

ECE Nature and Outdoor Play

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NSCC EDITION

TAYLOR HANSEN AND NSCC

Nova Scotia Community College
Nova Scotia Canada



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About the Book

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ADAPTATION NOTICE

ECE Nature and Outdoor Play: NSCC Edition is adapted from [Early Childhood Education: Nature and Outdoor Play](#) by Taylor Hansen published with [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license. See the [version history chapter](#) at the end of this book for more information about the changes made to the NSCC edition.

OVERVIEW

This resource is designed to be an interactive review of each course topic. Each chapter contains a brief overview of the course topic, interactive key takeaways from the content, additional resources for your consideration, reflective prompts, and experiential activities. For course topics built around outdoor engagement or guest speakers, supporting resources and/or activities are shared.

Please use this resource as an opportunity to deepen your engagement with course ideas, reflect on what we have discussed in class, and make connections with your own personal philosophies and experiences. Many of the reflection pieces or

experiences can serve to inform your nature journal as we progress through the course.

PART I

RELATIONSHIPS

CHAPTER 1

Adults with Children with Nature

Environmental worldviews impact pedagogy and practice; interacting in complex and diverse ways with the image of the child and the image of self as educator. When children are with nature in ECEC settings, they are also with adults and this entanglement impacts how children encounter, experience, and relate to the natural world.

It is vital that educators bring awareness to their view of children with nature and how it is reflected in their pedagogy and practice, as well as where these ideas come from. Beyond this, educators should have an awareness of the values and ideas guiding pedagogy and practice in their practice setting in order to build greater awareness and opportunities for collaboration, support, and learning.

Looking at the literature on outdoor and/or nature play, adults and educators identify many perceived barriers to children playing outdoors and in nature. Addressing and understanding these barriers requires critical and open engagement with others in order to unpack what barriers are real and what types of supports are needed to overcome them. It also requires critical and open

engagement with self to unpack barriers created in your own mind based on fears, current understandings, and experiences.

Critically examining who you are as an educator and person with children with nature and who you want to be should form the foundation of the development of your nature pedagogy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

To enlarge the writing, you may zoom in by accessing your browser's setting (three dots in the top right corner on Chrome) and adjust accordingly.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=32#h5p-2>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [*Getting Outside: Overcoming the Barriers to Outdoor Play*](#)
A 2014 blog post by Janelle Durham
Social worker and author Janelle Durham outlines simple concrete ways to overcome some common barriers to outdoor and/or nature play identified by adults in this detailed blog post.

The YouTube hosted video *Nature at Home – Nature Play for Kids* by Wild Side TV (also shared in the blog post) shows seemingly small changes you can make to create spaces with rich opportunities for children to play and connect with the natural world. A great support resource to share with families.



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You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=32>

REFLECT: EXPLORING BARRIERS

Many complex factors will impact educators' perceived barriers (internal and external) to outdoor and nature play.

Take some time to reflect on barriers.

- Are there aspects of your own relationship with nature and/or outdoor play that impact how you relate to children with nature?
- Mental blocks that have been created?
- Are there barriers that could be broken down and addressed with the right support?
- Make a list for yourself and start to do some brainstorming around this.

EXPERIENCE: OBSERVING ADULTS WITH CHILDREN IN

NATURE

Go to a place where adults and children and nature are. This could be a local park or even a walking path by your house. Without judgement, observe the interactions.

- Do the adults impact how the children relate to and encounter nature?
- Do the adults impact how the children play?
- What possible relationships to the natural world do you see reflected in the behaviours of the adults you observe?

CHAPTER 2

Human–Nature Relationships

Relationships between humans and nature are diverse, complex, and contradictory. They are also influenced by the physical, social, and cultural environments and histories that they are part of. These relationships form environmental worldviews and are reflected in ECEC approaches to nature and outdoor play.

At one end of the spectrum is the view that humans are separate and superior to nature. In this view, the environment is primarily a resource for human use and benefit. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that humans are part of nature, and that all life and the systems that support it are of equal value. In this view, humans are responsible for caring for the natural world and living with it in respectful balance. Both views are situated in past and present individual collective experiences and culture with their merits and ethical questions.

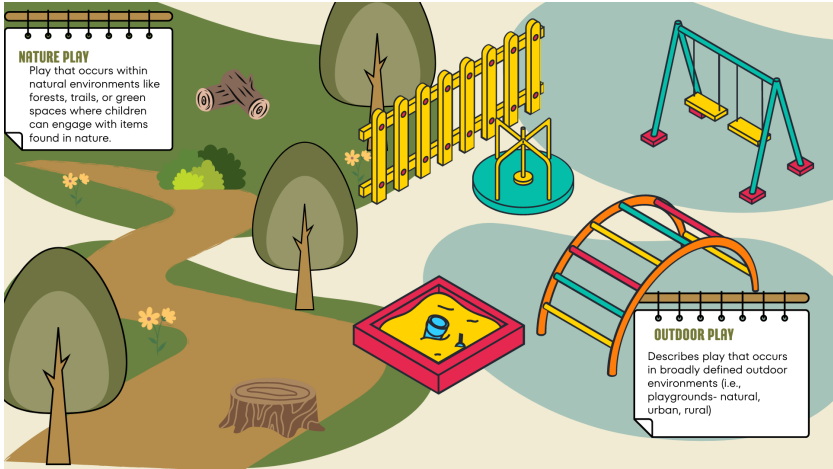
In settler societies such as Canada there is an interplay of various and complex cultural, racialized, colonial and environmental historical traditions and legacies. The lines between these seemingly contradictory worldviews are often blurred, messy, and influenced by both power and privilege.

The **Common World Framework**¹ attempts to make this messiness visible and explicit in ECEC environments and is particularly relevant to ECEC outdoor and nature play approaches. In this framework, the belief that humans are part of nature requires full acknowledgment and exploration of the real inseparability between humans and all other human and non-human life on this earth; not only the beautiful pristine controlled nature, but the environments humans have created and currently share with all parts of this world. This includes both the shared histories, and their current and future impacts.

*"...within the context of early childhood and education, common worlds are the actual, messy, unequal, and imperfect worlds children inherit and co-inhabit along with other humans and non-human beings and entities. [...] Within this framework, childhood is approached as situated, collective, and relational rather than as a universal developmental life stage that is experienced individually. Children do not just grow up in a society, but they grow up in a world, and the world affects and acts on them—even as they act on it"*²

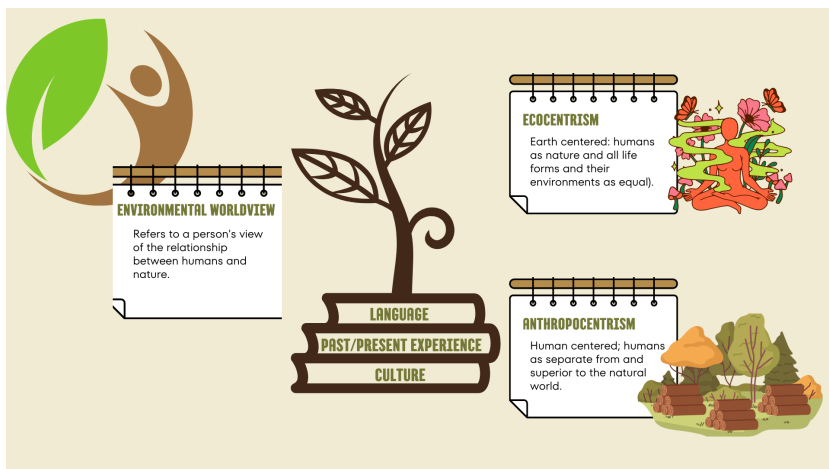
1. See the [Journal of Childhood Studies](#) for more information)
2. Nelson, N., Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Nxumalo, F. (2018). Re-thinking nature-based approaches in early childhood education: Common worlding practices(p.8). *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 43(1), 4-14.

KEY TAKEAWAYS³



*Nature Play occurs within natural environments like forests, trails, or green spaces where children can engage with items found in nature. Outdoor Play describes play that occurs in broadly defined outdoor environments (i.e., playgrounds- natural, urban, rural);.*³

3. Outdoor Play Canada. (2022). Outdoor Play Glossary of Terms. Outdoor Play Canada. from Suzuki, D. (2012, May 01). David Suzuki: The fundamental failure of environmentalism. Straight.



Environmental Worldview refers to a person's view of the relationship between humans and nature. It is made up of our experiences, our language and our culture. Ecocentrism is earth centered in that it views humans as nature and all life forms and their environments as equal). Anthropocentrism is human centered in that it views humans as separate from and superior to the natural world. These views may be influenced by our culture, our past/present experiences and the language that we use.

Drag and drop the terms 'outdoor play' or 'nature play' onto their matching photos. Press the 'check' button to view the answers.



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=29#h5p-1>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [*The fundamental failure of environmentalism*](#)
By David Suzuki published in Rabble.ca, May 1, 2012.
The fundamental failure of environmentalism offers some food for thought on environmental worldviews and how they shape our relationship to the earth, our actions and inactions, and specifically how they have prevented meaningful environmental change on a larger scale. Consider how this article might relate to approaches to nature and outdoor play in the early years. Specifically, how current approaches may serve to support children's relationships to nature and while also reinforcing the
- [*Children of the Poisoned River*](#)
By Jody Porter, CBC News.
In *Children of the Poisoned River*, we learn about how the poisoning of the water in Grassy Narrows First Nation from industrial pollution has impacted the community as a whole and in particular the young people. Reflect on how this article relates to *Common Worlding Practices*.

READ AND REFLECT

- Read [*Here's how national parks are working to fight racism*](#) by James Edward Mills published in *National Geographic* June 23, 2020.
Mills outlines the history of racism and segregation in national parks. In this topic we have started to explore the diverse, complex, and at times contradictory relationships to nature that we hold and their impacts.
- Reflecting on this article and your course learning thus far, consider how current approaches to nature and outdoor play might better address this and reflect an

approach more in line with the Common Worlds Framework

EXPERIENCE: SEEING RELATIONSHIPS TO NATURE AROUND YOU

Go for a walk and look for reflections of the diverse, complex, and contradictory relationships to nature around you.

- Is it clear what environmental framework is reflected?
- Do you see multiple frameworks reflected through a single image?
- Document your findings by taking pictures or sketching what you see and sharing what they communicate to you about nature in your journal this week.

CHAPTER 3

View of Self in Relationship with Nature

Relationships with nature, like any other relationship, are multifaceted and complex. This first topic invites you to take the time to how and why your thoughts and feelings about nature have evolved into what they are today. To look inward and identify those significant memories or experiences (or lack thereof), the messages you have received, and how you feel with and about nature will not only provide you with an understanding of your own place in this subject, but also a deeper understanding of how to support the children you work with as early childhood educators in deepening and understanding their own relationships with the natural world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The image below represents how our relationships with the natural world grow into being.



Our experiences with nature in the past (whether positive, negative, neutral or a mix of all) work together to form dynamic thoughts,

feelings and experiences with and about nature in the present. As a result, how we act, react and interact in nature (our experiences in nature) continues to shape how we feel and how we relate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- [*\[Blog\] Making Pedagogical Choices with a Bird's Nest*](#)¹

What do interactions with nature look like in the outdoor early learning environment? Robyn Ashley (recent Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study grad reflects on her experiences working as an early childhood educator and the “divide that can be created between children and the natural world in this post on the Canadian Association for Young Children blog.

MAKING PEDAGOGICAL CHOICES WITH A BIRD'S NEST-YOUR THOUGHTS

Complete the prompts in the following exercises.² You can save and export your answers to a word file [on the last side].



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=24#h5p-9>

1. Ashley, R. (2022, October 25). Making pedagogical choices with a bird's nest. [https://www.cayc.ca/blogs/news/making-pedagogical-choices-with-a-birds-nest\[blog post\]](https://www.cayc.ca/blogs/news/making-pedagogical-choices-with-a-birds-nest[blog post]). The Canadian Association for Young Children.
2. Ibid.

PHOTO JOURNAL ACTIVITY



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=24#h5p-10>

PART II

CONNECTIONS

CHAPTER 4

Connections With the Land

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Incorporating Indigenous land-based learning and Etuaptmumk into your nature pedagogy and approach to nature/outdoor play requires investment, action, and continued embodied learning. While you can begin to think about and understand these approaches inside the classroom, integrating them into your way of being and understanding the world, your role in it, and by extension, your role with children as practitioners, requires being present with this learning in the context of relationship with the land and Indigenous knowledge holders. This is the focus of this week.

Take some time to listen closely to the words of local Indigenous knowledge holders and move with this knowledge outdoors with nature. Go to a natural setting that you feel connected in and whether you move through the space or sit still with intention in it, pay attention to how you relate to what is happening around you.

- What do you notice?
- Do you notice things differently?

- What questions come to you?
- Start to think about a tangible action you can take to learn from local Indigenous knowledge holders in your community and build these relationships.

WATCH

[*Waseteg*](#), by Phyllis Grant, provided by the [National Film Board of Canada](#)



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You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=38>

[*Waseteg*](#), a short, animated film by Phyllis Grant and Alanis Obomsawin, tells the story of a young Mi'kmaw girl whose name means "the light from the dawn" who goes looking for healing in the stories of her people.

WATCH

Watch [*Reconciliation with the Earth with Elder Albert Marshall*](#) and to gain a deeper understanding of what brought him to *Etuaptmumk* and what guides him as a human on this earth.



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You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=38>

MI'KMAW ELDERS STORIES

The website for The Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre has gathered [a collection of stories from Mi'kmaw Elders](#).

CHAPTER 5

Land-based Learning

When children are outdoors and with nature they have unique opportunities for connection with themselves and the world around them, that are often very difficult to achieve or replicate in indoor early learning and care environments.

Indigenous worldviews are deeply connected to place: land, sky, water, and all inhabitants. This connection is not something that can be taught or experienced inside a standard four walled classroom and requires being with the natural world in connection. In order to nurture this connection, that all children have, children need time and space to be present with the natural world outdoors and play.

Children's connections and play can be deepened through land-based learning, but Indigenous land-based learning is about more than being present with the natural world and feeling connected to it. It requires local Indigenous knowledge and wisdom of place, including language, teachings, and storytelling. This knowledge and wisdom are what have enabled Indigenous ways of being and knowing to continue and what have enabled Indigenous peoples to live in balance with the natural world for so long, things needed now more than ever.

Centering Indigenous land-based learning in your nature pedagogy and approaches to outdoor/nature play has particular benefits for Indigenous children and non-Indigenous children as well as educators and families, but requires investment, action, and continued embodied learning on the part of the educator. Etuaptmumk or Two-Eyed Seeing presents a path forward for non-Indigenous educators looking to take on this important work by centering relationship building, healing, and respectful collaboration.

We are all treaty people.

WATCH

Watch the short film [*Maq and the Spirit of the Woods*](#) by Phyllis Grant, provided by the National Film Board of Canada.

How to Access the Film

NSCC libraries has a license that allows you to view NFB films.

- Please login with your NSCC W# and password.
- If you are already logged in the video will display below.



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You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.nscc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=35>

[Maq and the Spirit of the Woods](#) is a short, animated film by Phyllis Grant that tells the story of a young Mi'kmaw boy who finds purpose through stories, teachings, and laughter when he journeys through the woods. Maq's journey from the time he leaves the woods to the time he arrives at his camp is one of significant growth. He is described in the beginning of the tale as having two left feet, however as we progress through the story, we see that Maq is swinging in trees and running steadily through fields. Consider the role of storytelling in Maq's journey. As he travels through the land and listens to stories from the Spirit of the Woods, we can see Maq's confidence grow- he begins to remember and share some stories of his own and begins to explore on his own.

- What relationship to the natural world is reflected through this story?
- How can the concepts of land-based learning and storytelling from Maq's story be incorporated into your work as an ECE through a lens of two-eyed seeing?
- How are resources such as this valuable for supporting Indigenous land-based learning in outdoor/nature play?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [How Two-Eyed Seeing, 'Etuaptmumk,' is changing outdoor play in early childhood education](#) by Louise Zimanyi and Albert Marsh published in *The Conversation* April 17, 2023.
- [Artist shows meaning of Mi'kmaw months with beaded calendar](#) by Oscar Baker Published in CBC News November 6, 2022.
The article profiles the incredible work of Mi'kmaw artist Ashley Sanipass. Her beautiful work makes clear how language connects us to different stories and worlds.

Consider how the wisdom, stories, and understandings imbedded in the names of the months of the Mi'kmaw calendar might inspire wonder, connection, and learning in young children differently than the Gregorian calendar.

READ AND REFLECT

- Read [Eskasoni storyteller wants children to seek out knowledge](#) by Erin Pottie published by CBC News, April 6, 2022.
A profile of Mi'kmaw storyteller Terry Denny and his work using Mi'kmaw storytelling to help preserve Mi'kmaw history, teachings, and language as well as support healing.

Reflect

- Discuss the importance of Mi'kmaw storytelling to help preserve Mi'kmaw history, teachings, and language as well as support healing.
- Why does storytelling matter?

RESOURCES FOR DECOLONIZING YOUR NATURE PEDAGOGY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

There are a growing number of children's books, and books written for educators of young children, that share Indigenous language and knowledge of the land in accessible ways. Below you will find some examples to consider that may be particularly useful to practitioners in Mi'kma'ki.

Mi'kmaw Children's Books & Educator Resources:

- *Walking Together* (picture book) introduces Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) to young children. Written by Mi'kmaw

Elder Albert Marshall and Louise Zimanyi.

- *Jujijk: Mi'kmaw Insects* introduces children (and adults) to the Mi'kmaw names of local insects. Written by Mi'kmaw Educator and Artist Gerald Gloade.
- *Mi'kmaw Animals (board book)* introduces children (and adults) to Mi'kmaw names of local animals. Written by Mi'kmaw Educator and Artist Alan Syliboy.
- *Mi'kmaw Moons: The Seasons in Mi'kma'ki* introduces traditional teachings about the moon cycles and their relation to the natural history of Mi'kma'ki using Etuaptmumk. Written by Mi'kmaw Educator Cathy Leblanc and Astronomer David Chapman.

Reflect

- What resources are available to you where you are and how would you go about accessing them?
- What is important to consider when selecting a resource to share with children about local Indigenous language, stories, and knowledge?
- How you might use these kinds of resources to support outdoor/nature play and why they are important, particularly for non-Indigenous educators.

EXPERIENCE: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Go for a walk or reflect on what you notice when in nature.

- Is there a particular tree that you love? A pink wildflower that popped up in a neighbour's yard? A curious squirrel that visits you?
- Make a list of 5 parts of the natural world that you feel

connected to, but don't know the names of.

- Do some research and find out their names both in your primary language and the local Indigenous language of the place you live.
- Do the names and meanings you discovered reveal anything different for you?

PART III

CHILDREN WITH NATURE

CHAPTER 6

Environmental Identity and Holistic Development

The early years are now widely recognized as a critical period in the lifespan where the foundation of our development and who we will become as people is laid. However, the importance of this time in relationship to children's connection to the natural world is not as often explicitly discussed.

Environmental Identity Development (EID) attempts to break down this process by looking at how human relationships to the natural world are impacted through experiences and interactions, and the particular impact of early childhood experiences and interactions. While human relationships to the natural world are not static, experiences and interactions in the early years have been shown to be particularly impactful on how people relate to the natural world later in life.¹

Knowing this, educators have a unique opportunity to support and nurture this relationship through their nature pedagogy and practices related to outdoor and nature play. Beyond the

1. Green, C. (2017). Children environmental identity development in an Alaska native rural context. *International Journal of Early Childhood*.

importance of this relationship itself, outdoor and nature play have both been shown to support children's holistic development in ways that are not possible indoors, offering possibilities for learning that are connected and deeply personal.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This flashcard activity provides examples of the four progressions of Environmental Identity Development.² Read the story on the first flashcard and press the 'turn' button to view which progression the story is representing. The next button will take you to a new story, there are eight flashcards.



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=41#h5p-3>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [*Outdoor Play Matters: The Benefits of Outdoor Play for Young Children*\[PDF\]](#)
by Marie Willough published by Barnardos in 2014.
Check out this booklet on outdoor play, a wonderful resource that offers many concrete examples of how outdoor **nature play supports children's holistic**

2. Green, C. (2017). Children environmental identity development in an Alaska native rural context. *International Journal of Early Childhood*.

learning.

- [**What Are the Most Memorable Things You've Seen or Experienced in Nature?**](#)

By Katherine Schulten published in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2021.

This article explores human memories and relationships to nature, offering insight into EID throughout the lifespan and the impacts of experiences and interactions with nature.

REFLECT: THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Can you think of examples from your own interactions with children where you supported positive EID? Examples where you may have inadvertently negatively impacted a child's EID? If you haven't yet had interactions with children as an adult, what about interactions you had with adults as a child yourself?

- Reflecting on these experiences now, how do you view them differently?

EXPERIENCE: HOW DOES BEING OUTDOORS AND WITH NATURE SUPPORT YOU HOLISTICALLY?

Do something you love outdoors with nature. if you are just starting to reconnect with the natural world keep it simple and allocate 15 minutes to sit and be present.

- Afterwards, think about how being in nature supports the physical, personal, cultural, social, emotional, creative, and/or spiritual dimensions of who you are and the learning that occurs through this.

- Reflect on how you felt before this activity, during, and after.
- Did anything change?
- Was it challenging for you and if so, and why?
- What did you think about while you did this?

CHAPTER 7

Inclusion and Accessibility

Outdoor and nature play are beneficial to all children and can be particularly beneficial for children with disabilities because of the increased opportunities for freedom, responsiveness and flexibility.

At the same time, children with disabilities are largely left out of dominant discourse around outdoor and nature play, and the experiences of children with disabilities and their families in outdoor play spaces remain grossly under researched.

Addressing both the physical and social barriers to accessibility and inclusion is key to ensuring all children are able to participate and experience the many benefits of playing, learning, and connecting with the natural world. However, it is also necessary to understand how dominant deficit-based views of disability are internalized by children and their families, and that this impacts feelings about outdoor/nature play long before these spaces are entered.¹

Working to ensure all children and their families feel safe, supported, heard, and understood is a key element to designing a truly inclusive outdoor play space and this starts with centering

1. Horton, J., (2017). Disabilities, urban natures and children's outdoor play. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 18(8), 1152-1174.

accessibility and inclusion in outdoor and nature play discourse and your nature pedagogy from the very start.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Read through the descriptions provided on these slides and take a moment to consider the physical/social barriers that may be present in the outdoor spaces. On slides 1 and 3, read the story and drag and drop the barrier labels in their appropriate places. On slide 5, drag and drop the term with it's appropriate definition.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=44#h5p-4>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- [*Accessibility, Disability and Risky Play in the Outdoors*](#)
A The Child and Nature Alliance Podcast (April 14, 2021 / Season 2 /Episode 4)
Listen to this interview with Amanda St. Dennis, a disability and accessibility advocate with disabilities, discussing disability & risk-taking in outdoor/nature play.

REFLECT: INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY IN FOREST SCHOOLS

Many forest schools around the world are now adopting *Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Policies*. Have a look at the [policy from the Forest School Association UK](#).

- Do you think policies like this are meaningful?
- Why or why not?

EXPERIENCE: DO SOME OF YOUR OWN RESEARCH!

Is there an accessible outdoor/nature play space in your community? If so,

- What makes this space accessible?
- How is accessibility discussed and framed?
- In your opinion, does it support inclusion and all children connecting with nature?
- If you can, visit the space yourself and pay attention to who is using the space as well as potential barriers.

PART IV

DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE SPACES

CHAPTER 8

Looking at Diverse Outdoor Play Spaces

IMPORTANT TERMS

- Outdoor Classroom
- Adventure Playground
- Nature Playscapes
- Forest Schools
- Outdoor natural play environment in an ECEC space

Outdoor classrooms encompass a broad range of outdoor learning environments. At its most basic level, an outdoor classroom may simply mean moving a standard classroom outdoors. There are positive impacts to even this small shift as moving learning outdoors has been shown to improve focus, and when outdoors children will inevitably encounter the natural world.

Adventure playgrounds contain a variety of loose parts that children can interact and play with. In these settings, children are the creators of the play environment and decide on its purpose. These spaces help with learning limitations and boundaries as well

as encouraging imaginative play, creative thinking and problem solving. They have also been associated with increased confidence, sense of self and collaboration.

In comparison to a static playground with one literal play structure, **nature playscapes** are dynamic, open-ended, have no central location, and use natural materials. Land is modified with natural materials to encourage play and spark curiosity. These play spaces help to support inclusion and inspire all children to play.

Forest schools should be intimately connected to the place in which they exist. They should be rooted in local Indigenous knowledge of the land, water, and sky, and all their inhabitants. Educators share knowledge with children in ways that reinforce and deepen connection to place. The key to this is providing time and space for children to explore, observe, and interact with the natural world.

An **outdoor natural play environment in an ECEC space** may blend elements from all of the above outdoor play spaces described. They are intentional or unintentional reflections of relationships and understanding of nature, images of learning, and images of the child.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Click on the nine check marks in the activity below to read about the different features of adventure playgrounds.





An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=47#h5p-5>

Drag and drop the appropriate descriptions of playgrounds and playscapes onto their photos.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=47#h5p-6>

WATCH

Children's gardens are another example of outdoor play spaces that are intentionally created to support children and their relationships with nature and place. Watch the YouTube video *Mordecai Children's Garden 10th Anniversary* to learn about the thoughtful choices that were made to make the garden inclusive and connected for all children.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text.

You can view them online here: [https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/](https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=47#oembed-1)

[eceoutdoor/?p=47#oembed-1](https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=47#oembed-1)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [*The Benefits of Outdoor Education aren't Accessible to All*](#)
By Tina Deines, published in *High Country News*, February 19, 2021.
The article explores who is really able to access forest schools in a private system and how educators are responding.<

REFLECT: DIVERSE WORLDVIEWS AND OUTDOOR SPACES FOR CHILDREN

Reflect on the differences between spaces designed with intention for children to specifically connect with nature through play, like nature playscapes, versus children living in a way that is intimately interwoven with nature in all aspects.

Think back to our earlier discussions and experiences with Indigenous land-based learning. Consider how Indigenous children's relationships to nature might impact outdoor/nature play differently than non-Indigenous children.

EXPERIENCE: PUT YOURSELF IN THE ROLE OF THE CHILD.

Find an outdoor and/or nature play space and be present in it. Follow sensory exploration from the perspective of your inner child:

- What does it feel like in this space?
- What are you drawn to?
- What do you notice?
- Describe the space using all your senses.
- Also notice when there is a disconnect...
- What is missing in the space?
- Could changes be made to better support the whole child and play?
- The child's relationship to nature?

CHAPTER 9

Outdoor Play Spaces: Considering Materials

Rich outdoor play spaces include rich play materials. Play materials can be brought into diverse outdoor play spaces, found already in these spaces, or collected and brought into indoor play spaces.

Both synthetic and natural loose part materials can be added to outdoor play spaces to support play and learning in a variety of ways. Research has found that these types of materials provide more possibilities for diverse children to engage in play that is meaningful for them because they can bring their unique interests, imaginations, and needs to the materials rather than the materials dictating what should occur.¹

Outdoor play spaces that are set in nature are full of natural loose parts for the children to discover and interact with on their own, finding their own play materials through connection. These connections can be supported and maintained by bringing natural play materials into play indoors and into the child's daily life, showing that their connection to nature doesn't only occur when

1. Flannigan, C. & Dietze, B. (2017). Children, outdoor play, and loose parts. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 42(4), 53-60.

they are in natural spaces, but rather it is a consistent feature of their life; they are always in connection.

A wonderful example of this might be a child discovering seeds dropped by a squirrel in an ECEC outdoor natural play environment. The child is drawn to this unique material and begins to interact. Through that interaction they start to wonder about how this unfamiliar material appeared on top of this soil. What is it? Where did it come from and why? Much more exploration and play can occur with this material in this setting, but what happens when the child takes one of the seeds with them and plants it inside their classroom? What happens when they have the opportunity to see a peanut tree start to sprout through the colder months? How might this impact what they bring to this material when they encounter it in the future outdoors?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Consider the unlimited nature of loose parts as you are moving through the eleven slides. View or download a [PDF transcript of the slides](#)



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=51#h5p-7>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Have a look at the three blog posts below to see how and why ECEC are using loose parts and natural materials to support outdoor and/or nature play for all children:

- [Loose Parts: Let's Play With Nature!](#)
- [Why Natural Loose Parts?](#)
- [Nature, the ultimate sensory experience for young children](#)

EXPERIENCE AND REFLECT

Visit an outdoor/nature play space in your community and pay attention to what play materials, if any, are present.

- Are there loose parts?
 - If so, describe what types?
 - If not, what might you add to the space to enhance the play and risk-taking opportunities for all children and why?
- What opportunities for risk-taking are afforded by the materials present

CHAPTER 10

Diverse Outdoor Play Spaces & Materials

ACTIVITY

Using the knowledge you now have of diverse outdoor play spaces and your critical thinking skills, see how many of the below items you can find in your own community.

- You can complete this activity by looking online, taking your list out into the world with you, or using some combination of the two.
- When you locate an item take a picture or screenshot of it and check off the box.
- Make sure you are prepared to explain the thinking behind each selection, and if you are unable to find some of the items, do not get discouraged and instead reflect on why, and what it might mean.
- You will want to create a visual home for your pictures and notes, such as a slide deck, and your instructor will share a template that you can use for this in class.

Good luck and have fun!

OUTDOOR PLAY SPACE SCAVENGER HUNT

- ☐ An outdoor space that supports diverse nature relationships
- ☐ An outdoor space that supports decolonization
- ☐ An outdoor space that supports positive EID and holistic development
- ☐ An outdoor space that centres inclusion and accessibility.
- ☐ An outdoor space that is inaccessible and not inclusive.
- ☐ An outdoor classroom.
- ☐ An Adventure playground.
- ☐ A forest school.
- ☐ A nature play scape.
- ☐ An ECEC natural outdoor play environment.
- ☐ Loose parts and natural loose parts in an outdoor play space



You can download the [Outdoor Play Space Scavenger Hunt as a PDF to take on your scavenger hunt.](#)

CHAPTER 11

Creating a Dynamic Outdoor Play Space: Considerations & Communication

PRACTITIONER PROFILE: *ASHLEY WHYNOT OF WILD CHILD FOREST SCHOOL*

Ashley Whynot is a Forest School Practitioner who has firsthand experience with nurturing and supporting children in their nature and outdoor play. She strives to create an outdoor space for children that is connected, inclusive, and decolonized.

Read through Ashley's biography and responses below to gain greater insight into her professional journey, nature pedagogy, as well as barriers she faces in her practice.

Ashley grew up in a military home and spent most of her adolescent years moving around Central and Atlantic Canada. She spent most of her childhood outside playing in the woods and surrounding playgrounds with friends. Her dad retired and moved their family to Nova Scotia where her appreciation for nature and all living things began to flourish.



Ashley Whynot, Wild Child Program Coordinator. Nature Name: Bumble Bee

Ashley attended Carleton University in Ottawa and holds a BA in Psychology. She is also a level 3 early childhood educator and has been working in the childcare field since

2016. Once the pandemic hit, her love for outdoor play really began to grow. Building forts, using tools, and climbing trees, made Ashley eager to pursue her education in outdoor risky play. She is currently enrolled in the Forest and Nature Practitioners course through Child and Nature Alliance Canada.

Ashley is a strong advocate for outdoor risky play and knows firsthand the benefits Forest School and nature has on ADHD and anxiety. Her goal is to be able to offer a safe space for children to do all the fun things, in a supportive and natural environment.

The mission of our Wild Child programs is to provide child led, play-based learning through repeated exposure to nature, helping to foster a lasting relationship with the natural world.

Wild Child program brings fun environmental education and encourages staff and children to get outside, play games and age-appropriate activities to learn about their environment and the other critters they share their community with.

INTERVIEW

1. What brought you to forest school (your origin story if you will)?

I was working as a school-age educator in 2020 when the pandemic hit – I was in a tricky position as I had grades 3 to 5. If you do not know, children in grade 3 and under did not have to be masked while indoors, but grade 4 and above did. How do I explain to the children that one group is safe inside unmasked but the other is not? It was then that I made the decision to stay outdoors for as long as possible. And the results were incredible – we spent our afternoons building forts in the trees, creating with our hands and child-led games that centered around their creations.

I thought to myself, there must be a way to do this all day and not have to be limited by licensing in what children should and should not do in nature – which led to a deep drive into forest schools. We were not able to leave our neighbourhoods let alone the city, province, or country so my choices were limited to what I could pursue academically. I ended up finding Child and Nature Alliance (CNAC) who were offering a combination of online and in-person learning. While taking the course, I just so happened to come across the Wild Child program at Shubie Park. After speaking with the program coordinator at the time, Julia, she asked me to send her my resume and that led to my first summer at a Forest School educator.

From there I moved into the Assistant Coordinator position and was later hired on as the Program Coordinator. I could not be happier with where my life journey has led me to. I continue to look for new ways to bring our programming to our communities and my hope one day is to have a Forest School Practitioner in every school in Nova Scotia.

2. How do you define your role with children and what guides

your current practice?

I define my role as a supporter of child wonderment – it is not my place to tell a child what their interests are, but to observe and expand upon their current wonderment. I like to explain it to people who ask what we do, that we do not program plan, we have our little Batman utility belts of skills, knowledge, and activities that we pull out when the time is right.

What that looks like:

A child wants to build a fort.

- *Okay, what do we need? Help create a list.*
- *Encourage the child to find the materials.*
- *Hey, you know what? I have a cool knot that might help you build your fort; would you like to see it?*

It is safe to say for all of my educators at Wild Child, that the children are what guides our programs. We go into each day with their interests in mind and consult with them on what they would like to do with their day. Forest School is a safe space for children to just be children and to have no other expectation than to have fun and find their joy.

3. How has your practice changed over time and why?

I started in the Early Childhood Education world later in life, having children of my own, and the job fit into my lifestyle of wanting to be with my own children. I spent a lot of time trying to check off boxes, I needed to have my Level 1, then my Level 2 and with my BA in Psychology I ended with my Level 3 – but it was never enough. I was not happy with myself, and it was not until I was diagnosed with ADHD of the Combined type that I started to question what really made me happy – the forest. I started to let go of having to check all the right boxes and question

why things were done a certain way – when evidence clearly shows great benefits to risky play. I guess you can say my practice shifted from being a people pleaser, to what was important – the children and their connection to nature and each other.

4. What do you feel are some of the biggest misconceptions about what you do and what do you wish people knew?

Wow – that we just play in the woods. I have had this conversation with my staff, that if someone were to walk through our base camp, we would look like we are just standing around doing nothing and just watching the children. But what people do not see is that we are constantly running through risk assessments and listening to the language the children are using. We can tell when a child needs our help, or they just need to work through some things on their own. Giving children the space to make those choices without an adult immediately jumping in to fix it is a skill that we as educators, need to work on.

There are days that the children will play and engage with us all day and there are days that they just need supplies, and we are more than happy to fulfill both of those roles. Independent, confident play is a big part of Forest School.

5. How does open and collaborative communication with the families of the children in your program impact your practice? Do you have any tools that you use to support relationship building with families?

Coming from the childcare world, having apps to communicate with parents was a priority for me. I did not want to rely on social media to communicate and creating email lists is daunting. I found Procare, which I really enjoy. It is tailored to childcare, but we use the tools that are relevant to our practice.

We share pictures and videos on the app, and we can write up incident reports that the parent will receive in real time. In our waiver form, parents have the option to opt in or out of pictures being taken of their child, but also to only share them through Procure. This way they can see what their child is doing, but do not have to worry about their child being on social media.

We still have Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to help share our content, but the pictures and videos are only posted with parental consent, and we ask the children too.

6. How are you attempting to address issues of inclusion in your practice? Challenges and barriers you face? Support needs as a practitioner? Success stories? Issues currently on your mind or conversations currently being had with your colleagues?

Inclusion is a huge topic in Forest School, and we have had many conversations on what that looks like for us. To run our programs, we need to have low ratios, 1 adult to 6 children over the age of 5 and usually a max of 12 children over the age of 5. With children under age 4, it is 1 adult to 4 children. We do not have funding for one-on-one care, so if we have a child that needs that support that leaves one staff with 11 children – which is not a safe ratio from children climbing trees, using tools, and having a whole forest at their disposal.

Then there is the issue of accessibility – our Bedford Location involves a difficult hike up to our basecamp; it is not meant for those who are not used to being outside for hours at a time and hike as a family. Even our Cole Harbour location is a bit of a hike for those who are not used to it. We are looking into finding a permanent home for Wild Child, but it is not an easy task.

That said, we have had children with ADHD, Anxiety, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy attend our programs with enormous success. We never want a parent to feel they must edit their child to be able to attend our programs – we ask openly if there is anything we should know about their child to make their time with us an enjoyable experience. That means we need to know if your child needs to have a safe space to go to in order to self-regulate or if they are a runner and we need to stay close. We have had to pull in another staff in the past, but it is not always an option. And at that point, we need to talk with the family members about safety and if the program is the right fit, right now for them. The safety of the child and the staff are my top priority.

If we had the funding that child care centers and schools have, this would not be as big of an issue as it is currently. We are solely run on program fees, grants when we can get them and donations. It's a stressful position to be in, especially when all you want to do is foster a connection between children and nature.

7. How are you attempting to decolonize your practice? Challenges and barriers you face? Support needs as a practitioner? Success stories? Issues currently on your mind or conversations currently being had with your colleagues?

I have felt that running a program which focuses so much on connection with the land cannot be done without bringing in decolonization. The Mi'kmaq are the original people of Mi'kma'ki and they knew how to live off the land in a good way. I have been connecting with Mi'kmaw people that I have had the privilege of meeting through workshops, I ask questions and seek their guidance when they allow space for me.

I would love to be able to offer Mi'kmaw led programs for youth, but funding is a barrier that makes these dreams hard to obtain.

We have had the honour to host Brady Googoo, a Mi'kmaw youth from Millbrook at one of our summer camp programs. He spoke about his traditional dancing and brought some of his regalia to show the children. He is also a talented lacrosse player and brought his stick to pass around. He spoke so eloquently about his passions and kept the children and staff engaged and in awe. It was important to me for the children to see a youth so passionate about his culture, so often guest speakers are adults. It is important to bring in youth to speak – children connect with them on a different level.

Anything else/final thoughts?

Final thoughts, I wish there were more government support for what we do. Children spend so many hours of their day on a schedule, being told what to do and when to do it, they desperately need an outlet like Forest School to just be a child – with no other agenda. How incredible would it be if every child got to experience Forest School once a week throughout their school year. We need to honour children and allow them to explore who they are and what is important to them without interference from the adult world.

PART V

REFLECTION

CHAPTER 12

Reflecting on Impacts

EDUCATOR WITH CHILDREN WITH NATURE

Everyone started this learning journey in a different place, bringing different experiences, views, and understandings to their learning.

As this course comes to an end, I encourage each of you to look back on your learning and reflect on where you were at the beginning and where you are now. Much information has been shared and you may need some time to look back and pull out the pieces that have been most impactful for you, making connections by making your own *collection*.

As you move out of this learning space and bring your collection out into the world with you, remember to always come back to how important small moments of connection are for children and the impact they have. You are part of this.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This resource is meant to be used as a tool to reflect on what your key takeaways from this course have been. Use this resource to create or inspire a *learning artifact* that will act as a visual reminder

of your nature pedagogy and key learning from the course. You may choose to put this artifact somewhere prominent in your learning or practice space.

Write your answers into the activity below. The last screen lets you export your work to a word file.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/eceoutdoor/?p=61#h5p-8>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [*Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory*](#) (website)

To further deepen your engagement with the ideas in this book and get inspired — explore the writings and wonderings shared by The Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory. It is a Canadian hybrid and experimental space where educators and pedagogues trace and experiment with the contours, conditions, and complexities of early childhood education pedagogies in the 21st century.

EXPERIENCE AND REFLECT: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Select a course resource that you found meaning in to share with someone. You may select to share this with a close friend or family member, your, a child's family or caregiver, or your community more broadly.

Consider the intention of your sharing and how it relates to your own learning and identity as an educator today.

CHAPTER 13

Conclusion

Throughout this course, we hope that you were able to learn more about and reflect on the diverse and complex relationships between humans and nature in order to deepen your understanding of how outdoor play spaces can be designed with this in mind to support children's play, learning, holistic development, and well-being.

As adults working with young children, it is important to understand the impacts our own relationships and understandings have on children's engagement with and in the outdoors and nature. In order to holistically support them and nurture their relationship with the natural world, it is crucial to maintain an element of reflection yourself as you continue your own journey with the outdoors and nature and your practice in the field of early childhood education and care.

Version History

ECE Nature and Outdoor Play: NSCC Edition is adapted from [Early Childhood Education: Nature and Outdoor Play](#) by [Taylor Hansen](#) published with [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license.

The NSCC edition contains the following changes:

- Title shortened to ECE Nature and Outdoor Play.
- Book chapters reorganized into sections, chapter headings revised.
- Presentation and colour scheme simplified [new style template].
- In-text citations changed to footnotes to enhance readability.
- Accessibility changes made to to meet WCAG standards.
 - Hierarchical tagging revised.
 - Alt text added.
 - Text added to chapter content to replace images of text.
- Removed images with all-rights reserved copyright statements.
- Embedded videos into chapters.

- Bibliographic information added to suggested readings.
- New H5P added in chapters 1 & 12.
- New cover.
- Sharing of multiple formats enabled to support choice for readers .