

Part 1 – Reflection

Hello, my name is Chloe Duffy and my student number is 2111311. Today I will be reflecting on my John Muir award experience. The award aims to inspire people to discover, explore, conserve and share their experiences as stated by the John Muir award (2024).

As part of my experience I decided to explore the Pembrokeshire area. I decided that Pembrokeshire would be the perfect place to do my John Muir award because I spent a lot of my childhood exploring Pembrokeshire and I thought it would be a great opportunity to do the same with my own children. The first place we explored was Bosherton Lily Ponds, this is a woodland and coastal path that leads to Broad Haven beach. I choose this location as it is a family favourite and a place we have visited many times however we had not been for over a year, therefore it seemed like a great place to start our adventure.

The second place we visited for our John Muir award was Scolton Manor in Haverfordwest. Scolton Manor is a country park which includes a variety of play parks, walled gardens, ponds, a bee centre and a Victorian manor house. We had never been to Scolton Manor but decided to visit after discovering that the country park is ran sustainably for the good of the environment and the community as noted by Scolton Manor (2024). I thought that by visiting a location that is sustainable it may help give me inspiration on what I could do for the conservation part of the John Muir award. Not only was I inspired by Scolton Manor but we absolutely fell in love with everything the country park had to offer and it will definitely be a location that me and my family will be returning to often.

While exploring Pembrokeshire one moment that sticks out for me is discovering a swans nest in the reeds of the lily pond and how breathtaking it was to witness a mother swan sat on her eggs. I felt so incredibly lucky to experience something so beautiful, and felt even luckier to share that moment with my children and teach them how incredibly beautiful nature can be. It made us want to learn more about Swans and we discovered on The Swan Sanctuary (no date) that baby swans are called cygnets and swan eggs take 6 weeks to hatch therefore we hope to return to Bosherton Lily Ponds in 6 weeks' time to see if we will be lucky enough to spot the cygnets.

Another incredible moment during my experience was when a heron flew down and sat on a rock across the stream on the beach where my family and I were having a picnic. It was absolutely amazing to be able to admire a bird that you do not see often up close.

During our time in Scolton Manor I felt like a child again as I stood in awe of the extraordinary woodland playground. I could not help myself but play with my children. We climbed to the top of the woodland tower and my son told me to pretend it was our house and before I knew it I was no longer mummy, I was a forest ninja balancing across the rope bridge with hands full of wood chippings that I had collected for our dinner while fighting off the bad guys that were trying to takeover our woodland house. I could not help but think that it is the moments playing outdoors with my children that are going to be the core memories of their childhood that I will look back on fondly.

After exploring Pembrokeshire I felt inspired to conserve my own garden. I took inspiration from the Bug and Bat houses I'd seen in the woodlands in Scolton Manor and introduced a bug hotel and bat house to my own garden. I decided to introduce a bug house to my garden after reading a sign in Scolton Manor that explained how bug houses help support biodiversity and contribute to a more balanced ecosystem. When I seen the bat houses in Scolton Manor it reminded me of the bats that we watch fly around our garden in the summer evenings. Therefore I thought for my garden conservation project introducing a bat house to help give shelter to the bats in my garden could contribute greatly to looking after the nature around me.

Another way I decided to contribute to looking after the nature around me was by feeding the garden birds. This was due to being inspired by all the birds we seen in Bosherston lily ponds. RSPCA (2024) express the importance of feeding garden birds as it gives bird a reliable food source. Another reason I decided it would be a good idea to feed the garden birds was to give my children educational opportunities to witness and learn about different birds that they will see in the garden.

Part 2 – Sustainability in early years.

The John Muir Award supports children in spending quality time in nature which is vital as in recent years children are spending less and less time outdoors. Louv (2009) refers to this as nature-deficit, which continues to be a major issue due to various factors such as excessive screen time, lack of nature exposure, and climate change. However, opportunities to engage with nature in early years can be considered as an incredible learning tool. As Moore (2014) explains that multisensory encounters in nature serve to establish "the cognitive constructs necessary for sustained intellectual development," as well as spark imagination by providing the child with open space and materials for what he calls children's "architecture and artefacts." Furthermore allowing children opportunities to engage with nature can also support the wider learning of sustainability.

Our common future (1987), also known as the Brundtland report emphasises education's role in attaining sustainable development. For example early childhood practitioners can create curricula that include sustainability ideas like understanding natural resources, recycling, and the value of biodiversity. By supporting sustainable education the report aims to raise a generation that is more conscious of and committed to sustainable living, subsequently contributing to our planet's long-term health and wellbeing.

In Wales, the Welsh government places a major emphasis on sustainability in early childhood education. The new curriculum for Wales (2022) emphasises the significance of teaching young children about sustainability. It promotes outdoor learning, an understanding of the natural world, and an appreciation for the environment. Another policy that supports sustainability in early years is the wellbeing of future generations act, the act

requires public bodies to examine the long-term implications of their choices, ensuring that future generations' needs are met. In early childhood education, this implies incorporating sustainable methods and teaching that will benefit children throughout their lives and into adulthood. Furthermore, collaboration among public bodies, communities, and organisations is encouraged in order to achieve common goals. Early childhood settings are urged to collaborate with communities, parents, and environmental organisations to improve sustainability (Welsh Government, 2015).

However, although the Welsh Government and the future generations act provides a strong framework for sustainability in the early years some barriers that may impact their efforts may be, the lack of funding and insufficient training that early years settings receive. Which in turn could implement early years setting in being able to invest in sustainable resources as well as staff not being educated or trained in sustainable practice. Another barrier could be inadequate facilities such as no space for outdoor learning.

Hicks and Holden (2007) hold similar views as the future generations act by highlighting the importance of engaging children in conversations and encouraging them to think about the future and sustainability. The study aims to do this through education, engaging children in future-oriented activities and environmentally friendly projects. Moreover, Chawla (2020) considers thinking about the future as constructive hope. Constructive hope is having a hopeful yet grounded view of the future and believing that each action can have a beneficial impact. This entails fostering in children a mindset that blends optimism with achievable actions that may take to improve the environment. These skills that the children are learning by considering the future could also be transferable skills that could help children during the conservation part of the John Muir experience.

A pioneer in Early years who's principles aligned with sustainability is Froebel. D'Ascoli and Hunter (2022) explain how Froebel's principles include establishing a strong connection to the natural world and encouraging environmentally responsible behaviour. Froebel believed that outdoor learning and nature-based activities were essential components of a child's education. Froebel believed in the importance of unity and connectivity. By studying the life cycles of plants and animals, he could teach children that everything is interconnected. For example, fruit waste becomes compost, which is then used to plant seeds, which grow into plants which then produces seeds to begin the cycle again. Froebel's approach encourages a child's emotional and spiritual connection to nature, instilling in them a lifelong respect and devotion to the environment.

However, some barriers to Froebel's approach may be that children from households with limited access to outdoor spaces may struggle to engage in nature activities. Furthermore, children may avoid outdoor activities if they don't like being dirty, wet, or uncomfortable.

Similarly to Froebel's views Tinney and Hirst (2017) support hands on sustainable learning in early years by encouraging the integration of sustainable ideas and practices in early childhood environments. They discuss practical implementation, such as gardening projects that allow children to grow plants, participating in recycling programmes that teach children about waste and recycling, and educating children about energy conservation, such as

simply turning off light switches when leaving a room. They believe that by including environmentally friendly habits into the curriculum and daily routines, educators can lay a solid foundation for environmental consciousness in children.

Additionally, Prince (2010) advocates in her work for the inclusion of sustainability in the early years curriculum. This entails not only teaching about environmental challenges, but also incorporating sustainable practices into daily activities and educational experiences. She believes that by including sustainable activities and concepts into the curriculum, educators may assist to raise a generation of environmentally conscious individuals.

Furthermore, Davis (2005) work on Educating for sustainability in the early years emphasises the important role that sustainability education plays in the holistic development of young children. She suggests that through sustainability-focused activities and curricula it fosters physical, cognitive, emotional and social growth. This is supported by Duhn (2012), Duhn highlights the significance of holistic development and proposes an integrated strategy in which sustainability education benefits all aspects of a child's development.

In Wales there is the Education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC), It emphasises the need of educating children about the global connections of social, economic, and environmental challenges. The Welsh Government (2012) state how they aim to emphasize the role of a global citizen through components such as the curriculum which makes sustainability and global citizenship core components of topics such as geography, science, and social studies. Furthermore, the benefits of ESDGC in Wales include informed citizenship as people who have received an education grounded in the ESDGC principles are better able to engage in democratic processes and make decisions that consider the long term effects of the planet into account.

Undertaking experiences such as the John Meir award allows individuals to reflect on how crucial it is for children to foster sustainability from a young age. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) aims to encourage this. The United Nations (2015) state how the SDGs provide a shared roadmap for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, both now and in the future. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are at the heart of it, and they represent an urgent call to action for all countries, developed and developing, to work together globally. One of the sustainable development goals aims to focus on quality education. This could be implemented by providing access to high-quality early childhood education that promotes holistic development. Moreover, another sustainable development goal aims to make sustainable cities and communities. Children could be a crucial part in reaching this goals by including them in local community projects, educating them about recycling, and involving them in helping to preserve natural spaces.

Barriers that may prevent the united nations from achieving the sustainable development goals, include efforts to implement the SDGs being restricted by political instability brought on by wars and conflicts. As well as the fact that many people are unaware of the initiatives being taken to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), (1989) interlinks with sustainability in early years. Article 24 of the UNCRC states how children have

the right to the highest standard of health. This can be interlinked with sustainable practice by educating children about healthy habits and nutrition, as well as concentrating on sustainable food production, this allows children to learn about the benefits of eating fresh, local produce. This could include hands on learning of growing fruits and vegetables in early years settings or visits to local farms to look further into larger-scale production of locally produced food which could also be considered for sustainable practice.

However, opportunities such as trips to local farms or nature walks in early years settings don't always happen. This may be due to safety concerns, these concerns can include the possibility of incidents like falls or encounters with unsafe plants and animals. Before an early years setting can offer nature trips and opportunities, staff members must complete a risk assessment and complete first aid training. Another barrier could possibly be accessibility as not all nature sites are easily accessible or suitable for young children. While there are challenges to adopting environmental visits and sustainability projects in early childhood settings, including safety, financial, and staff issues, problems can be avoided with careful planning, proper training, community involvement, and open communication with parents.

Overall, the John Muir Award can help children develop into environmentally conscious, healthy, and well-rounded individuals. Opportunities such as the John Muir experience and a curricula that embrace sustainable education it could provide the next generation with a better chance of achieving the SDGs and contributing to the larger objective of creating a sustainable future. Furthermore, introducing sustainability into early childhood education provides several benefits that extend far beyond immediate environmental awareness. By introducing sustainability principles and practices to young children, it provides the framework for a lifetime of environmentally conscious behaviour and holistic growth.

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