

## **ECEY6005 SCRIPT & REFERENCE LINK**

### **[00:00–01:00] Introduction**

Hello and welcome to my presentation for ECEY6005 Regaining Paradise? Sustainability In the Early Years.

Today I will be sharing my personal and professional journey through completing the John Muir Award, a nationally recognised environmental scheme that emphasises discovering, exploring, conserving, and sharing experiences in nature. My chosen site for this experience was Grange Pavilion in Cardiff, a community-led green space that is both personally significant and ecologically important. I used this location to build a reflective scrapbook that documented each phase of the award.

The award not only helped deepen my understanding of sustainability but also connected me with community-led ecological action. John Muir's quote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir, 1911), resonates strongly with the holistic ethos of both the award and the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) framework.

### **[01:00–02:30] Discover**

In the 'Discover' phase, I became more aware of the biodiversity around Grange Pavilion. I used observational tools such as sketching, photography, and written notes to document common and rare species, including robins, blackbirds, bees, ladybirds, and hoverflies. I was surprised by the diversity of life in what I had previously seen as an ordinary urban space. This newfound awareness links directly with SDG 15: Life on Land (United Nations, 2015), which promotes the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems.

The process echoed Froebel's belief in nature as the "great educator," where real-world engagement enables meaningful learning (Bruce, 2015). I also incorporated

nature journaling techniques advocated by Sobel (2004), who argues that place-based education fosters a sense of ecological identity in both children and adults.

This awakening has shaped my perception of local green spaces, highlighting their role as learning environments and biodiversity hubs. As Muir (1915) wrote, "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."

### **[02:30–04:30] Explore**

Learning by Doing The 'Explore' phase of my project involved taking part in composting workshops, mapping seasonal plant changes, and engaging with other local volunteers. I monitored plant growth in raised beds and learned how climate and human interaction affect plant lifecycles. I also explored water usage in the area and how water conservation was practised using rainwater tanks and mulching techniques.

This aligns with Dewey's (1938) experiential learning model: "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."

I drew inspiration from Steiner's emphasis on nature's rhythms as an organising principle for child development and learning. As I tracked changes, I became aware of how sustainability is embedded in small, daily practices.

According to Hedefalk et al. (2015), ESD in early childhood education is most effective when children (and educators) participate in real-life sustainability experiences. Through this phase, I developed observational and critical thinking skills that now influence how I approach nature-based learning with children.

### **[04:30–06:00] Conserve**

My conservation actions included removing plastic litter, planting pollinator-friendly herbs, fixing bug hotels, and discussions of adding more bird feeders with repurposed materials. While these actions were simple, they mirrored real-world ecological interventions. I also attended a session with the local nature club

where children made seed bombs using native wildflower seeds, combining play with environmental restoration.

This links directly to Julie Davis' (2010) argument that sustainability education must be transformative and action-oriented. As Davis (2015) writes, "Young children need to see and experience sustainability in action to learn its value."

My efforts also reflect the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, especially in promoting a resilient and healthier Wales through environmental stewardship (Welsh Government, 2015). It aligns with SDG 13: Climate Action and the broader aims of ESDGC, especially in fostering responsibility and agency.

Engaging with the Eco-Schools framework (Korkmaz & Yildiz, 2017), I realised how even informal settings like a community garden can support sustainability literacy through modelling and shared action. These insights have shaped my views on the role of the educator as a guide and participant in sustainability practices.

### **[06:00–07:30] Share**

In the 'Share' phase, I compiled a reflective scrapbook combining photos and written observations. I also had plenty of conversations with community members. Sharing this with peers, friends, and family encouraged wider dialogue about our local green spaces and their importance. I also got together with the youth forum of Grange Pavilion and came up with some posters and ideas to do some activities in the Grange pavilion over summer, these can be seen in the Scrapbook.

Prince (2010) argues that embedding sustainability in social contexts enriches early years education by fostering connection and responsibility. Koralek et al. (2009) also stress the importance of sharing environmental knowledge to build a collective sense of stewardship.

As Korkmaz and Yildiz (2017) state, "Collaborative environmental education experiences support deeper ecological identity formation in young children." This

phase reminded me that education is not confined to classrooms but thrives in shared, lived experiences.

### **[07:30–09:00] Reflection**

Through this experience, I came to understand sustainability as a personal and collective journey. My role as an early years practitioner is to model sustainable practices, create opportunities for experiential learning, and build children's confidence in engaging with nature.

Julie Davis (2015) urges educators to be reflective practitioners, actively demonstrating sustainability in everyday routines. Cutter-Mackenzie and Edwards (2014) advocate for authentic environmental learning, highlighting that "Children learn best about sustainability through first-hand experiences."

The scrapbook served as more than just documentation—it became a mirror of my evolving understanding of place, responsibility, and pedagogy. This reflective process allowed me to develop what Oxfam (2015) describes as global citizenship competencies: empathy, responsibility, and a commitment to positive change.

I now see myself not just as a facilitator of learning, but as a participant in community and ecological restoration.

### **[09:00–10:30] Pedagogical Alignment**

The John Muir Award is deeply aligned with foundational early childhood theories:

- Froebel emphasised nature as the ideal environment for holistic development (Bruce, 2015).
- Dewey championed real-world, democratic learning experiences (Dewey, 1938).
- Steiner proposed nature's seasonal rhythms as essential to child development (Edwards, 2002).

These perspectives are echoed by Hedefalk et al. (2015), who state that “ESD in early childhood must be grounded in lived experiences.”

The concept of a "sense of place" is central to sustainability education. Cutter-Mackenzie and Edwards (2014) assert that local place connection nurtures ecological literacy and moral responsibility.

This practical experience has shown me how pedagogical theory can come alive in informal settings, helping to build children’s capacity for environmental agency and curiosity.

### **[10:30–11:30] Creativity and Critical Thinking**

I used creativity throughout my project to express and deepen learning. Journaling, and collaborative discussions enabled me to reflect critically on the ecological, social, and emotional aspects of sustainability.

These align with SDG 4.7, which calls for education to empower learners with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Tinney and Merriman (2018) highlight that reflection and creativity are key to ESDGC, as they enable children and educators to form emotional connections to nature.

Prince (2010) supports this view, stating that "Creative learning environments foster sustainability thinking through emotion and imagination." Through reflective storytelling and peer engagement, I developed a deeper understanding of what it means to live sustainably and to teach sustainability meaningfully.

### **[11:30–12:30] Policy Connections**

My project connects with several key policy frameworks:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 4.7 (Education), 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land)
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Estyn guidance (2014) promoting outdoor and sustainability education

According to Estyn (2014), high-quality early years education should include sustainability as a core theme through experiential, cross-curricular learning. My project achieved this by integrating ecology, creativity, and community engagement.

This project also highlights the relevance of the Curriculum for Wales (2022), which encourages child-centred learning, wellbeing, and global citizenship.

### **[12:30–13:30] Critiquing the John Muir Award**

While the John Muir Award is valuable, it can be critiqued for overemphasising environmental themes at the expense of social and economic aspects of sustainability. Tinney (2013) warns that unbalanced delivery of ESDGC may limit critical engagement with equity and justice.

My project did not explicitly address inequality, poverty, or access issues, which are core to holistic sustainability. As Hirst (2019) notes, collaborative inquiry projects involving children can bridge this gap by combining ecological awareness with socio-political understanding.

Future iterations of the award could be improved by integrating social justice themes, economic literacy, and intercultural perspectives into the activities.

### **[13:30–14:30] Implications for Practice**

This experience has had a profound impact on my teaching philosophy. I now believe that sustainability education must be embedded across all aspects of early years practice—curriculum, environment, and pedagogy.

I aim to incorporate daily nature experiences, child-led inquiry, and community engagement into my teaching. The John Muir Award has shown me how accessible and transformative this can be, even in urban areas.

As a future practitioner, I am committed to creating learning environments that model sustainability and empower children to be change-makers in their own communities.

### **[14:30–15:30] Conclusion**

In conclusion, the John Muir Award offered a rich, hands-on opportunity to explore, act, and reflect on sustainability. It is deeply compatible with early years pedagogy and aligns with national and global policy aims.

To truly embed sustainability in early childhood education, we must:

- Offer authentic, nature-based experiences
- Reflect critically and creatively on our role as educators
- Empower children through active participation and shared responsibility

As John Muir once said, “The power of imagination makes us infinite.” Thank you for listening.

## Harvard Reference List

Bruce, T. (2015). *Early Childhood Education* (5th ed.). Hodder Education.

Cutter-Mackenzie, A. & Edwards, S. (2014). *Young Children's Play and Environmental Education in Early Childhood Education*. Springer.

Davis, J.M. (2010). *Young Children and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability*. Cambridge University Press.

Davis, J.M. (2015). *Young Children and the Environment* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Edwards, C. (2002). *Three Approaches from Europe: Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia*. Merrill.

Estyn. (2014). *Guidance on inspecting primary schools*. [online] Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales> [Accessed 30 June 2025].

Hedefalk, M., Almqvist, J. & Östman, L. (2015). Education for sustainable development in early childhood education: A review of the research literature. *Environmental Education Research*, 21(7), pp. 975–990.

Hirst, N. (2019). Education for Sustainability within Early Childhood Studies: Collaboration and Inquiry through Projects with Children. *Education 3–13*, 47(2), pp. 233–244.

Koralek, D.G., et al. (2009). *Spotlight on Young Children and Nature*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Korkmaz, A. & Yildiz, T.G. (2017). Assessing preschools using the Eco-Schools program. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(4), pp. 595–612.

Muir, J. (1911). *My First Summer in the Sierra*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Muir, J. (1915). *Travels in Alaska*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Oxfam. (2015). *Education for Global Citizenship: A guide for schools*. Oxford: Oxfam.

Prince, C. (2010). Sowing the seeds: Education for sustainability within the early years curriculum. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(3), pp. 273–285.

Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*. Orion Society.

Tinney, G. (2013). Sustainable Education in Practice: Challenges for ESDGC in the UK. *ESD Journal*, 9(2), pp. 45–58.

Tinney, G. & Merriman, E. (2018). Early Years Education and ESDGC: Two Sides of the Same Coin? *Early Education Journal*, 86.

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. [online] Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org> [Accessed 6 July 2025].

Welsh Government. (2015). *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*. [online] Available at: <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> [Accessed 6 July 2025].