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Children Learning Outside the Classroom From Birth to Eleven

Waite, S. (Ed.) 2011

London, Sage

£21.99 (pbk), £65.00 (hbk) 236pp.

ISBN 978-0-85702-048-2 (pbk); ISBN 978-0-85702-047-5 (hbk)

The contributing authors to this book focus on the definition of 'outside' as the 'outdoors' and 'environments beyond the classroom'. Although this might be considered to be narrower than the U.K.'s Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto (2006) definition, it is perhaps more useful for international readership. The book draws together theory and practice with an emphasis on engagement with outdoor spaces and the importance of learning beyond the classroom for all children from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS: birth to five years) to the end of Primary education (eleven years). The terminology of the text does relate to the English National Curriculum and it could have been scoped further to include the Welsh and Northern Irish curricula and the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, especially given the opportunities for outdoor learning therein. International readers will need to note the ages of the children to which the various sections apply to translate and transmute practice. However, although the market is awash with texts about play in early childhood, this text fulfils a useful niche about outdoor learning and thus, should be of considerable interest to readers of *JAEO* who are practitioners or researchers in this phase.

The book is both developmental in approach but also can be accessed as a compendium through individual chapters. There is a clear rationale and justification for learning outside the classroom with signposting to later chapters and sections. It has a system of icons: chapter objectives, points for practice, case studies, thoughts on theory, summary and further (key) reading which results in a very accessible and readable text. There is a list of useful websites and a comprehensive list of references at the end for those who wish to research aspects further.

Beyond the first chapter on theoretical perspectives, there is a section on the EYFS followed by one adopting a cross-curricular approach in the Primary curriculum and then an examination of subject areas/themes in outdoor learning such as residential centres, school gardens and forest schools and environmental education in a National Park. Perhaps an omission might be Citizenship where outdoor learning can have a valuable contribution but it is hard to expect the inclusion of all statutory and non-statutory subjects within the space available. The emphasis on children's empowerment and engagement is laudable.

For the less experienced or novice practitioner, the book provides an excellent tool-kit for practice. It contains many illustrations of successful experiences and ideas, with further focused reading to 'adjust (their) facilitation to maximise development of children's independent learning that is self-regulated, personally meaningful and motivated' (Waite, p.203). For more experienced readers, there are some interesting discussions and critique which should stimulate capacity for further debate. The section on Mathematics (Pratt, pp. 80-93) provides a good perspective in so far as it critiques the role of the outdoors in teaching and learning which is not all positive. There is a limit to what can be taught optimally outdoors and to the expansion and extension of the resource available. Some interesting areas of fruitful debate and discussion are available for those with a questioning mind about the relationship of Neoliberalism and education, place meaning and the possible 'overformalisation of outdoor learning' (Rea, p.150) for example, and there is an important section on risk differentiation between 'risk-taking' and 'hazardous behaviour' for Early Years practice (Huggins & Wickett, p.32).

Sue Waite is a Faculty of Education Research Fellow at the University of Plymouth and a qualified primary school teacher and is published currently and widely on outdoor learning with young children. She has drawn together authors mainly from South west England with considerable expertise in early years and primary education and the semantics used throughout promote a powerful outdoor pedagogy. In her conclusion, she links theoretical perspectives (psychological and socio-cultural) to learning outside the classroom and emphasises some key points of best practice including that outdoor learning provides the foundations for lifelong learning and the need for the provision of authentic experiences.

The limitations of the text are in the narrow framework of a specified curriculum and in case studies located mainly in a restricted area of the U.K. A more expansive curriculum beyond Section 3, 'Outside the Box' (p. 147) would illustrate an augmentation of ideas and opportunities for outdoor learning which consequently, would engender more widespread appeal. The writing is situated in mainstream schooling approached chronologically and thematically and would have benefitted from viewing the curriculum through different lenses (e.g. Eisner, 2002; Beames, Higgins & Nicol, 2012). A section about children with special needs would have expanded the creative opportunities for outdoor learning, so clearly defined, to a wider spectrum of participant. Higher Education academics and researchers may seek further critique and discourse to generate questioning and debate, for example, concerning methodologies, data as evidence, paradigms or shifts in perspectives.

For an early career practitioner, this book is an asset but perhaps lacks the outreach and higher level discourse to be attractive in a broader academic realm. It will develop readers' thinking and practice in outdoor learning but has less to challenge any re-conceptualisation of that pedagogy. However, it does achieve its aim to inspire the reader with a powerful and enduring message about experiential learning for young children outside the classroom.

Beames, S., Higgins, P. & Nicol, R. (2012). *Learning outside the classroom. Theory and guidelines for practice*. London: Routledge.

Eisner, W.E. (2002). *The educational imagination. On the design and evaluation of school programs*. USA: Prentice Hall.

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