developing children's interest in their environment, but it has gone much further than that. Knowledge and understanding of the environment will foster interest and even caring, but this alone is not enough. Without the values and attitudes that underpin ESD, how can we expect future generations to develop into caring and responsible people with an active desire to protect and care for each other and our world? Equally, how can we expect our children to achieve without a positive attitude to learning?



Our whole school approach to ESD has helped the children to develop not only an awareness of the world around them, but also empathy and an improved ability to consider the consequences of their actions. The staff's understanding of ESD has also deepened, and they are now planning for ESD and making links throughout the curriculum, whenever the learning is appropriate. The values and attitudes that underpin ESD have served to provide our Infant school with an entire scheme of work for PSHE; one which we have found to be not only relevant, but to contain essential elements of any PSHE curriculum. ESD has also been the catalyst which has enabled the staff to focus on the particular needs of the children within our school, providing a meaningful context in which to develop the children's attitudes and awareness of their role within their environment.

### What's this got to do with Education for Sustainable Development?

#### Values and attitudes

- concern for social justice
- respect for and valuing of human and biological diversity
- empathy and awareness of the points of view of others
- a sense of responsibility for personal and group actions
- a belief in a positive future to which they, working with others, can contribute
- a willingness to act as a responsible citizen.

#### Skills

- cooperative working
- critical thinking
- ability to discern patterns of interrelationship
- ability to distinguish between wants and needs
- problem solving
- reasoned debate
- informed decision-making
- creativity, an ability to envision alternatives.

#### Knowledge and understanding

- that there are basic human needs that are universal
- how their own lives and actions connect with the environment and with the lives and actions of others, locally, nationally and globally; past, present and future
- how school, home and community can be managed more sustainably
- how the processes of decision-making work and how to take part in them
- that quality of life is not just dependent on standard of living.



## Key success factors

- Building key ESD concepts into the PSHE programme allays staff fears about taking on an 'extra subject'.
- Allocating several staff meetings to ESD provides space to develop understanding and for planning.
- Planning assemblies around the PSHE themes ensures coherence and deepens staff and pupil understanding of the issues.
- Differentiated schemes of work ensure pupil progression and maintain interest over three years.
- Opportunities to engage with decision-making processes enable pupils to put their learning into action and develop responsibility, problem solving and cooperation.

## Resources

Websites that were found to be particularly useful in exploring ESD themes:

[www.wwflearning.co.uk](http://www.wwflearning.co.uk)

[www.nc.uk.net/esd](http://www.nc.uk.net/esd)

## The WWF Schools' Case Studies Series

This case study forms part of a series designed to capture the work of schools as they journey towards Education for Sustainable Development. The case studies come from schools working at all levels – from Early Years to Secondary, but we hope that the principles and ideas are transferable. Free copies of all the case studies are available from WWF Education at the address below, or you can download them from the Resource Bank: Case Studies section of our dedicated ESD site, [www.wwflearning.co.uk](http://www.wwflearning.co.uk)

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## Acknowledgements

This case study was written by Annette Gale, Woodfield Infant School, Shrewsbury, with assistance from Liz Holloway

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Published by WWF-UK, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR.



Printed by Arrowhead Printing Ltd, Alton, on Cyclus Offset made from 100% post consumer waste.

WWF-UK registered charity number 1081247

A company limited by guarantee number 4016725

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