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Confirmation Statement - Use of Generative AI.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my own drafts, notes, and other resources which I used before, and after the use of AI tools, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Part 1: Exploration of the site.

Today, I will explore sustainability in the early years and explain why I chose Porthkerry Country Park as the central focus of my scrapbook and presentation. This site holds personal significance for my family; during the COVID-19 pandemic, we discovered its diverse landscapes and visited almost every day, finding that regular time immersed in nature provided a vital sense of peace and comfort that supported our emotional wellbeing through a difficult period. Years later, we still discover something new with every visit - whether tracing seasonal shifts, observing local wildlife, or navigating its varied walking trails. This enduring connection has shown me how nature can support child's development. My time at Porthkerry has strengthened my commitment to early years sustainability, showing that outdoor play inspires lifelong environmental stewardship.

Whenever I visit 'Porthkerry Country Park', I **discover** the unique history and ecology of the site. It is incredible to think this estate was owned by the Royal Family in the 15th century before becoming a model farm in the 1800s. Walking past the visible remains of the old sawmill, workers' cottages and the depopulated medieval village site felt like stepping back in time.

My sense of wonder for this place amplified when I explored Cliffwood, a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) since 1962. Learning that these cliffs hold an essential, protected habitat for incredibly rare UK plant life - like the True Service Tree and purple gromwell - sparked a deep appreciation for our local biodiversity.

Discovering Porthkerry's rich history firsthand taught me the delicate balance between past human activity and the vital need for modern conservation. It has made me far more conscious of the impact our daily choices have on the environment, reinforcing my personal responsibility to protect and preserve these fragile natural sanctuaries for future generations. At their core, these experiences align Welsh educational policy with real-world conservation. For me, this means translating the four purposes and six Areas of Learning and Experiences (AoLEs) of our national curriculum into meaningful action, perfectly matching the wild spirit and environmental care of the John Muir Award (Welsh Government, 2022; John Muir Award, 2026).

Furthermore, creating this scrapbook page for 'Porthkerry Country Park' allowed me to document its diverse landscapes for further **exploration**. I chose to record my searches for local wildlife and minibeads because they perfectly capture the sensory, child-led curiosity that Siraj-Blatchford (2009) identifies as effective, relational early years pedagogy. Alongside these wildlife logs, I featured photos of meadow tree climbing, and beach stone skipping to showcase the pure joy of open-ended, active outdoor play. Rather than merely evoking a passive appreciation, compiling these photos and notes actively fosters a deep sense of *cynefin* (BERA,

2024). By grounding this sense of belonging within my scrapbook, I have visually captured how connecting local heritage with nature inspires young people to become 'ambitious, capable learners', and 'ethical, informed citizens' of the changing world (WG, 2020).

I also used this scrapbook section to show how I can actively protect Porthkerry's habitats, wildlife, and history. During my visits, I reduce my environmental footprint by disposing of litter responsibly to protect wildlife from plastic pollution, staying on designated paths to prevent soil erosion, and following park guidelines. Recording these practices highlights that **conservation** depends not only on protecting natural spaces but also on meaningful personal engagement with them (WG 2021, Stewart *et al.*, 2024). Caring for the historic ruins and rare Cliffwood SSSI plants has strengthened my belief that nature is the ultimate educator. These visits made me realise I am not just a visitor, but someone whose choices directly impact the environment's future. This connects to Froebel's ideas about unity and how being close to nature teaches us about social responsibility and builds a lifelong bond with the world around us (Roszak, 2018; Watts, 2021; Froebel Trust, 2022; Froebel Partnership, 2024).

Lastly, I now feel confident **sharing** information about Porthkerry Country Park with others. Further information regarding this place - including its history, walking trails, and facilities - can be found on the Vale of Glamorgan website. They can also learn about the site's rich biodiversity and local forestry on the Woodland Trust directory. By **sharing** information with others about this site, not only am I taking pride in my local environment, but I am also, actively inspiring others to take action for wild places too (John Muir Award, 2026).

Overall, I believe that encountering places like Porthkerry Park provides an opportunity for me to reconnect with nature, offering a psychological respite from the pressures of daily life. These experiences mirror my own childhood when I explored the diverse landscapes in Poland. Whether navigating woodlands in Wales or rural landscapes internationally, these formative encounters are vital for developing a child's sense of belonging and *cynefin*. These places shape who we are, as the environments we explore in our youth become the very spaces that define our peace, resilience, and responsibility towards the world around us.

Part 2: Critical analysis of the site.

Sustainability is having appreciation for the wider environment, a respect of the world around us and the greater order of our nature (Boyd *et al.*, 2022). Sustainability is characterised by meeting current global needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In Wales, since the devolution of powers, sustainable development has been an integral part of the Welsh Government's policy, and it is underpinned across different organisational sectors (Tinney and Campion, 2020). The 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship' was developed to ensure that people are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deal with the major challenges that the world is facing, preparing them for sustainable living in the 21st century (WG, 2018). According to the Welsh Government's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), ESDGC is defined as:

"About the things that we do every day... It is about how we treat the earth and how we treat each other, no matter how far apart we live. It is about how we prepare them for the future" (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

Essentially, ESDGC is not only taking social responsibility for our actions, but also, how we as individuals can become ethical citizens of the changing world. The Welsh Government's deliberate use of the adjective 'future' holds significant implications for public bodies in Wales, reflects a legal shift away from short-term decision-making towards long-term sustainability. A collaborative approach is legally required to resolve these issues pertaining to future generations (UK Legislation, 2015; WG, 2025). In particular, the 'Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015' states the duties that citizens must carry out to ensure that our future generations can enjoy the same quality of life as we have now (WG, 2026).

Nonetheless, this policy is embedded in the Welsh Curriculum through the core cross-cutting theme *cynefin*. *Cynefin* is about engendering a sense of pride and belonging of others, celebrating the diverse landscapes of Wales (WG, 2022). By understanding their own place within the local community, children begin to realise the powerful and active role that they can play within our society. They not only respect their surroundings but know that their actions have a rippling effect to our future environment. Enabling children to become 'informed, ethical citizens' of the world around them. Hence, they do not perceive sustainability as an abstract concept, but something that is a tangible reality in our lives.

This essay will reflect on how the experiences observed in part 1 support the themes and aspirations of 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD). Drawing on concepts, such as learning from nature and intergenerational change, should help me reinforce the understanding of this topic. Through further exploration of this topic, it becomes important to assess the extent to which Early Years policies and

frameworks are translated into classroom practices towards sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Regarding the first theme, ESDGC and 'learning from nature' is sustained within the Welsh Curriculum through the experiences that children can cultivate in their outdoor environment. Within the early years, children have a desire to take part in hands-on, purposeful activities and engage in their wider surroundings. The Welsh Curriculum capitalises on this innate curiosity by encouraging exploratory play, and independent learning as vehicles for children's holistic development (WG, 2017; WG, 2022).

Similarly, international frameworks like United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD) reinforce that early, positive physical encounters with nature are essential for children to develop lifelong environmental responsibility, taking into consideration their actions and behaviours (Kopnina, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The ESD approaches towards sustainability and early-childhood education are visible in the ways in which they are embedded in our everyday lives, through the physical environment and the pedagogy of the setting (Somerville *et al.*, 2015; Collins *et al.*, 2025). Activities like those in Part 1 - including exploring ancient woodlands, freshwater streams, and a pebble beach - illustrate how my own experiences at Porthkerry reflected these principles in practice. Ultimately, these practises ensure that they can 'overcome positivistic and romanticised views in our relationship with the environment' and 'to integrate individual and collective values', as proposed by Malone (2016) and Bascope *et al.* (2019).

However, the effectiveness of implementing such curriculum goals depends on whether professionals can provide multiple, sustained outdoor experiences and encounters with nature, or if these practices are merely tokenistic. Whilst one-off fieldtrips to sites like 'Porthkerry Country Park' can prove effective at cultivating real-world experiences, they may not necessarily enhance deep-seated environmental stewardship unless these principles are consistently embedded within students' immediate, daily inhabited settings (Senedd Wales, 2022; Tinney, 2023; RCPCH, 2024). Without regular opportunities to revisit and apply these experiences, children may struggle to translate short-term enthusiasm into sustained environmental responsibility. Providing pupils with authentic outdoor experiences is important to supporting their learning progression; but failing to do so prevents them from developing an understanding of the world around them - as 'ethical, informed citizens' of the world and 'ambitious, capable learners' who are keen to embrace change in the environment (WG, 2022; WG, 2024; Ellis *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, contemporary practises must look to early years scholars such as Froebel, who argued that nature is a place where children can ignite curiosity and lifelong learning, and Malaguzzi, who proposed that the physical environment acts as a 'third teacher'; whereby space is never just a passive backdrop; it directly influences how children

feel, interact, and learn (ACECQA, 2018; Tovey *et al.*, 2022). When outdoor spaces act as a true partner in teaching, they inspire natural discovery and enhance communication. Without this environment, children lose the chance for deeper exploration and the hands-on experience that makes their growth visible (Wilson, 2007; Somerville & Powell, 2019; Elliott & Davis, 2020). However, neither theorist was writing in response to contemporary environmental crises such as climate change or biodiversity loss.

A closer synthesis of these arguments suggests that the true success of ESGDC comes from professionals implementing big outdoor trips with everyday classroom activities, if and only if, nature is embedded into it. Whilst visits to places like 'Porthkerry Country Park' can evoke natural curiosity and lifelong interests amongst learners, such experiences must not be temporary. But instead, professionals must cultivate these encounters in the classroom environment, encouraging children to 'sense ecologically' through everyday weather and elements like rain and stone (Elliott & Davis, 2020). Alternatively, professionals can also embrace the 'rain pedagogies' in practice amongst children within the outdoor playground. Nascimento (2020) uses children's popular song 'Rain, Rain, Go Away' to subvert the adult's expectations of the weather, challenging this idea that nature should be avoided or controlled when it gets messy. Rather than intreating indoors, the writer urges professionals to invite 'rain' and water to 'stay' in educational practices. This allows children to feel reconnected with the natural world. Experiences such as visiting Porthkerry Park on a wet day can encourage children to engage with natural processes rather than avoid them.

Secondly, ESGDC is reflected through the authentic voices and concerns of young people who demand environmental change. This highlights 'intergenerational change' and is often underpinned by the Welsh Government's commitment to institutional sustainability. Globally, this ensures compliance with initiatives like the 'World Project on Education for Sustainable Development 2009-2010', coordinated by OMEP and UNESCO (UNESCO 2009; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2010; Engdahl, 2015). Within these international interviews, children were shown an image of the globe that served as the official logo for the 2010 OMEP World Congress. When children looked at this image, they often said that the planet was 'dirty', and 'sick'. These responses demonstrated that even young children possess sophisticated environmental understandings when given opportunities to express them (UNICEF, 2019; OMEP, 2024). Most importantly, children shared profound thoughts that inspired us to look at how our own behaviours shape the natural world. For example, participants from China emphasised that 'people cannot live without the earth', whereas participants from Poland stated that 'every child should care about the planet... because it is our **home**' (Engdahl & Rabušicová, 2010; Gregoric *et al.*, 2025). Ultimately, this call for sustainability and environmental responsibility is exemplified in

the experiences those seen in Part 1. As a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Porthkerry Park protects rare wildlife and restores habitats for the future. The park offers a mix of rich biodiversity, historic landmarks, and coastal spaces that connect the community directly with nature. Combining the John Muir Award with visits to Porthkerry Park connects global ideas to local action. This hands-on experience helps children move beyond words, teaching them the empathy needed to protect our planet.

However, turning these ideas into practice varies amongst communities. While spaces like Porthkerry Park offer rich outdoor environments, they can suffer from a 'value-action gap' (Gregoric et al., 2025). This gap occurs because teaching children about the environment in a classroom does not automatically change how communities treat local spaces. Despite its SSSI status, the park faces constant environmental damage. For instance, noise and air pollution from the active railway line on the Porthkerry Viaduct disrupt local wildlife, while litter and dog waste remain persistent issues (WG, 2019). Moreover, this tension can be further understood through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. International and national approaches, such as UNESCO's 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD) and Welsh Government's 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship' (ESDGC), successfully embed the principles of 'sustainability' and 'environmental responsibility' into the 'macrosystem'. Despite this, they often overlook the immediate 'microsystem' level, where children directly encounter the daily realities of pollution (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Boyd, 2018; Fisher & Lombardi, 2025). This gap reduces *cynefin* from a lived principle to an abstract concept, turning initiatives like the John Muir Award into isolated classroom exercises rather than tools to address wider social issues (WG, 2022; John Muir Award, 2022). Crucially, if frameworks only focus on global ideas, they fail to address the local, structural polluters - such as the industrial transport networks - that children have no power to change. To bridge this gap, the John Muir Award has the potential to be used as a direct micro-level intervention (John Muir Award, 2025). Active participation drives real change: when children clear litter or protect local wildlife, they shift from passive observers into young leaders taking charge of their *cynefin* (WG, 2023; WG, 2024). When this happens, these hands-on actions build a deep sense of pride and belonging. By taking ownership of their local spaces, children transform from helpless onlookers of a damaged planet into empowered citizens caring for their 'home' (WG, 2022).

In conclusion, this essay has critically analysed how the experiences observed in part 1 support the themes and aspirations of 'Evidence for Sustainable Development'. Upon further exploration of concepts such as 'Learning from Nature' and 'Intergenerational Change', it becomes evident that whilst national and international policies genuinely advocate for 'sustainability' and 'environmental responsibility'; they often fail to consider the immediate microsystem level where children physically

encounter the everyday impacts of environmental damage firsthand. To overcome this, pedagogical frameworks like the John Muir Award should be used to translate broad policies into meaningful local practices. Natural environments like Porthkerry Park can enhance these experiences, helping children develop a lifelong connection with the wider world.

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