

ECEY6005

Regaining Paradise? Sustainability in the Early Years.

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References

I have not used any AI in this assignment.

Part 2 A - Reflection Script

Hello my name is Kelly and today I will be reflecting on my experience of completing the John Muir Award and exploring how it has strengthened my connection with nature.

The first thing I needed to do was to discover an area. I decided to choose my garden as the focus for my John Muir Project because it is our special place where we feel safe, happy and connected as a family. It has been wonderful to watch my daughter grow, learn and discover new things there over the years. Our garden holds so many fun filled memories and whenever I look outside I smile as I remember them all.

I can picture us on warm summer days playing together, planting flowers and enjoying picnics on the grass. We were surrounded by the beautiful sounds of birds singing in the trees and the gentle buzzing of bees as they move from flower to flower. I often think back to 2020 when the world stood still and our garden became our whole world. Every day brought a new adventure as we searched for insects, watched birds and squirrels and even welcomed a frog that decided to join us in the paddling pool. Our garden will always be my favorite place because it is more than just a garden it is where some of our happiest family memories were made. It is a place filled with love, laughter and togetherness and it will always hold a special place in my heart.

In order to explore my garden I set about taking pictures of everything from the wild, flowers, large trees and insects that I found in my natural surroundings. I really enjoyed taking the photos as it made me stop and look at all the beauty that was there. My garden has many potted flowers including honeysuckle that climbs freely along the walls adding colour and life to the space and as I water the flowers each day I often notice bees busily moving from one bloom to another collecting pollen. I love taking a moment to stop and watch them as they work. The gentle buzzing sound they make is one of my favourite sounds in the garden and always makes me feel calm and connected to nature. I enjoy seeing how focused they are as they visit each flower and it amazes me how such small creatures play such an important role in helping plants grow. Watching them has helped me appreciate

nature even more and reminds me how important it is to create spaces where wildlife can thrive.

Undertaking the John Muir Award has given me the opportunity to explore and learn about different insects and I have gained a wealth of knowledge especially about the importance of bees. One of the most enjoyable parts of this journey has been sharing what I have learned with my daughter. We have explored nature together, talked about the insects we have found and even wrote a poem together about a bumblebee which I have included in my scrapbook. Sharing this experience has made it even more meaningful and has helped us both develop a greater appreciation for the natural world.

One of the biggest things I have learned while completing the John Muir Award is to slow down and really notice the nature around me. Since moving into my home almost ten years ago I have admired the beautiful tree in my garden, enjoying its white blossoms in spring and its bright red berries in autumn but I had never taken the time to find out what it was. Through this award I discovered that it is a Rowan tree also known as a Mountain Ash and I was surprised by how much I could learn from a single tree. I have learned that the Rowan is one of our most valuable native trees because it supports so much wildlife throughout the year. In spring, its flowers provide nectar for bees, hoverflies, butterflies and many other pollinating insects, while in autumn its bright red berries become an important food source for birds such as thrushes and blackbirds. I also discovered that the plants growing beneath the tree create a sheltered habitat for insects and other small creatures. While exploring this area I even found a frog hiding amongst the foliage showing me how one tree can support a whole community of wildlife.

This experience has changed the way I look at my garden. I now understand that even familiar places are full of wildlife if you take the time to observe them. Learning about my Rowan tree has helped me appreciate the important role that native plants play in supporting biodiversity and it has inspired me to continue making my garden a welcoming habitat for wildlife.

I also shared photos of our homegrown strawberries and potatoes. My daughter loved helping me plant them and we both enjoy watching them grow a little more each week. It was exciting to see the first strawberries appear and to know that

the potatoes were growing under the soil. Growing them together has been a great way to teach my daughter where our food comes from and why growing our own food is important. She has learned that growing fruit and vegetables at home is more sustainable because it reduces food miles, creates less packaging waste and is better for the environment. We cannot wait to harvest them and enjoy eating them together. Growing our own food has been a fun and rewarding experience helping us spend quality time together outdoors while learning how to care for nature and live more sustainably.

To help conserve wildlife I decided to add bird feeders and a bird bath to my garden. I conducted some research to help me find out the benefits and found that these simple editions to my garden provide birds with a safe place to find food and fresh water especially during hot weather and in the winter when these can be difficult to find. Since adding them I have noticed more birds visiting my garden which has been exciting to watch. By providing food and water I am helping to protect local wildlife and encouraging more birds to use my garden as a safe habitat. This also helps restore nature by creating a space where wildlife can thrive. Looking after birds in this simple way has shown me that even small actions can make a big difference to conserving nature and supporting biodiversity. One of my favourite parts of adding the bird feeders and bird bath has been watching the birds with my daughter. We often see little brown and black sparrows visiting throughout the day happily hopping around the garden looking for food. We have also been lucky enough to see a pair of doves that visit together regularly, they always seem to stay close to each other which is lovely to watch. Sometimes the little birds chirp noisily at one another almost as if they are arguing because one will not move over to let the other have a turn at the feeder. My daughter and I always smile and giggle as we watch their funny behaviour.

These special moments have helped us feel more connected to nature and reminded us how important it is to create safe spaces where wildlife can feed, drink and thrive. As John Muir so beautifully said, 'but in every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks'. Watching the birds together has shown us that even the simplest moments in our own garden can bring joy, wonder and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

Another favourite part of my John Muir Award was sharing my garden with family and friends. We invited them over for a picnic so we could enjoy everything we had created together. We sat surrounded by colourful flowers, buzzing bees, singing birds and fluttering butterflies taking in the peaceful sights and sounds of nature. The sweet aroma of the flowers and herbs filled the air making the garden feel calm and relaxing. It was lovely to watch everyone enjoy the space and it made me proud watching my daughter show our garden and telling stories about what we had created. Sharing this experience reminded me that nature is even more special when it brings people together and inspires others to appreciate and care for the environment. John Muir himself quotes 'Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike'.

Thank you for listening.

Part 2 B – Academic script

Education for Sustainability helps children develop an understanding of environmental responsibility, social justice, economic awareness and active citizenship giving them the knowledge and skills to build a more sustainable future (UNESCO, 2022). The John Muir Award (2025) supports this by encouraging people to discover, explore, conserve and share their experiences in nature. This presentation will explore how the John Muir Award supports early childhood education for sustainability. It will discuss how the award links to the theories of Froebel, Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Bronfenbrenner as well as key frameworks including the Curriculum for Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

According to UNESCO (2022) education is essential in creating more sustainable societies and preparing children to become active citizens who can respond to environmental, social and economic challenges. They argue that education for sustainable development should empower learners to solve problems collaboratively and take positive action within their communities. Similarly, Tinney (2020) states there is increasing recognition that young children will become the

decision makers of the future and that professionals working in the early years sector are ideally positioned to help children understand the interconnected nature of the world. The author points out that practitioners can also support children in recognising the cycles and patterns within the natural environment and promote an appreciation of harmony and the principles of sustainable development. In the same vein, according to Samuelsson and Park (2017) early childhood practitioners play a key role in promoting sustainability through both the Curriculum and everyday practice. They argue that children should be encouraged to lead their own learning by exploring, thinking critically and reflecting on their experiences. The authors explain that high quality early childhood education and well trained practitioners are essential for promoting sustainability and stress that all children should have equal access to an informed education. However, they recognise that many children around the world still do not have access to high quality education and argue that quality is important for achieving social, environmental and economic sustainability. Experiences such as the John Muir Award (2025) reflect these principles by allowing children to participate in conservation projects, make observations, ask questions and become involved in improving their local environment. The award allows children to become active participants developing the confidence and skills needed to contribute to a more sustainable future.

The philosophy behind the John Muir Award (2025) also aligns closely with the principles of the UK Government (2015) Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The Act places a legal duty on public bodies to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales while considering the needs of future generations. One of its seven well-being goals is creating a more resilient Wales which focuses on protecting biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. To support this, activities undertaken through the John Muir Award (2025) encourage children to care for local wildlife, enhance natural environments and recognise the importance of biodiversity. Similarly, according to Barrable (2019) these experiences help children understand that their actions can have a positive impact on the environment supporting the long term aims of sustainability and encouraging responsibility from an early age. Furthermore, the author suggests that regular access to natural environments is essential in early childhood education as it helps

children connect with nature and adds outdoor activities strengthen this connection and should be a core part of environmental education.

The Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for Wales supports this view and states it places sustainability at the centre of learning by aiming to develop ethical, informed citizens who understand the impact of their actions on the world around them. The Curriculum encourages enquiry, outdoor learning, collaboration and authentic experiences that connect children with their local communities and natural environments. However, Jones (2022) points out that even though there is growing interest in sustainability among pupils many teachers lack confidence in teaching these topics and suggests that practitioners should start with the desired outcomes and work backwards to identify the steps needed to achieve them. The author suggests this will help practitioners build confidence and develop a more tailored approach. The John Muir Award (2025) complements the Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for Wales aims by providing practical opportunities for children to investigate biodiversity, observe seasonal change, solve real life environmental problems and reflect upon their learning. These experiences support all four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales particularly developing ethical, informed citizens who are ready to play an active role in creating a sustainable future (Welsh Government, 2022). According to Barrable (2019) outdoor learning has always been an important part of early years education and suggests research shows that spending time in nature helps children's social, emotional and thinking skills. The author points out that as a result this has led to more nature based pedagogy in early year education.

The principles of UNICEF (2019) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [Hereafter UNCRC] underpin sustainability in education and are reflected in the Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for Wales. Article 29 states that education should develop children's talents and encourage respect for the natural environment, while Article 31 recognises every child's right to play, rest and participate in recreational activities. Furthermore, outdoor learning experiences such as the John Muir Award (2025) provide meaningful opportunities for children to develop emotional well being, resilience and environmental awareness while exercising these rights. Moreover, involving children in conservation activities supports Article 12 by encouraging them to express their views and participate in

decisions that affect them. In the same vein, research by Malone (2016) suggests that sustainability in education provides children with opportunities to develop environmental knowledge and understanding while also promoting their rights, participation and holistic development. The author points out that keeping children indoors limits opportunities for independence and environmental learning and points out that taking away natural risks in the outdoors may have a negative effect on children's resilience.

The ethos of the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Policy in Wales (2008) [hereafter ESDGC] underpins many of the experiences promoted through the John Muir Award. Rather than being a separate subject, ESDGC is an approach to learning that develops learners values, attitudes, skills and understanding across the Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for Wales. The ESDGC (2008) encourages children to recognise the links between environmental sustainability, social justice and global responsibility while promoting respect, participation, critical thinking and informed decision making and suggest through practical conservation activities and exploring local ecosystems children learn how human actions affect the environment and begin to understand that local actions can have a wider global impact. This is reflected in the John Muir Award (2025) where experiences in nature help children develop empathy for living things and understand how simple actions such as planting flowers for pollinators or creating wildlife habitats can contribute to a more sustainable future. Through these experiences children are supported in becoming responsible, informed and active citizens reflecting the aims of ESDGC (ESDGC, 2008). However, according to ESTYN (2014) report many teachers did not have a clear or consistent understanding of the purpose, definition and benefits of ESDGC and point out that although schools were enthusiastic about teaching sustainability, many were less certain about how to develop the skills and understanding associated with ESDGC effectively.

From a theoretical perspective the John Muir Award (2025) reflects the interconnected principles of theorists such as Froebel, Maria Montessori, the Reggio Emilia approach and Urie Bronfenbrenner. Froebel believed that children's learning should be holistic recognising the interconnectedness of the child, nature and the wider world. He viewed play as a natural and essential means of learning enabling

children to develop through exploration, creativity and meaningful experiences. He suggested that while adults have an important role in guiding children's development, the guidance should nurture rather than control learning. Froebel also saw the natural environment as a powerful teacher that supports children's growth, wellbeing and understanding of the world making nature based experiences central to effective early years education (Froebel trust, 2026). Similarly, Montessori advocated for child-led, hands-on experiences within carefully prepared environments that foster independence, curiosity and responsibility (Standing, 1998). These principles align with the John Muir Award's (2025) focus on exploration, discovery and meaningful interaction with natural environments. The Reggio Emilia approach further reinforces this perspective by recognising the environment as the third teacher encouraging children to investigate, collaborate and construct knowledge through real world experiences (Rinaldi, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's (1996) ecological systems theory highlights the interconnected relationship between children their communities and the wider environment emphasising that development is shaped through these interactions. In the same vein, according to World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (2010) education for sustainable development aims to help children develop the values, skills and attitudes needed for a sustainable future. However, state that applying western ideas of best practice can conflict with local traditions and cultural values especially in many parts of the world where learning from elders and connecting with nature are important. The organisation points out to be effective it should be based on children's local cultures and everyday experiences and suggests sustainable change is more successful when it respects both local and global perspectives and involves children, teachers and families. This perspective closely aligns with sustainability education and the Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for Wales as it encourages children to recognise that their actions influence both people and the natural world. By engaging with local environments and communities the John Muir Award (2025) fosters environmental responsibility and an understanding of the interconnected relationship between people and nature. Collectively, these theorists highlight how outdoor sustainability in education supports children's cognitive, social, emotional and environmental development while encouraging a lifelong commitment to caring for the natural world.

In conclusion, the John Muir Award (2025) demonstrates how education for sustainability can be meaningfully embedded within early childhood education. By reflecting the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Curriculum for Wales and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship it empowers children to become active participants in caring for their environment. Furthermore, supported by educational theory and research these experiences develop environmental knowledge, critical thinking, resilience and wellbeing while fostering a lasting commitment to sustainability. Ultimately, meaningful engagement with nature in early childhood benefits children's holistic development and equips them with the values and skills needed to contribute to a more sustainable future.

Thank you for listening.

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