



The Open
University

Young children, the outdoors and nature

Transcript

NICOLA KEMP:

There's a real emphasis on young children's wellbeing nowadays. One of the things parents and practitioners are often advised to do, is to take children outdoors. However, when children are spoken about, it's often those who can run, jump, and climb, so children over the age of two. There appears to be little discussion of children who are below this age. Those we generally call babies and toddlers. My name is Nicola Kemp, and along with my colleague, Jo Josephidou, we noticed this gap, and wanted to find out more. This led us to do some research, funded by the Froebel Trust.

JO JOSEPHEDOU:

You will have the opportunity to find out more about the Froebel Trust and Friedrich Froebel in Session 3. Froebel took for granted that children would grow up in and with nature from birth, and that parents would spend time outdoors with their babies. And we are interested in thinking about the contemporary relevance of Froebel's ideas, particularly as so very many young children now spend time in daycare. Our research started by exploring existing research. And we called our first report, *Where Are The Babies*, as our analysis confirmed that very young children are largely absent from discussions about being outdoors. We then conducted an audit of outdoor provision in English early childhood settings. And we found that there is significant variation in the emphasis on, and resourcing of, outdoor practice between settings. This is a concern, as it means that there is inequality of access to the outdoors. The final part of our research involved case studies of settings, which highlighted the opportunities for innovative outdoor practice. And you will hear from some of the setting managers later in this course. Our analysis of the whole project found that whilst being outdoors might be valued, there is a tendency to remove natural features from the environments, which the youngest children have regular access to. We think there are opportunities to reconnect with Froebel's thinking about young children having time to be in and with nature in contemporary practice.

NICOLA KEMP:

For us, one of the most important outcomes of the research has been that it has started a much-needed conversation about the needs of the youngest children, and how these are supported through time spent outdoors. This free course looks at the importance of babies and toddlers having opportunities to engage with diverse outdoor environments. We've been privileged to have met with and engaged with a large network of researchers and practitioners, and delighted that so many of them have been able to

contribute to this course. We are also delighted that you are interested and are joining this most important discussion. By engaging with the course, you will be able to explore the reasons why spending time outdoors is so important for babies and toddlers, and how this has been understood at different times and in different contexts. You will also be introduced to a variety of inspiring examples, which will help you develop your own outdoor practice for the youngest children.