**Young Children, the Outdoors and Nature**

**Learning journal**

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# Session 1: Taken for granted practices with young children and the outdoors

| Activity 1 Thinking about cultural practices in New Zealand Take a moment to reflect on the discussion by Maria and Shirlene. You may like to make some notes on the points you found most interesting. |
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| Activity 2 Parenting in Denmark Read Elisabeth’s comments and then have a go at answering the questions below:  • Why do you think that parenting attitudes to letting babies sleep outside may differ in different cultural contexts?  • Parents depend on health professionals for advice to help them look after their children in the best way. Why might this professional advice differ if offered by a professional in different cultural contexts?  • If you were in Elisabeth’s position what do you think you would do? Why? |
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| Activity 3 Thinking about your own experiences and observations Think about your own experiences and observations and have a go at responding to the questions below:  • Have you noticed babies being given opportunities to be outside?  • Do these opportunities include being ‘contained’ in equipment that might prevent their movement?  • Have you noticed babies who have been given the freedom to move around and explore their environment? |
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| Activity 4 Reflecting on Session 1 Reflect on what you have learned this session and record your responses to the questions below:  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. How has considering children’s engagement with the outdoors and nature through a historical and cultural lens helped you understand contemporary practices? |
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| Personal notes (optional) Record any additional thoughts on the learning this session and note down anything you want to follow up at a later date. |
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# Session 2: The missing babies

| Activity 1 Touching the apple tree Read the extract in which Pelo describes how she lifts Dylan up so she can experience an apple tree and then see if you can answer the questions below:   * What do you think Dylan is learning about herself and her world? * Why do you think that she is so receptive to learning? * If you were the adult looking after Dylan, what do you think you would do to help her learn? |
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| Activity 2 Thinking about risk Think about how you would respond to the following questions and make some notes:  • Babies need to be kept safe, but can you see any disadvantages in keeping babies apart from older children?  • What other considerations would practitioners have to make to keep babies safe outdoors? Why do you think this?  • What are the implications of putting too strong an emphasis on particular safety measures? |
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| Activity 3 Reflecting on Session 2 Now is a good time to reflect on what you have learned so far. In particular, you might like to consider if you have noticed how the outdoor environment is perceived in a certain way for very young children. Remember we are thinking specifically about those children aged birth to two years old. Once again there are some questions below that may help you in your thinking:   * What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why? * What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session? * What about your practice? Is there anything you are now going to change about your practice with young children if you are a parent, carer or practitioner? |
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# Session 3: Friedrich Froebel: a mover and shaker of his day

| Activity 1 Exploring the Froebel Archive Explore the resources in the Froebel Archive and find one that interests you. If you are not sure where to start, you may like to choose either ‘Froebel's Letters on the Kindergarten’ or ‘Pamphlets on Froebel’s principles’. As you search, respond to the questions below.  • Why did you choose it?  • What did it make you think?  • What did you learn? |
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| Activity 2 Mother songs Think of songs you share with children or perhaps even songs that were sung to you as a child. Make a list of three such songs and note why you think the children enjoy them. |
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| Activity 3 Reflecting on Session 3 Have a go at answering the questions below:  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. How might you take on board some of Froebel’s ideas and change your practice with young children if you are a parent or carer? |
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# Session 4: Challenges, risks and opportunities

| Activity 1 A reluctance to change Imagine you were talking to a colleague, parent, or carer about the assumptions that might be made about outdoor play. Reflect on Ouvry and Furtado’s (2019) list of assumptions and make some notes on the following questions:  • Have you, your colleagues, parents or carers you’ve worked with ever assumed any of her statements are true?  • Why did you think this?  • How could you encourage your colleagues, parents or carers to think beyond these assumptions so that they are encouraged to spend more time with children in the outdoor environment? |
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| Activity 2 Auditing your outdoor experiences Have a look at the questions in the table below. Spend some time considering your responses and then write your answers below:  Table 1   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Use** | * What are your feelings about very young children being outdoors? * What do you believe babies, toddlers and two-year-olds get from outdoor play? * How much time do babies and toddlers in your care actually spend outside (including walks in the locality/community) each day, across the whole year? | | **Design** | * How easy is it to move between indoors and outdoors? * How do you feel about being outside in your space, throughout the year? * What do children like about being outside and being in this outdoor space? | | **Management** | * What gets in the way of going outdoors? * Do routines limit time spent outdoors or the flexibility to go outdoors whenever children express interest or need? * Are there some issues that change across the year? | |

| Activity 3 Advice and tips Watch the video where Sandra and Charlotte offer advice to other practitioners. Now make a list of what you feel are the three key points that Sandra and Charlotte make about overcoming challenges. |
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| Activity 4 Reflecting on Session 4 Reflect on your learning in this session, using the questions below to help you, and record your thoughts below.  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. What do you think might be holding you back in taking young children outside? How do you feel you might be able to overcome some of your challenges? |
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| Personal notes (optional) Record any additional thoughts on the learning this session, and note down anything you want to follow up at a later date. |
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# Session 5: Developing outdoor provision for babies and young children

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| Activity 1 Exploring principles of outdoor provision Spend 10 minutes examining the images in the slideshow carefully. What evidence can you find for Gould’s (2012) S Factor criteria or Bilton *et al*.’s (2005) resource-based learning bays? In what ways do you think the provision could be developed? You may find it useful to complete a table such as the one below:   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | | **What evidence can you see for this?** | **How could the outdoor provision be developed in relation to this?** | | Gould’s (2012) S Factor criteria | Surfaces |  |  | | Stimulus |  |  | | Staffing and supervision |  |  | | Storage |  |  | | Seating |  |  | | Shade and shelter |  |  | | Sustainability |  |  | | Safety and security |  |  | | Space |  |  | | Bilton *et al*.’s (2005) resource-based learning bays | Creative area |  |  | | Quiet area |  |  | | Imaginative play area |  |  | | Environmental area |  |  | | An open space |  |  | |
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| Activity 2 The young explorer Watch the video where Liam, a 13-month-old boy, explores his local outdoor space as the commentator highlights Liam’s learning. As you watch focus on how Liam is exploring and using his environment. What evidence do you see that fits with Watts’ quotation about what outdoor spaces for children should contain? What do you think could enhance Liam’s outdoor environment even more? |
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| Activity 3 How have others developed their practice? Sharon spoke about the wide range of experiences that young children have outside. Were there any in particular that resonated with you? Make a note of the benefits she spoke about; which do you think are the most important – and why? What stood out to you about the tips Sharon offers? |
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| Activity 4 Reflecting on Session 5 Spend some time thinking about your learning in this session and responding to the following questions in your Learning Journal:  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. Which key criteria for effective outdoor provision stand out to you the most? Which do you think you will be able to develop in your own provision? |
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| Personal notes (optional) Record any additional thoughts on the learning this session, and note down anything you want to follow up at a later date. |
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# Session 6: Being outdoors or being in nature

| Activity 1 Playing in the park Watch the video and have a go at responding to the questions below:  • How would you describe the ‘affordances’ for Ko in the park environment?  • Which of the activities he spends time doing in this clip could happen in any outdoor environment?  • How important do you think the natural features are within the environment (grass, trees, wildlife) to his learning and development? |
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| Activity 2 Opportunities for sensory engagement Watch the videos of Dr Tansy Watts talking from her perspective as a Steiner practitioner and early childhood researcher about sensory nutrition. Now have a go at answer these questions:  • What do you understand by the phrase ‘sensory nutrition’?  • What are the implications for parents and practitioners? |
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| Activity 4 Reflecting on Session 6 It would be good at this point to reflect on all the learning you have engaged with in this session and in particular to consider what you can take from this content to develop your own practice with young children.  As before, here are some questions to support your reflection:  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. Think about Gibson’s concept of affordances. Make a list of the affordances in the outdoor environments you share with young children. |
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# Session 7: Growing up green

| Activity 1 Thinking about sustainable goals Watch the two videos introducing the Sustainable Development Goals and then have a go at answering the questions below.  1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals?  2. Why do we need them?  3. How are they relevant to early childhood education? |
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| Activity 2 Futures thinking Have a look at the ‘Futures Thinking’ page of CCCU’s Exploring Sustainability website and note down your responses to the questions below. There are no right or wrong answers – it is a reflective activity to develop your personal perspective.  1. Given the context of unsustainability, why do you think it has been challenging for the early childhood sector to respond?  2. Spend some time imagining and dreaming about your ideal early childhood setting for babies and toddlers that encourages learning ‘in, about and for’ the environment. What would it look like and how would it work, who would it be for, where would it be? Try and sketch your ideas and continue to add notes and thoughts as you work through this session. You could add inspirational quotes from things you have read or listened to. |
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| Activity 3 Nature Friendly Nurseries Listen to Professor Jan White talking about a concept she calls Nature Friendly Nurseries. When you have watched the video, have a go at responding to the questions below:  • What do you understand by nature friendly nurseries?  • What do you think Jan means by a child’s ecological identity?  • What do you think about the idea that nature can care for humans? |
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| Activity 4 A best practice toolkit Watch the video and then answer these questions:  • Which of the 13 best practice indicators do you think are most appropriate in developing an outdoor environment for babies and toddlers?  • Do you agree that creating a high-quality outdoor environment involves ‘incremental development’? Why? |
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| Activity 5 Reflecting on Session 7 As before here are some questions to support your reflection:  1. What did you find helpful about this session’s learning and why?  2. What are the three main learning points you will take away from this session?  3. In what ways have you considered your own relationship with nature? How can you develop a reciprocal relationship that includes both the ‘give’ and the ‘get’? |
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# Session 8: Moving forwards and answering the big questions

| Activity 1 Exploring your possibilities Find a natural environment close to your home that you can spend about 30 minutes in. Remember the definitions of natural environments in Session 6. You don’t need to go to the countryside; it could be spending time in a garden, a park or going for a walk where you know there will be some natural features. The important thing is that you will be able to engage with some aspects of nature. You may like to go on your own or you may like to go with a friend/colleague so that you can discuss your observations. It doesn’t matter which. As you are walking think about your responses to these questions:  • What do you notice in nature?  • What pulls your attention?  • Which senses are you using?  • Which spaces make you feel comfortable and give you a sense of wellbeing? Why?  When you return for your work, then you may like to make a sketch of the place(s) you visited and annotate it with your thoughts. Think also about your favourite season and why you have chosen that particular one. Think more generally about spaces you feel comfortable in and those you don’t. How could you make yourself feel comfortable in spaces that don’t attract you? |
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| Activity 2 Reflecting on Session 8 and the course Now you have reached the end of Session 8, and indeed the whole course, it’s a good time to reflect on all your learning. In particular, you might like to consider what are the big questions you still need to find answers to and how you intend to move forwards. Once again there are some questions below that may help you in your thinking.  1. What did you find helpful about this session? Why?  2. Are there three key points you will take away from this session? What might you choose to share with others?  3. Think about three action points you could write down in terms of moving forward. Make sure they are doable and not too aspirational. Remember the importance of small, incremental steps. |
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| Personal notes (optional) Record any additional thoughts on the learning this session, and note down anything you want to follow up at a later date. |
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