

**2107308**  
**ECEY6005**

**Part 2 a- 5-7 minutes**

**Sustainability in the early years.**

**Discover**

**John Muir Award – Carnwylion Castle Pond**

**Why did I choose this place?**

My chosen natural area is Carnwylion Castle Pond, or as I always knew it, “the pond by the leisure centre.” It is opposite Sandy Water Park and behind Llanelli’s old leisure centre and skate park.

I chose this place for several reasons. Firstly, it is close to where my family live and near my partner’s parents, so it was easy to visit more than once. While researching the John Muir Award, one message that stood out to me was that nature can be discovered anywhere, not just in national parks or remote countryside. This pond proves that even a small local habitat can support an incredible amount of biodiversity.

Secondly, this place is special to my boyfriend because he spent much of his childhood here. I never knew it here until he brought me once for a walk, I had no idea it was such a peaceful, wildlife-rich area. I had always assumed it was just another part of town, but walking around the pond made me realise how quiet and beautiful it really is. During my visit I also found a hazel tree beside the path. This reminded me of visiting my grandparents as a child, where I used to collect hazelnuts with my mum. It made me realise how closely nature connects with our memories. I also wanted somewhere peaceful where I could slow down and appreciate my surroundings instead of rushing through everyday life.

**My first impression**

Despite being surrounded by busy roads, I was surprised by how calm the pond felt. I could hear birds singing, insects buzzing and the gentle movement of the water while the traffic noise quickly faded into the background. The diversity of habitats immediately stood out to me. There were grassy banks, reeds, open water, mature trees and small islands where birds could safely nest away from people and predators.

**Explore**

Instead of simply walking around the pond, I slowed down and stopped regularly to observe what was happening. The longer I stayed, the more wildlife I noticed. One of the first things I saw was a family of swans with several cygnets following closely behind. It was clear how protective the adult swans were, reminding me how important safe habitats are for raising young. Nearby, ducks guided their ducklings across the pond, teaching them where to swim and feed. I also spotted a rat walking along the edge of the pond. Although rats are often viewed negatively, they play an important role in ecosystems by recycling nutrients and providing food for predators. Seeing one reminded me that every species has its place in nature. Around the flowers I watched bees collecting pollen and nectar, helping to pollinate plants that support many other species.

One of the most interesting creatures I discovered was a water strider gliding across the surface of the pond. They almost looked as though they were racing each other. I also watched dragonflies hovering above the water before darting away at incredible speed. Learning that dragonflies spend most of their lives underwater as nymphs showed me how important ponds are for their survival. While exploring, I realised how few plants I could actually identify. I used the plant identification feature on my iPhone to identify different leaves and flowers. Using technology alongside nature helped me learn far more than I would have otherwise and encouraged me to become even more curious.

## **Conserve**

Although the pond was beautiful, I also noticed litter, including plastic bottles and an old tyre floating in the water. This was upsetting because litter can pollute habitats and harm wildlife. My boyfriend Elliot and I collected some of the litter we could safely remove and placed it in a nearby bin. I also researched local volunteering opportunities, including the Llangennech and Bryn litter-picking group and Carmarthenshire County Council's "Pride Your Patch" programme. During my visit I stayed on the paths, avoided disturbing wildlife, especially birds with young and made sure to leave no litter behind. This experience reminded me that conservation does not always require big actions. Even small efforts, such as litter picking or respecting wildlife, can make a positive difference.

## **Who was John Muir?**

John Muir was a Scottish naturalist, author and conservationist who believed that spending time in nature encourages people to care for and protect it. His philosophy centred on four ideas: discover, explore, conserve and share.

Throughout this project I explored a local natural area, learned about its wildlife, carried out a small conservation activity by collecting litter and now sharing what I have learned. My experience reflects the values of the John Muir Award.

## **Reflection**

Completing this award has changed the way I view nature. I realised that meaningful experiences do not have to happen in mountains or forests. A small pond in my local community supports an amazing variety of wildlife and deserves the same appreciation and protection.

The biggest lesson I learned was the importance of slowing down. Taking the time to observe allowed me to notice far more than I would have if I had simply walked past.

As someone training to work in early childhood education, this experience has reinforced how important it is to give children opportunities to explore nature. Outdoor experiences help develop curiosity, confidence and respect for the environment. If children learn to value nature from a young age, they are more likely to protect it in the future.

Overall, this project has shown me that even small local green spaces can have a huge impact on wildlife, communities and our own wellbeing. They are valuable places that deserve to be appreciated and protected

## **Part 2 B**

In early childhood education, sustainability entails teaching children to take care of the environment while acknowledging how their actions impact the world. Waste reduction, recycling, resource reuse, energy conservation and care for the environment are all part of it (United Nations, 1987). By encouraging environmental, social, economic and cultural responsibility, education for sustainable development (ESD) goes beyond environmental preservation. It seeks to provide children the values, attitudes, information and abilities necessary to help create a more sustainable future (UNESCO, 2020). ESD acknowledges children as active citizens who may contribute to sustainable societies rather than as passive children (Davis, 2015).

The John Muir Award embodies these values by encouraging participants to discover, explore, conserve and share nature-related activities. This debate takes into account both the advantages and disadvantages of experiencing outdoor learning and critically assesses how my investigation of a nearby pond exemplifies the ESD principles.

## **Sustainability and Early Childhood Education**

According to the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainable development means achieving current goals without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to achieve their own

goals. It defined sustainability as including social, economic and environmental responsibilities, despite criticism for its wide definition (Hopwood et al., 2005). In the context of early childhood education, this entails fostering in children a sense of responsibility, respect and concern for others and the environment (Davis, 2015). These themes are carried over into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), particularly Goals 4 (Quality Education), 13 (Climate Action) and 15 (Life on Land), which promote sustainability education and biodiversity conservation.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which encourages long-term planning, teamwork and environmental responsibility, reflects these values in Wales. Similarly, the Curriculum for Wales promotes the development of morally upright, knowledgeable individuals who are aware of how their actions affect society and the environment (Welsh Government, 2022). Cynefin, a special component of the Welsh curriculum, promotes children's sense of community and natural surroundings. According to research, early emotional ties to nature promote favourable environmental views in later life (Chawla, 2020).

### **What is Education for Sustainable Development?**

Education for Sustainable Development gives students the values, attitudes, information and abilities they need to help create a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2020). ESD promotes critical thinking, involvement, environmental responsibility and respect for others rather than concentrating only on recycling or waste reduction. According to Davis (2015), teaching children about sustainability should help them comprehend how people, communities and the natural environment interact.

### **Critically Evaluating the John Muir Experience Through Education for Sustainable Development**

#### **Learning through Nature**

During my John Muir experience, I observed swans, ducks, bees, dragonflies, water striders and wildflowers, all of which contributed to my learning through direct connection with nature. This reflects both Montessori's emphasis on independence and reverence for the natural world, as well as Froebel's view that children learn best via first-hand experiences (Bruce, 2021; Montessori, 1967).

Positive early encounters in nature have been shown to improve children's welfare and promote environmental stewardship throughout life (Louv, 2005; Chawla, 2020). But not everyone has equal access to outdoor education. Opportunities for meaningful

nature-based learning may be diminished by a lack of green spaces, practitioner confidence and resources.

### **Practical Learning and Taking Action**

Gathering litter and looking at an abandoned tyre showed how human activity has a direct impact on ecosystems. This is consistent with Dewey's (1938) idea of experiential learning, which holds that reflection and real-world experiences lead to meaningful education.

According to UNESCO (2020), participation and action are essential components of ESD since sustainability necessitates that people make constructive contributions to society. However, Davis (2015) contends that rather than just picking up litter, practical activities like litter picking should be accompanied with conversations that inspire children to wonder why pollution happens and how communities may stop environmental harm.

### **Futures Thinking and Intergenerational Responsibility**

The idea of preserving landscapes for future generations was also represented in my experience. The Brundtland Report (1987), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) all highlight children's rights to sustainable futures and healthy environments.

To create a more comprehensive knowledge of sustainability, local conservation efforts should be connected to broader global concerns like social justice, sustainable consumption and climate change.

### **Critical Discussion**

Reflecting on my John Muir experience, I realised that the activities largely helped me grasp environmental sustainability. My understanding of biodiversity was enhanced by investigating the pond ecosystem, seeing wildlife and gathering litter. It also showed how outdoor education may promote environmental care (Davis, 2015; Chawla, 2020).

However, environmental sustainability was the primary focus of the experience. According to UNESCO (2020), sustainability encompasses social, economic and cultural aspects. As a result, while picking up litter and observing wildlife promoted respect for the environment, they offered fewer chances to investigate more general concerns like inequality, climate justice.

Furthermore, if conservation efforts are not accompanied by substantive discourse, they may turn. Instead of just addressing the effects of environmental issues, practitioners should encourage children to ask questions about their origins (Sterling, 2001). This teaches children that sustainability calls for teamwork rather than just personal accountability.

However, by promoting inquiry, involvement and emotional ties to environment, my experience exemplifies many early childhood sustainability ideals. According to research, these encounters help people develop environmentally conscious habits later in life (Louv, 2005; Chawla, 2020). Opportunities to investigate justice, diversity and global citizenship should be incorporated into outdoor learning in order to offer a more comprehensive approach to ESD.

All things considered, the John Muir Award offers a useful foundation for promoting experiential, location-based learning in Education for Sustainable Development. Curiosity, environmental responsibility and active citizenship are fostered by exploring local settings, taking part in conservation initiatives and by observing biodiversity.

However, social justice, cultural awareness and global citizenship should be included in sustainability education in addition to environmental preservation. Early childhood educators may assist children in developing into moral, knowledgeable citizens who contribute to a more sustainable future by integrating outdoor learning with chances for dialogue and critical thinking.

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