

Sustainability in early years script

Slide 1 - Hello, I am Lucie, my focus during this presentation is to share my personal experience and understanding on sustainability issues but also what sustainability could be in the natural environment and how best to support it.

Slide 2 - So, the place I chose to explore was Craig-Y-Nos Country Park, this place is an absolute pleasure to visit, and I would count it as a luxury to be able to spend more time there. My reason for choosing Craig-Y-Nos is because it holds a special place in my heart and a fond childhood memory. I used to visit Craig-Y-Nos with my grandparents regularly, this place provided me with so much happiness, curiosity and a sense of calm. Some of my favourite memories of this place is feeding the ducks and spending hours at the rock pool, throwing stones into the water and listening to the gentle splashes. As a child, I did not realise at the time but these moments I took away from nature provided me with such peace and overall positive wellbeing.

Slide 3 - Craig-Y-Nos is located in the upper of the Swansea Valley on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales. The country park is surrounded by mountains, woodland and the River Tawe. Craig-Y-Nos is a natural countryside area that has forests, open field, rivers, waterfalls and walking trails. The place is popular for its peaceful environment, wildlife, scenery and history around it.

Slide 4 - While exploring Craig-y-nos Country Park, it highlighted how important natural environments are for both wildlife and people. I discovered that parks like this provide safe habitats for many different plants and animals while also giving people opportunities to explore, relax, and appreciate nature. It also made me think differently about how valuable outdoor spaces are for children. Spending time in nature can encourage curiosity, creativity, confidence, and an appreciation for the environment. Children can learn through exploring, observing wildlife, and experiencing the changing seasons, which helps them build a stronger connection with the natural world. As seen here in my scrapbook I spotted some sustainability and creativity from reusing wood and natural materials to create dens and fencing.

The creativity within Craig-Y-Nos is what makes visitors curious and invites them to participate in the natural environment.

Slide 5 - As I spent my afternoon in Craig-Y-Nos Country Park, I noticed how thoughtfully the environment is cared for whilst protecting its natural beauty. As I explored, I spotted bird houses, benches and shelters which had been placed to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors while also supporting the wildlife. At the entrance of the park, I also spotted a café with an inviting outdoor seating area overlooking the country park, this creates a space for visitors to relax and appreciate their surroundings. All of these things reminded me of the importance of outdoor experiences during childhood and how those memories can create a lifelong respect for nature. It also made me think about how we can encourage children to care for the environment by helping them understand why protecting natural spaces is so important.

Slide 6 – Here I spotted some beautiful plants and some that I have not come across before, although some of these may be more common, I spent some time researching them when I got home to learn new facts about each of them and what they do to support our environment or what issues they may cause.

Slide 7 – Craig-Y-Nos as I have mentioned is linked to the River Tawe, so as I explored through the walking trail, I discovered many rivers and waterfalls. I took some time looking at the growth that was in and around the water and I wondered why it is not cut away or cleared. Out of interest I went away and done some more research which I then found out that it is all natural growth that helps create a healthy habitat for the wildlife around the country park.

Slide 8 – During my time at the country park, I noticed multiple signs reinforcing the importance of keeping dogs on leads and always to pick up their waste after them. This guidance was in place to protect the wildlife and visitors but also ensure that the environment is clean and enjoyable. Seeing many of these signs reminded me that caring for the natural environment is everyone's responsibility.

Slide 9 – Due to having my own dog with me, an issue I found was although there were many signs reinforcing the guidance to pick up after dogs, the dog waste bins were very limited. I did feel that this could cause frustration to visitors and they could

potentially leave the dog waste behind. My concern regarding this issue was if the dog waste is left behind because of the lack of bins, then this could then harm the wildlife, pollute the environment and visitors may avoid visiting the park due to lack of relaxation and cleanliness. To help overcome this issue I spent some time drafting an email to the local council to inform them of the lack of bins within the environment. I have now sent that email and will request an update in the near future.

Slide 10 – Here is my dog, we explored the country park together, followed the guidance for visitors with dogs, he was kept on a lead, we picked up his waste and disposed of it. We did this to help support the environment and ensure the country park is enjoyed by others just as much as we enjoy it!

I will now move onto part B of my presentation.

This part of the presentation will focus on sustainability becoming one of the most important issues today, explore the importance of Education for Sustainable Development and evaluate how experiences like the John Muir Award can support the children's understanding of sustainability.

To begin, although it is important that everyone protects the environment, there is more that can be achieved by ensuring that future generations have access to healthy communities, social equality and economic opportunities (IFAW, 2024). Within early years education, sustainability and the natural outdoors is highlighted as one of the key parts to a child's learning and development, it is believed that children develop values, attitudes and behaviours that will influence how they care for people and the environments throughout their lives (Birthto5Matters, no date).

The idea of sustainable development was first introduced in the Brundtland Report (1987), this report describes sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). This definition highlights the importance of protecting the environment whilst also supporting social wellbeing and economic development for future.

Following this, the 1992 Earth Summit strengthened the global commitment to sustainability by encouraging different countries to work together to protect the environment and improve people's quality of life (United Nations, no date). These

principles are reflected within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, there are 17 important goals, however, goal 4 focuses on quality education, goal 13 is climate action, goal 15 is life on land and all these link with early years education as they encourage children to become responsible, caring and active citizens within this world (United Nations, no date).

Within Wales, sustainability is embedded within the Well-being of Future Generations Act Wales (2015), this encourages organisations to consider the long term impact of their decisions will have on future generations (Welsh Government,2015). This links very closely to children's rights through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 29 states that education should prepare children to respect the natural environment and become responsible members of society (Unicef, no date). This highlights that sustainability is not only about protecting the environment but providing children with the knowledge, values and experience they need to create a more sustainable future.

This is where Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) becomes important because it helps children develop the knowledge, skills and values needed to create a more sustainable future (The Harmony Debates,2020). In Wales, the government have ensured these principles are embedded into the Curriculum for Wales, focusing on teaching the children to become ethical, informed citizens who have good understanding on local and worldwide issues (Welsh Government, 2020).

Furthermore, the curriculum for Non-maintained Nursery Settings promotes sustainability by helping the children develop a sense of belonging, identity and connection to the places they live (Welsh Government, 2024). Instead of practitioners teaching sustainability as a separate subject, Education for Sustainable Development is implemented into children's everyday learning activities. These activities could be planting and caring for the growth, caring for wildlife, recycling, growing fruit and vegetables and simply just having the opportunity to explore the natural environment. This ensures children have an understanding on sustainability and how to respect and support the environment around them from a young age.

To further support the children's understanding of sustainability, the key features of Education for Sustainable Development that must be considered and understand how these features can be implemented into everyday practice. Furthermore,

effective Education for Sustainable Development is child-led allowing them to actively participate in their own learning rather than being guided and provided the information from the adults around them. The learning should be practical and hands on which allows the children to explore and become curious through their experiences. Practitioners have the role to ensure the environment has resources such as recycled or natural materials however, they must encourage child-led learning, giving children opportunities to ask questions, problem-solve and explore their own ideas and only stepping in when support is needed or to extend the learning. When possible, the children's learning would be beneficial when outdoors, allowing them to explore the natural environment and appreciate the world around them. Although these experiences are child-led, practitioners should encourage the children to work collaboratively with other peers, share ideas and think about how their actions can have a positive impact on others and the world around them (Unesco, 2026).

From exploring the key features of Education for Sustainable Development, these principles can be applied to the experience that took place in part one as part of the John Muir award to recognise how they support the children's understanding of sustainability. The experience that was completed in part one as a part of the John Muir Award holds many of the key principles of Education Sustainable Development. One strength is the emphasis on the hands-on approach to learning, children are able to explore the natural environment and experience the world around them for themselves instead of receiving information, participating in classroom discussions or by reading a book. A theorist that supports this approach is Froebel, he believes that children learn best with hands-on experiences in natural environments. Froebel seen the outdoors as the most important environment for children's learning, he believed that the environment supports the children's physical, emotional and intellectual development (Froebel Trust, no date). Research also suggests that hands-on, practical experiences boost children's engagement, confidence and environmental awareness because these learning experiences are enjoyable, meaningful and link with their everyday lives (National Literacy Trust, 2022). However, although practical learning provides the children with so many benefits, there are also challenges that may be faced. Some early years settings may have less opportunity to offer the practical learning due to not having access to natural

environments, not enough staff to cover both indoor and outdoor ratios and low funding so they are unable to provide meaningful and regular outdoor opportunities. There are also challenges such as the the weather, health and safety requirements and curriculum demands reducing the time the children get to spend outdoors. This highlights that not all children have access to the same equal opportunities which takes away beneficial experiences.

Another important feature of the John Muir Award is the opportunity for children to explore and learn directly from nature. This can be done by observing wildlife, exploring different habitats and recognising the changes that happen through the different seasons, children are encouraged to ask questions, explore and develop curiosity. A theorist that supports this learning approach is Loris Malaguzzi, he saw the natural environment as the 'third teacher', he believed that the natural environment could offer meaningful opportunities by allowing the children to explore and develop their own understanding through the experience (Reggio Inspired, no date). These opportunities could help support the children's overall wellbeing by encouraging physical activity, reduce stress and help them to develop positive emotional connections with the natural world. However, although there are many benefits, it can sometimes focus solely on protecting and caring for the environment without helping children understand the sustainability issues, such as equality, social justice and being responsible citizens. Education for Sustainable Development focuses on developing the children's understanding of environmental, social and economic sustainability, so it is important that children learn about all these areas rather than just focusing on how to protect nature (NCCA, 2025).

To conclude, Education for Sustainable Development plays an important role within early years education. It has been recognised that international policies, Welsh legislation and educational frameworks promote the importance of supporting children develop respect for themselves, others and the environment. The experiences seen in part one of the assignment highlights how practical hands-on learning and learning directly from nature can help children develop curiosity, responsibility, problem-solving and a sense of belonging. However, it is important that education does not solely focus on protecting the environment but to ensure children develop an understanding on fairness, inclusion, communities and their role as a responsible citizen.

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