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Module: ECEY6005

Part 1: Scrapbook (Submitted on turn it in link)

Part 2: Presentation and Script

### AI Cover Sheet

I acknowledge my use of Grammarly to help with grammar and spelling.

I acknowledge that I used Canva to create the scrapbook.

I acknowledge my use of Copilot to check for repetition and rephrase work to help reduce the word count.

I acknowledge my use of CoPilot to help with research to support my work, using prompts such as find me information on sustainability, including policies, legislation, definitions and guidelines.

Find me research, theories, and information on the barriers and impacts that sustainability has on the early years and on the world.

Summarise these documents: Our Common Future-Brundtland, Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.

Find me documents on these theorists, Froebel and Montessori, that link to sustainability in early years.

I acknowledge my use of co-pilot to help make a webinar background I can confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after using AI tools, which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

## Part 2

Link to presentation- [https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v/g/personal/2405866\\_student\\_uwtsd\\_ac\\_uk/IQDpNhChAtR1TJDf33V9q3KdAQDcov-xa205Wg9oGDEIS5Y](https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v/g/personal/2405866_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/IQDpNhChAtR1TJDf33V9q3KdAQDcov-xa205Wg9oGDEIS5Y)

Welcome, my name is Vicky, and today I will be reflecting on sustainability in the early years through my experiences working towards the John Muir Award. For this module, I have chosen to focus on the wildflower meadow and grassland habitat within the grounds of Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar. This space has become incredibly meaningful to me, not only as a practitioner but as someone who has spent time exploring, observing, and learning alongside the children. Over the past few weeks, my understanding of sustainability has deepened in ways I didn't expect, shaped by the time I have spent reconnecting with this place.

On the discovery pages in the scrapbook, you will see an area which features a rich variety of natural elements, including long grasses, wildflowers, insects, birds, a small pond, and the surrounding woodland that encloses the space. As I walked through it, I found myself noticing small details such as the way grasses move in the wind, how insects weave between wildflowers, and how the colours shift with the seasons. In the summer, the meadow feels warm and open, with sunlight catching on the tops of the grasses and wildflowers swaying gently in the breeze. In contrast, the winter months bring a quieter, more sheltered atmosphere; the trees surrounding the meadow create a sense of enclosure, and the muted greens and browns offer a calm, reflective space for exploration.

These observations made me think about my own childhood and the places that shaped me. Growing up, nature was a space of freedom, curiosity and comfort. Revisiting these feelings through the meadow helped me recognise how powerful natural environments can be for children today. Spending time here encouraged me to think more deeply about how nature teaches us, how the meadow adapts, how species interact, and how children respond to these changes with curiosity, care and wonder. Their spontaneous comments highlighted this beautifully: one child excitedly announced, "I found a dragonfly, it's purple and black!", while another proudly shared, "Rhoi dŵr i blanhigion i helpu tyfu" when talking about how they care for

plants. These moments show how children naturally connect their actions to the wellbeing of the environment.

Before moving into the academic literature, it is important to recognise how each section of the scrapbook reflects the children's learning journey. The Discover pages capture the sensory richness of the meadow and the children's initial curiosity as they noticed colours, creatures, and seasonal changes. The Explore pages show how children deepened their understanding through hands-on encounters, such as observing bees resting on flowers and discussing pollination. The Conserve pages highlight the practical actions children took to care for the environment, including building the bug hotel and returning insects safely outdoors. Finally, the Share pages celebrate the children's reflections, drawings, photographs, and bilingual comments, demonstrating how they communicated their learning and developed a sense of pride and connection to the meadow. Together, these sections show how sustainability becomes meaningful when children are given opportunities to observe, explore, care for, and share their experiences within a local natural space.

This reflection aligns strongly with the Curriculum for Wales, which emphasises supporting children to become ethical, informed citizens who show care for the natural world and understand their place within it, and highlights Cynefin as a sense of belonging, identity and connection to place (Welsh Government, 2022). It reminded me that sustainability is not just a policy agenda or a global challenge; it is something lived and felt. It is about belonging, connection, and understanding our place within the natural world.

These experiences have shaped my understanding of sustainability in early years education. Throughout this presentation, I will explore how practical learning, learning from nature, and futures thinking within my John Muir Award journey align with the wider aspirations of Education for Sustainable Development, and how early years education can inspire children to care for their world, develop curiosity, and feel connected to the environments around them. These personal experiences in the meadow have not only shaped my understanding of sustainability but also provide a meaningful foundation for exploring how sustainability is conceptualised within early childhood education.

To deepen this reflection, I now turn to the academic literature and policy frameworks that inform sustainable practice in the early years. Sustainability has become a central concern in early childhood education, reflecting global recognition that environmental, social, and economic challenges are intensifying. The Forest Stewardship Council (2024) reinforces this by emphasising that sustainability requires responsible use of natural resources to protect ecosystems for future generations. The foundational definition from *Our Common Future* describes sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Although published decades ago, this definition remains highly relevant and continues to underpin international frameworks such as Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992), the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), and UNESCO’s recent Futures of Education reports (UNESCO, 2021; 2023; 2026). In Wales, sustainability is embedded within national legislation through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with updated Welsh Government guidance published in 2025. The Act places a legal duty on public bodies to work towards a resilient, healthier, more equal and sustainable Wales, shaping how early years practitioners support children to develop the knowledge, values and ethical awareness needed for sustainable futures.

Environmental challenges are increasingly visible within local communities, including Blaenau Gwent. The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2024) highlights concern around biodiversity loss, climate resilience, and access to natural spaces, issues that are mirrored across Wales (Natural Resources Wales, 2023; Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, 2025). These concerns are evident in our own setting at Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar, where the creation of an eco-friendly wildflower meadow reflects a commitment to restoring local biodiversity. When asked what lives in the area, children confidently listed “pili pala, spiders, gwenyn, granny greys”, demonstrating their growing ecological awareness.

Sustainability is particularly relevant to early childhood because young children are naturally curious, observant, and eager to explore their surroundings. Research consistently shows that early experiences in nature shape long-term environmental

attitudes and behaviours. Chawla (2020) demonstrates that childhood nature encounters are strongly linked to pro-environmental behaviour in adulthood, while Becker *et al.* (2017) found that regular outdoor learning significantly improves children's wellbeing and environmental awareness. Prins *et al.* (2022) similarly highlight the holistic developmental benefits of nature play, including sensory engagement, emotional regulation, and social collaboration. Development Matters (DfE, 2023) recognises the learning environment as a key driver of children's development, noting that well-planned spaces encourage exploration, independence and deep-level learning. Our wildflower meadow embodies this principle by providing a rich, open-ended environment where children can investigate natural processes and develop ecological understanding. These findings align with Estyn's (2023) thematic review, which emphasises the importance of outdoor learning in Welsh early years settings and notes that children thrive when given opportunities to explore natural environments.

Policy frameworks reinforce this emphasis. The Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022) positions sustainability within the "ethical, informed citizens" purpose, while the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Settings foregrounds Cynefin, encouraging children to develop a deep sense of belonging to their local environment. The UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) further supports sustainability education by emphasising children's rights to participate, express views, and engage with their communities. Lundy's (2009) model of participation reminds us that voice alone is insufficient; children must be given space, audience, and influence. In sustainability contexts, this means enabling children not only to talk about environmental issues but to take meaningful action. This was evident when a child explained, "Rhoi pry cop tu fas", describing how they gently returned a spider outdoors to keep it safe.

Nature walks further enhanced children's learning. On the Explore page, the scrapbook shows the moment children observed a bee resting on a wildflower and discussed pollination. The scrapbook describes how "the children watched quietly and talked about how bees help flowers grow." When asked what we can do to help the bees, one child responded confidently, "Gallu plannu planhigion i gwenyn cael polen", showing an emerging understanding of pollinator needs. These moments reflect Tinney and Merriman's (2018) findings that sensory encounters with nature

foster curiosity, empathy, and sustained attention. They also align with O'Brien and Howard's (2016) argument that children must be active participants in climate-related learning, developing both knowledge and emotional connection.

Building on these observations, the scrapbook also captures how children began to understand the importance of protecting insects and supporting pollinators. On the Explore pages, their conversations show growing ecological awareness, such as when one child explained, "*Gallu plannu planhigion i gwenyn cael polen*", linking their own actions to the wellbeing of bees. Another moment shows the children watching a bee resting on a flower, quietly discussing how "bees help flowers grow," demonstrating early understanding of pollination and interdependence. These interactions highlight how sensory experiences with insects nurture empathy and care, echoing Tinney and Merriman's (2018) argument that nature-based encounters deepen children's curiosity and environmental connection. These scrapbook moments also show children beginning to see themselves as environmental helpers. A child proudly shared, "*I saved a spider*", reflecting the development of responsibility and compassion. Such experiences support the Curriculum for Wales' vision of ethical, informed citizens who care for living things and understand their role in sustaining local biodiversity.

In our setting, sustainability is enacted through practical, hands-on experiences that allow children to explore, question, and contribute. On the Conserve page of the scrapbook, you can see the bug hotel we built using natural and reused materials such as sticks, bark, pinecones, and cardboard tubes. As noted in the scrapbook, "the bug hotel wasn't for decoration; it was a cosy place for tiny creatures to hide and rest." This activity supported children's understanding of biodiversity, recycling, and the importance of insects in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Dominguez Contreras and Krasny (2022) argue that such experiences help position young children as environmental stewards, capable of contributing to ecological wellbeing. Elliott and Ärlemalm-Hagsér (2022) similarly emphasise that practical sustainability activities build children's agency and deepen their ecological understanding.

The John Muir Award provided a structured framework for deepening these experiences. The Award encourages participants to Discover, Explore, Conserve, and Share wild places (John Muir Trust, 2025). On the Share pages of the

scrapbook, you can see the children's drawings, photographs, and reflections capturing the colours, creatures, and discoveries they found in the meadow. These actions align strongly with Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) in Wales, which emphasises hands-on learning, ethical responsibility, and community involvement (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2015; UNESCO, 2023).

The principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are closely connected to established early childhood theories. Froebel's emphasis on nature as the foundation of learning (Bruce, 2015; Cave, 2023; d'Ascoli and Hunter, 2022), Malaguzzi's concept of the environment as the "third teacher" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012), and Montessori's focus on respect, independence, and real experiences (Montessori, 1967) all support the idea that sustainability should be lived rather than taught abstractly. These theoretical perspectives reinforce the value of child-led exploration, sensory engagement, and practical action, key features of our work in the meadow.

Critically evaluating these experiences reveals several strengths. First, practical learning enables children to develop agency and competence. Building the bug hotel, protecting flowers, and observing wildlife allowed children to take meaningful action, which research shows is essential for developing environmental responsibility (Boyd, 2018; Boyd, Hirst & McNeill, 2022). Second, learning from nature supports wellbeing, curiosity, and ecological identity. The scrapbook describes how "everything slows down... I notice colours more vividly here", illustrating the sensory richness of outdoor learning. Mackinder (2022) notes that sustained outdoor learning fosters autonomy and confidence, while Knight (2016) highlights the developmental benefits of forest school approaches. Third, taking action empowers children to see themselves as capable contributors to their environment, supporting the Curriculum for Wales' vision of ethical citizenship. This was evident when a child proudly shared, "I saved a spider", demonstrating empathy and responsibility.

However, there are also limitations. Opportunities such as nature walks and conservation activities can be restricted by weather conditions, staffing ratios, risk assessment requirements, and the time pressures common within early years settings. Education Scotland (2022) note that practitioner confidence and leadership

priorities strongly influence how frequently and effectively outdoor learning is embedded in practice. Confidence in teaching sustainability also varies, with some practitioners feeling uncertain about addressing complex environmental or global issues (Hedefalk, Almqvist & Östman, 2015).

While the John Muir Award provides valuable environmental learning, it can risk focusing too narrowly on nature, potentially overlooking broader aspects of sustainability such as social justice, equity, community participation, and global citizenship (Davis, 2010; UNESCO, 2026). Social sustainability is an essential dimension of ESD, emphasising fairness, inclusion, children's rights, and the wellbeing of communities. In early years practice, this includes helping children understand cooperation, kindness, shared responsibility, and respect for others. Whether these wider themes are addressed often depends on the specific experiences undertaken and the practitioner's intentional planning.

There are also broader challenges. Not all settings have access to wild spaces like our meadow, creating inequalities in children's opportunities to engage with nature (Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, 2025). Furthermore, sustainability education can sometimes be treated as an "add-on" rather than embedded across the curriculum. To overcome these limitations, sustainability must be integrated holistically, supported by professional learning, community partnerships, and a commitment to children's rights and participation.

In conclusion, my John Muir Award journey has shown me that sustainability is not only an educational aim but a lived, relational experience. On the final pages of the scrapbook, the photographs and reflections capture how the wildflower meadow has taught me about biodiversity, resilience, and interdependence, and it has reminded me of the importance of nurturing children's deep connection to nature. As I spent time observing the grasses, insects, and seasonal changes, I realised that sustainability becomes meaningful when it is rooted in place and experienced through the senses. These moments where "everything slows down... I notice colours more vividly here" highlight how powerful outdoor environments can be for shaping children's curiosity, empathy, and ecological identity.

Engaging with the meadow has shifted my thinking from viewing sustainability as a distant global agenda to understanding it as something personal and embedded in

everyday practice. It has strengthened my belief that early years education plays a vital role in helping children recognise their role in caring for the world. Our meadow in Sirhowy demonstrates how local action, hands-on learning, and child-led exploration can support the aspirations of Education for Sustainable Development, the Curriculum for Wales, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Looking ahead, this experience will influence my practice by encouraging me to plan more intentional opportunities for children to discover, explore, conserve, and share their learning. It has reinforced the importance of listening to children's ideas, supporting their agency, and creating environments where they can take meaningful action. By embedding sustainability holistically, through everyday routines, conversations, and outdoor experiences, I hope to continue nurturing children who feel connected to their environment and confident in their ability to contribute to a more sustainable future for Blaenau Gwent and beyond.

Thank you for listening

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