

Part 2- Reflection and Evaluation

20 minute presentation.

First 5 mins

Good evening, I am Tirion Brackenbury, student number 2106662. Thank you for joining me to explore the current relationship between children, nature, and sustainability.

Explain that there are two sections and name them

We will be looking at my visit to Rhossili when I took part in the John Muir award and then a review of sustainability within the curriculum and how spending time in nature can positively impact children's development.

Taking part in the John Muir Award was more than an outdoor experience—it deepened my understanding of education as a living, sustainable practice. I came to see that sustainability isn't just about conserving nature—it's about cultivating a mindset that values curiosity, responsibility, and interconnectedness.

Through the Award's four challenges—**Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share**—I discovered how experiential learning in nature fosters not only ecological awareness but also emotional resilience and social empathy. When given space to engage with the outdoors meaningfully, people begin to see themselves as part of a larger being.

For my conservation work I chose to explore and use the approach of Leave No Trace. A movement started in the United States, but the belief behind it can be found throughout our own history and in acts such as the Countryside Code. Using educating within natural spaces as a form of conservation creates a meaningful relationship between people and the environment around them, it also promotes others to think on these issues and follow a path that will support our natural environments.

Final 15 mins

What is sustainability on a global and local scale

Conservation and sustainability has grown as a matter of conversation and importance in recent years, with the Brundtland Report (1987) shining a light on these issues for the whole world to see.

1. Brundtland Report

The Brundtland Report, published in 1987, formally known as Our Common Future, was the first meeting and report to highlight the issue of environmental degradation, poverty, and inequality across the world. They defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'

2. UN Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations took the research and findings from the Brundtland report in 2015 to create 17 interlinked goals with the core aim of ending poverty, protecting the planet, and enabling peace and prosperity for everyone. Two key goals when looking at sustainability and the early years are that of good health and well-being, and quality education.

3. UK and Wales (specific) policies (making changes this year)

The UK Government, as part of the UN, took on the Sustainable Development Goals as well as creating a series of 5 principles that would guide UK policy and legislation; these include living within environmental limits, ensuring a strong, healthy, and just society, achieving a sustainable economy, using sound science responsibly, and promoting good governance.

4. Wales Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

While Wales is part of the UK, it is led by its own legislation, most notably the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), which is globally recognised for how it has been embedded sustainability into law.

5. Local Authority (Vale of Glamorgan)

The Vale of Glamorgan created a 5-year plan for change this year with five key objectives. The most important objectives when considering the early years and locally sustainability are Objective 2: Respecting and celebrating the environment and Objective 3: Giving everyone a good start in life. They have drawn from the legislation I have

mentioned previously and hope to create strong communities with a bright future by 2030.

6. Lack of action will cause severe damage

Due to the late recognition of the importance of sustainability, our world is already suffering the consequences of our actions. We have lost much biodiversity over the past 25 years, along with a depletion in essential resources, we have also seen a rise in poverty, a health crisis, and high numbers of children who are unable to attend regular education. These issues will increase in severity without the drastic action set out in the UN Development Goals, the Well-being of future Generations Act, and even the Vale of Glamorgan 2030 plan. This is why it is so important that we allow our children to explore our natural environments and learn how to respect and promote the natural world and sustainability.

Activitists

There are many well-known climate and environmental activists who aim to spread awareness and encourage the people of the world to make changes to support the Earth. Two key figures being Greta Thunberg, who at the age of 15, led school climate strikes that quickly travelled world-wide. She has become an internationally recognised climate activist and continues to raise awareness about the damage our society does to the planet.

Another key environmental activist is Sir David Attenborough, who's interest in the natural world started from a young age. He is renowned for his work in broadcasting, including his numerous documentaries about the natural world around us. He has spent eight decades raising awareness of different environments and what we can do to protect them. He has explored areas of the world no one else has and enabled others to form a love of nature through his work.

Inspiration to future generation

Children's Relationship with Nature

The concept of a symbiotic relationship between children and nature is important throughout the early years. This relationship allows for mutual growth, well-being, and sustainability (Summers *et al.*, 2019). This relationship is central to many curricula such as Reggio Emilia, Montessori, Steiner, and the Norwegian curriculum, although it is interpreted to fit their unique cultural, philosophical, and pedagogical foundations. This symbiotic relationship when applied within early years settings in Wales allows for children to form a deeper sense of cynefin, belonging (BERA, 2024). The Foundation Phase in Wales aims to continue leading the UK early years sector in experiential learning, raising awareness of the unique opportunities to be creative, have freedom of movement, be noisy, and take risks. It also notes the unique stimuli within an outdoor environment such as the weather, sounds, smells, and textures which contribute to a rich learning environment (Welsh Government, 2009)

How would experiences like this support young children?

There are several forms of learning, such as reading, listening, and doing, and as the saying thought to come from Confucius goes 'I hear and I forget... I see and I remember... I do and I understand!'. The use of the outdoors enables children to act through scenarios in play and learn through movement ensuring that their learning is embedded into their being (Bento and Dias, 2017).

The authentic learning experiences that children gain through use of the outdoors cannot be replicated or simulated within a classroom (Kuo *et al.*, 2019). They can create real life understanding of the world around them such as the plants and the weather and learn how nature is interconnected with our existence, and they can build resilience, curiosity and their sensory development through outdoor play and exploration. Being in a natural outdoor environment can also support children to self-regulate, reduce stress, and improve focus. This is particularly true for children with ALN such as ADHD and ASD (Fan *et al.*, 2023), as I have seen in my own setting.

How will these children make the world better for their future and the future generations

By partaking in sustainable practices such as the John Muir Award and other activities, a child's critical thinking and problem-solving skills are developed as well as promoting their well-being and resilience. Furthermore, it fosters a sense of global citizenship, through empathy, co-operation, and a sense of responsibility towards the earth (Bright Futures Experience, 2024). Through this sense of understanding and responsibility, this generation will grow up and improve our relationship with the natural world enabling future generations to enjoy the natural spaces that have previously been taken for granted.

Research view on using education to promote sustainability

Current research describes education as the cornerstone of sustainable development (Bascope *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, educational settings should be promoting the use of outdoor spaces as sustainable environments as well as learning about larger sustainable issues and what we can do to improve these concerns.

The Curriculum for Wales states the importance of practical experiences, and use of the outdoors (French *et al.*, 2023). However, many settings are restricted due to lack of time, space, and qualified staff. It is also evident that as children grow, the main focus within educational settings is that of academic achievement (Peng and Kievit, 2020).

Therefore, it is evident that practice needs to improve to meet the current research.

How could schools improve the authentic learning experiences of their children and support their love and connection to nature?

There are many ways for schools to improve, for settings following the new Curriculum for Wales, simply starting by implementing the guidance would improve their use of nature and their children's experiences.

Settings could also prioritise regular, quality outdoor time within natural environments, foster emotional and sensory engagement, as well as celebrate the seasonal rhythms and changes in the local landscape and model nature-positive values to deepen their understanding of the world around them (John Muir Trust, 2023).

References

- Bascopé, M., Perasso, P. and Reiss, K. (2019). Systematic Review of Education for Sustainable Development at an Early Stage: Cornerstones and Pedagogical Approaches for Teacher Professional Development. *Sustainability*, 11(3), p.719. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030719>.
- Bento, G. and Dias, G. (2017). The Importance of Outdoor Play for Young Children's Healthy Development. *Porto Biomedical Journal*, 2(5), pp.157–160. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbj.2017.03.003>.
- BERA (2024). *Doing cynefin: Exploring ideas on belonging, connectedness and community in the Curriculum for Wales*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog-special-issues/doing-cynefin-exploring-ideas-on-belonging-connectedness-and-community-in-the-curriculum-for-wales>.
- Bright Futures Experience (2024). *Why It's Important for children worldwide to understand the importance of sustainability* «bright futures experience. Available at: <https://brightfutures-experience.com/why-its-important-for-children-worldwide-to-understand-the-importance-of-sustainability/>.
- Brundtland, G.H. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. United Nations. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.
- Fan, N., Ho, W., Long, L., Lophina Phiri and Kai Chow Choi (2023). Nature-Based Interventions for Autistic Children. *JAMA network open*, 6(12), pp.e2346715–e2346715. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.46715>.
- French, G., Jones, C., Parry, D., McQueen, R., Boulton, P., Horder, S., Rhys-Jones, K., Sheriff, L., Sheen, E. and Formby, L. (2023). *Teaching and learning in the outdoors: The current state of outdoor learning in schools in Wales*. Welsh Government. Available at: [https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/researchoutputs/teaching-and-learning-in-the-outdoors\(9c1376f2-9129-45d1-84d4-a3c552f07b71\).html](https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/researchoutputs/teaching-and-learning-in-the-outdoors(9c1376f2-9129-45d1-84d4-a3c552f07b71).html).

Irranca-Davies , H. (2025). *Introduction of the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill (2 June 2025) | GOV.WALES*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/introduction-environment-principles-governance-and-biodiversity-targets-wales-bill> [Accessed 31 Jul. 2025].

John Muir Trust (2023). Our Position on Nature Connection, Outdoor Learning and Education Trust position.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.24.2.0010.pdf?seq=1>.

Kraemer, D. (2024). Who Is Greta Thunberg, The #FridaysForFuture Activist? *BBC News*. 9 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-49918719>.

Kuo, M., Barnes, M. and Jordan, C. (2019). Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(305). doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305>.

NDNA (2022). *Curriculum for Wales - Cynefin*. Available at: <https://ndna.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Wales-Cynefin-Curriculum-for-Wales-Factsheet.pdf> [Accessed 4 Jul. 2025].

Peng, P. and Kievit, R.A. (2020). The Development of Academic Achievement and Cognitive Abilities: A Bidirectional Perspective. *Child Development Perspectives*, 14(1), pp.15–20. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12352>.

Summers, J.K., Vivian, D.N. and Summers, J.T. (2019). The Role of Interaction with Nature in Childhood Development: An Under-Appreciated Ecosystem Service. *Psychology and behavioral sciences (New York, N.Y. 2012)*, 8(6), p.142.

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (2019). David Attenborough | Biography, TV Series, & Facts. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Attenborough>.

United Nations (2025). *The 17 Sustainable Development Goals*. United Nations. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Vale of Glamorgan Council (2025). *Vale 2030 Strong Communities with a Bright Future*. Available at: <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Our%20Council/Achieving%20our>

[%20vision/Corporate-Plan/Corporate-Plan-2025-2030/Vale-2030-English-Interactive.pdf](#) [Accessed 31 Jul. 2025].

Welsh Government (2009). *Foundation Phase Outdoor Learning Handbook*.

Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/fcb8539c-9be7-4883-8542-35d7b54b56f2/foundation-phase-outdoor-learning-handbook.pdf>.

Welsh Government (2015). *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials [HTML]*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html>.