

AI statement

I have used AI to create pictures for my scrapbook. Everything else is my own work.

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Script for part 2A

Throughout my John Muir award, I discovered that nature has so much more to offer than I had ever realised. Spending time in my grandfather's garden helped me notice the small details that are often overlooked. From bees pollinating flowers, to dragonflies skimming across the pond and robins searching for food, I learnt that every plant, insect and animal has an important role in keeping the garden healthy and balanced.

I also discovered the value of growing our own food. Watching fruit and vegetables develop from tiny seeds into fresh produce showed me that the patience, care and commitment that gardening requires. Harvesting the crops and turning them into meals for my family helped me appreciate where food comes from and reminded me that growing your own produce can reduce waste save money and support a more sustainable lifestyle.

Most importantly, I discovered how deeply connected nature is to my own life and memories. My grandfather's garden was more than just a place to grow plants, it was a place where I learned, explored and created lasting memories. This journey has inspired me to continue caring for the environment, encourage others to appreciate nature and carry forward the lessons my grandfather taught me. I now understand that even small actions, such as planting flowers for bees, creating habitats for wildlife or growing food at home, can make a positive difference for both people and the natural world.

This journey has also encouraged me to slow down and spend more time outdoors. I have realised that nature is not just something to look at but something to care for and protect. Every visit to the garden has strengthened my appreciation for the environment and inspired me to continue making positive choices for the future.

As I explored my grandfather's garden, I discovered that every part of nature has an important role to play. By slowing down and observing more closely, I noticed how much life exists in even the smallest spaces. Bees moved from flower to flower collecting nectar, dragonflies skimmed across the pond, robins searched for worms and insects, and snails and caterpillars made their homes among the plants. Each visit gave me the opportunity to learn something new and appreciate the variety of wildlife living alongside the fruit and vegetables we were growing.

One of the most interesting things I found was how connected everything in the garden is. Bees are essential pollinators, helping flowers develop into the fruit and vegetables that we later harvested. Although caterpillars created holes in some of the leaves, I learned that they are an important part of the garden ecosystem and eventually become butterflies or moths. Dragonflies helped control insects around the pond, while robins naturally fed on worms, slugs and other small creatures, helping to keep the garden balanced. Even snails, although they sometimes damaged plants, formed part of the food chain and reminded me that every living thing has a purpose.

Exploring the garden also taught me that nature is constantly changing. Flowers bloom, vegetables ripen, insects emerge and wildlife changes with the seasons. Every visit was different, making me more curious about the natural world. I realised that taking time to observe these changes helped me feel calm, connected and appreciative of the environment around me.

This experience has changed the way I see nature. Instead of simply looking at a garden, I now see a thriving habitat full of life, relationships and opportunities to learn. Exploring alongside my grandfather has helped me understand why it is so important to care for wildlife, protect natural spaces and encourage biodiversity so that future generations can enjoy and learn from nature just as I have.

Throughout my John Muir Award journey, I discovered that conservation is not always about making large changes. It can begin with simple everyday actions that help protect nature and encourage others to value the environment. My grandfather's garden has always been cared for with respect for wildlife, and I was able to continue this by helping to grow food, care for plants and create a welcoming habitat for many different species.

One of the ways I helped conserve the garden was by harvesting the fruit, vegetables and herbs that we had grown and using them to prepare meals for our family. This reduced food waste, encouraged us to eat fresh seasonal produce and showed how growing food at home can be both sustainable and cost-effective. We also created recipe cards using the home-grown ingredients, which were shared with family members so they could enjoy healthy meals while making the most of the harvest. Sharing these ideas encouraged others to think about where their food comes from and how even a small garden can make a positive difference.

Another important part of my conservation journey was helping to build a mud kitchen for younger members of my family. We used natural and recycled materials wherever possible to create a space where children could play, explore and develop an appreciation for the outdoors. The mud kitchen encourages imaginative play using sticks, leaves, flowers, soil and other natural resources, helping children build a connection with nature from an early age. By creating this space, we hope to inspire the next generation to enjoy and care for the environment.

This experience has shown me that conservation is about protecting nature while also sharing its importance with others. Whether it is supporting wildlife, reducing waste, growing food or encouraging children to play outdoors, every small action contributes to a healthier environment. I now understand that caring for nature starts at home, and by continuing the values my grandfather has shared with me, I hope to help protect the natural world for future generations.

Completing the John Muir Award has changed the way I think about sustainability and my own role in protecting the environment. Before beginning this journey, I understood that looking after nature was important, but I now realise that

sustainability is built through everyday actions and choices. Growing food with my grandfather, observing wildlife and using the harvest to prepare meals showed me that even small changes can have a positive impact on both people and the environment.

This experience has encouraged me to become more mindful of the resources I use and the waste I produce. I now understand the value of growing seasonal food, reducing food waste, reusing materials where possible and creating spaces that support wildlife. Building the mud kitchen from natural and recycled resources also demonstrated how sustainable choices can benefit future generations by encouraging children to connect with nature through play.

Moving forward, I will continue to develop my understanding of sustainability by growing more of my own fruit and vegetables, planting flowers that support pollinators such as bees and butterflies, and creating habitats for wildlife in my own garden. I also plan to share these ideas with the children I work with in school by encouraging outdoor learning, gardening activities and discussions about caring for the environment. By continuing to learn, share and make sustainable choices, I hope to honour the values my grandfather taught me and inspire others to appreciate and protect the natural world for years to come.

Script for part 2B

Education for sustainability (EFS) has become a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, recognising that young children play an important role in creating a more sustainable future. Meaningful, hands-on experiences in natural

environments provide opportunities for children to explore, investigate and develop a sense of responsibility towards people and the environment. Experiences such as those undertaken through the John Muir award promote active learning, curiosity environmental awareness while encouraging learners to value and care for the natural world. This section will critically evaluate how these experiences support the philosophy and principles of early childhood EFS.

Sustainability has become a fundamental principle within early childhood education recognising that young children have an important role in creating a more sustainable future EFS extends beyond Environmental Protection by encouraging children to understand the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural and economic issues (UNESCO, 2025). This holistic perspective was first established through the Brundtland report which defines sustainable development as addressing the needs without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to address their own (World of commission on environmental and development (WCED), 1987). This vision was strengthened through the earth summit, which marked a significant shift in international thinking by recognising education as a tool for sustainable development through agenda 21 and emphasising that environmental concerns cannot be managed without changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (United Nations, 1992). according to United Nations, (2015) the sustainable development goals, which present sustainability as a complex idea that extend environmental protection, social justice and economic development broadened this viewpoint.

Within Wales these global ambitions are reflected in the well-being of future generations act 2015 which requires public bodies to consider the long-term consequences of decisions while promoting environmental social economic and cultural wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2015). Similarly, the curriculum for Wales positions sustainability as a cross-cutting responsibility, aiming to develop ethical, informed citizens who understand their responsibilities towards both local and global communities (Welsh Government, 2024). This is further supported by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC), particularly Article 29 which states that education should develop children's respect for the natural environment while promoting responsible citizenship (UNICEF, 1989). Together these policies demonstrate that sustainability is not simply an environmental issue, but a fundamental aspect of children's rights, well-being and future participation in society.

Despite these strong policy drivers, researchers argue that sustainability in early childhood is often interpreted too narrowly. Davis (2023) suggests that many settings continue to focus primarily on environmental activities such as recycling, gardening or litter picking, while overlooking wider themes including equity, participation, diversity and social justice. Similarly, Elliott and Davis (2020) argue that Education for Sustainability should move beyond teaching children *about* nature towards empowering them to become active participants who can question, influence and contribute to sustainable communities. This reflects the principles of child-centred pedagogy, where children are recognised as capable citizens rather than passive

recipients of knowledge. However, implementing this broader vision can be challenging. Barriers such as limited practitioner confidence, curriculum pressures, insufficient training and restricted access to high-quality outdoor environments may reduce opportunities for meaningful sustainability education (Education Scotland, 2019; Ernst and Burack, 2019). Consequently, while sustainability is increasingly embedded within policy and curriculum frameworks, its successful implementation depends upon practitioners providing authentic, hands-on experiences that enable children to explore complex environmental and social issues in developmentally appropriate ways.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an educational approach that enables learners to develop the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours needed to contribute to a more sustainable future. Rather than focusing solely on environmental protection, ESD promotes an understanding of the interconnected nature of environmental, social, cultural and economic issues, encouraging individuals to make informed and responsible decisions (UNESCO, 2025). In Wales, this has traditionally been developed through Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC), which aimed to help learners understand both local and global issues while recognising their responsibilities towards people, communities and the environment (Adran and Oes, 2008). Although the term ESDGC is no longer used within the Curriculum for Wales, its principles remain embedded throughout the curriculum under Learning for Sustainability (LFS), which incorporates sustainability, global citizenship and outdoor learning into all areas of learning (Welsh Government, 2024). This reflects the ambition of developing ethical, informed citizens who understand the impact of their actions and contribute positively to society.

The Curriculum for Wales promotes learning experiences that are authentic, purposeful and responsive to children's interests, closely aligning with the principles of ESD (Welsh Government, 2024). Similarly, the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings emphasises the importance of *cynefin*, belonging and developing meaningful relationships with local places, enabling children to understand their environment through first-hand experiences (Welsh Government, 2022). This approach recognises that sustainability cannot be effectively taught through isolated lessons but should be embedded within everyday experiences that encourage exploration, enquiry and reflection. Consequently, children become active participants in their learning rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

A key feature of ESD is its emphasis on child-led, experiential learning, where children investigate real-life situations through play, exploration and problem-solving (UNESCO, 2025). Experiences such as gardening, observing wildlife, caring for living things and reducing waste provide meaningful contexts in which children develop environmental awareness alongside communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills. This reflects constructivist perspectives, particularly those of Dewey (1938), who argued that knowledge is constructed through meaningful

experiences (Martin, J 2003) and Froebel, who viewed nature as central to children's holistic development (Tovey, 2016). However, sustainability education should extend beyond nature-based activities alone. Davis (2023) argues that high-quality ESD encourages children to question issues of fairness, participation, consumption and social responsibility rather than simply learning about recycling or conservation. Therefore, effective ESD requires skilled practitioners who can build upon children's interests, encourage enquiry and connect local experiences with wider environmental and social issues.

Implementing ESD in early childhood settings is still difficult, despite its acknowledged advantages. Barriers that practitioners may encounter include low self-esteem, inadequate professional growth, curricular demands, and limited access to excellent outdoor settings (Education Scotland, 2019; Elliott, Ärlemalm-Hagsér and Davis, 2020).

A significant strength of the experiences undertaken during my John Muir Award was the emphasis on practical, hands-on learning, which is considered a fundamental principle of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Rather than learning about sustainability through books or classroom activities, I developed my understanding by actively participating in growing fruit and vegetables, observing wildlife, harvesting crops and sharing produce with others. These experiences enabled me to understand sustainability through real-life situations, demonstrating that environmental responsibility is developed through participation rather than simply acquiring knowledge (UNESCO, 2020). This reflects Dewey's (1938) theory of experiential learning, which argues that education should be grounded in meaningful experiences that encourage learners to investigate authentic situations and reflect upon them (Martin, 2003). Harvesting vegetables before preparing meals and creating recipe cards for family members transformed sustainability into a lived experience, helping me understand the relationship between food production, reducing waste and responsible consumption. However, Kolb (1984) argues that experience alone is insufficient to promote deep learning unless opportunities for reflection are provided (Bilyk, 2010). Consequently, the reflective process involved in completing the John Muir Award scrapbook became equally important, allowing practical experiences to relate to wider concepts of sustainability.

The practical nature of my experiences also reflects the principles of Froebel, who believed that children construct understanding through direct interaction with nature rather than passive instruction (Tovey, 2016). Growing food alongside my grandfather required patience, responsibility and care while demonstrating that sustainability begins through everyday actions. Similarly, creating recipe cards using home-grown produce extended learning beyond the garden by encouraging responsible consumption, reducing food waste and sharing sustainable practices with family members. Davis (2023) argues that effective ESD should empower learners to become active participants capable of making positive environmental decisions rather than simply increasing environmental knowledge. My experiences

support this perspective because they encouraged me not only to learn about sustainability but also to apply sustainable practices within my own family and community. Nevertheless, some researchers caution that practical environmental activities can become tokenistic if they are not linked to broader discussions surrounding climate change, equity and social justice (Elliott, Årlemalm-Hagsér and Davis, 2020). Therefore, while my experiences strongly supported environmental sustainability, greater opportunities to explore wider global sustainability issues could have strengthened the learning further.

A second key theme supported through my John Muir Award was learning through nature. Spending time in my grandfather's garden allowed me to observe bees pollinating flowers, dragonflies around the pond, robins searching for food and caterpillars feeding on leaves. Rather than viewing these as isolated observations, I gradually recognised the interconnected relationships that exist within ecosystems. This aligns closely with contemporary ESD, which encourages learners to understand that humans are part of, rather than separate from, the natural world (UNESCO, 2025). Nature-based learning has been shown to enhance children's curiosity, environmental awareness and emotional wellbeing while promoting stronger pro-environmental behaviours later in life (Natural England, 2019). Similarly, Chawla (2020) argues that repeated positive experiences in nature during childhood are among the strongest predictors of lifelong environmental stewardship. My own experience supports this research, as spending time in the garden strengthened both my appreciation of wildlife and my motivation to conserve it through everyday actions.

Learning through nature also reflects Froebel's belief that gardens provide ideal environments for holistic development because they encourage observation, enquiry and care for living things (Tovey, 2016). Likewise, the Reggio Emilia approach views the environment as the "third teacher", recognising that carefully designed outdoor environments stimulate curiosity, collaboration and independent learning (Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 2012). My grandfather's garden became such an environment, providing opportunities to investigate natural processes through authentic experiences rather than predetermined outcomes. However, while outdoor learning offers significant educational benefits, access remains unequal. Practitioners may face barriers including limited outdoor spaces, insufficient training, curriculum pressures and concerns regarding risk management (Maynard and Waters, 2014). Consequently, although nature-based experiences strongly support the principles of ESD, their effectiveness depends upon skilled practitioners who can facilitate meaningful enquiry and ensure that learning extends beyond observation to include reflection, critical thinking and action. Therefore, my John Muir Award demonstrates that practical learning and learning through nature can make sustainability meaningful, but these experiences achieve their greatest educational value when combined with thoughtful reflection and opportunities to connect local experiences with wider environmental challenges.

Although my experiences during the John Muir Award strongly supported many principles of ESD, it is important to recognise their limitations. One criticism is that the activities undertaken were predominantly focused on environmental sustainability, particularly wildlife, gardening, food growing and conservation. While these experiences developed environmental awareness and encouraged responsible behaviours, ESD is a broader concept that encompasses environmental integrity alongside social justice, economic sustainability, cultural diversity and global citizenship (UNESCO, 2025). Sterling (2010) argues that sustainability education should encourage transformational thinking, enabling learners to critically question the complex relationships between environmental, economic and social systems rather than simply participating in environmental activities. From this perspective, my experiences may be viewed as representing a relatively narrow interpretation of sustainability, as there was limited opportunity to explore wider global issues such as climate justice, inequality, ethical consumption or international food systems.

Conversely, some researchers argue that beginning with local, meaningful experiences is an essential foundation for developing children's understanding of wider sustainability issues. Yamamura and Koth (2018) suggest that expecting young children to engage with global environmental crises too early can lead to feelings of anxiety or helplessness. Instead, he advocates for place-based education, where children first develop a strong emotional connection with their immediate environment before extending their understanding to national and global issues. This aligns closely with my experiences in my grandfather's garden, where developing relationships with wildlife, growing food and caring for natural spaces created a sense of belonging and environmental responsibility. Similarly, Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, Malone and Elisabeth Barratt Hacking (2020) argue that young children's sustainability learning is most effective when grounded in familiar places and everyday experiences that are meaningful to them.

Although outdoor play and nature exploration are widely promoted within early childhood education, structured conservation programmes such as the John Muir Award are often more commonly associated with school-aged children and community groups than with very young children (Elliott, Ärlemalm-Hagsér and Davis, 2020). Nevertheless, the philosophy underpinning the Award closely reflects approaches already valued within early childhood education. For example, the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales promotes play, exploration, belonging (*cynefin*) and authentic experiences within local environments (Welsh Government, 2022). Likewise, the Nurturing Care Framework identifies responsive relationships and opportunities to explore natural environments as important contributors to children's holistic development (WHO, 2018). Consequently, while the formal Award itself may not always be implemented with younger children, many of its underlying principles are already embedded within high-quality early childhood practice. This suggests that simplified versions of the

Award, adapted to children's developmental needs, could provide valuable opportunities for introducing sustainability from the earliest years.

A further debate concerns whether experiences such as my own sufficiently promote global citizenship. Oxley and Morris (2013) argue that global citizenship education should encourage learners to understand global interdependence, diversity, human rights and social responsibility. My experiences focused primarily on local biodiversity and sustainable food production, meaning opportunities to consider international perspectives were limited. For example, while creating recipe cards using home-grown produce encouraged responsible consumption, it did not explicitly explore issues such as global food security, fair trade, migration or climate inequality. Similarly, Bourn (2020) argues that sustainability education should help learners recognise the connections between local actions and global consequences if it is to prepare children for an increasingly interconnected world. However, this criticism depends largely upon the experiences that are undertaken and the role of the practitioner. Experiences centred on gardening or wildlife can become powerful opportunities for global citizenship when practitioners encourage children to compare food production across countries, discuss the effects of climate change on farming or explore how biodiversity loss affects communities worldwide. Therefore, it is not necessarily the John Muir Award itself that limits global citizenship learning, but rather how experiences are planned, facilitated and extended.

My Part 1 experiences effectively supported key environmental dimensions of ESD by engaging children in hands-on learning, fostering connection with nature and encouraging conservation. At the same time, they highlight the need for sustainability education to extend beyond environmental care alone if it is to align with contemporary interpretations of ESD. A more holistic approach should weave together local, place-based experiences with wider conversations about children's rights, social justice, cultural diversity and global interdependence. As Wals and Benavot (2017) emphasise, the future of sustainability education is not limited to nurturing children's appreciation of the natural world but lies in enabling them to think critically and act meaningfully in response to the complex social and ecological issues shaping our planet.

In conclusion, the John Muir Award demonstrated how hands-on, nature-based experiences can effectively support early childhood education for sustainability. Exploring, conserving and sharing experiences in my grandfather's garden developed my understanding of environmental responsibility and the value of everyday sustainable actions. However, sustainability extends beyond caring for the environment and should also include social, cultural and economic issues. By providing practical, child-centred experiences alongside opportunities to explore wider concepts such as global citizenship and equality, early years practitioners can help children develop the knowledge, values and confidence to contribute to a more sustainable future.

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