

SUII Seminar Series: “The Well-Connected Child: Developing a relational approach for work with young children”.

Seminar 3. The Child’s Natural & Built Environments
Thursday 4th July

In the third seminar we turn attention to children’s relations with their natural and built environments, and the way these afford experiences for health, growth, and learning. New evidence from research and practice demonstrate the importance of natural environments for satisfying the motivation within the child for engagement, creativity, and learning. We will examine new research data with examples of best outdoor working practice with children, and also how to build supportive indoor environments for these same talents. Set within a developing Scottish policy to encourage outdoor play, this seminar will improve our understanding of how both outdoor and indoor environments affect children’s lives.

Draft Programme

9:00 *Registration and Coffee*

Morning Session on Research: Significance of Environment on Health & Learning

9:30 Introductions and Re-cap of Previous Seminars

9:50 **Prof. Catharine Ward Thompson**, ‘Engagement with the natural and built environment for children at home, at school, and into their teenage and adult years’ (OPENspace Research Centre, University of Edinburgh)

10:40 Open Discussion

11:00 *Coffee, Fruit, Pastries*

11:30 **Dr. Jenny Roe**, ‘Terrain-led support for children and teenagers with special health needs’ (School of the Built Environment, Heriot Watt University & Stockholm Environment Institute; Department of Environment, University of York)

12:20 Open Discussion

12:45 *Lunch*

Afternoon Session on Practice: Working with Children Outdoors & Indoors

13:45 **Robin Duckett & Catherine Reding** ‘Look, look the tree’s on fire! Developing Environments of Enquiry in early childhood and primary education’ (Sightline Initiative, Newcastle Upon Tyne)

14:30 Open Discussion

14:45 *Coffee, Fruit, and Cake*

15:00 **Cathy Bache** ‘Into the Middle of Nowhere: Outdoor Environments & Practice for Healthy Children’ (Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery, Fife)

15:30 Panel Discussion

16:00 **Closing Remarks**

16:15 *Close of Main Session & Opening of Poster Session, Wine Reception*

Morning Research-Focussed Session

Engagement with the natural and built environment for children at home, at school, and into their teenage and adult years.

Professor Catharine Ward Thompson, OPENSspace, University of Edinburgh

In the context of general concerns over unhealthy lifestyles and serious health inequalities in the 21st century, there is evidence that children's health is deteriorating as a result of inactivity and lack of access to stimulating environments and opportunities to play in informal or unsupervised settings. Evidence suggests that engagement with the natural environment offers a range of (possibly unique) benefits to children's healthy development. With increasing problems of mental illness, particularly in young people, there is an interest in how such environments might support emotional and cognitive wellbeing as well as physical and social development. This paper will present evidence from a range of research projects by Catharine and colleagues to demonstrate the links between outdoor environments and children's wellbeing, and points to the kinds of environments that support or hinder healthy development.

Bio. Catharine Ward Thompson is Director of the OPENSspace Research Centre and Research Professor of Landscape Architecture at Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on inclusive access to outdoor environments, environment-behaviour interactions, landscape design for older people, for children and for teenagers, and salutogenic environments. She also has expertise in the history and theory of urban park design and conservation, the history of landscape design, and landscape aesthetics and perception. As a landscape architect, she is passionate about good access to open space that offers opportunities for a rich experience for all.

Terrain-led support for children and teenagers with special health needs.

*Dr Jenny Roe, School of the Built Environment, Heriot Watt University
& Stockholm Environment Institute; Department of Environment, University of York*

There is good evidence showing how natural settings can help protect health - by promoting opportunities for physical activity and psychological restoration, for example, and by acting as a buffer to stress. But research measuring the impact of the natural outdoors as a treatment strategy for specific health problems is still in its infancy. This paper will present research by Jenny and colleagues exploring how the outdoors can support wellbeing in children and teenagers with specific mental health problems. It draws on a series of studies spanning a spectrum of mental health problems and environmental contexts – from children with severe mental health disorders living in a residential home, to children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and children at risk in mainstream primary and secondary schools. It presents findings on a range of wellbeing measures including behaviour, emotion, literacy, cognition, creativity and social interactions. The paper concludes with suggestions for further studies in relation to built environmental factors and their impact on specific mental health problems in children and young people.

Bio. Jenny Roe is Lecturer in the School of the Built Environment at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. Her work addresses the relationship of the built environment to health and wellbeing with a focus on green space, the outdoors and healthcare settings. The impact of rehabilitation strategies designed to improve wellbeing in people with mental health problems and visual impairments. Development of methodologies for monitoring health and wellbeing including personal project analysis and objective measures of stress (e.g. cortisol). Particular expertise in engaging vulnerable young people, minority ethnic groups and NHS patients in the research process, development of tools to audit and evaluate environments, and participatory research methods (video/film). She is a qualified Landscape Architect and member of the Landscape Institute, was previously Research Fellow with OPENspace, and is now Co-Convenor of the Restorative Environments Network, an international network of health and environment researchers, operated via International Association of People-Environment Studies (IAPS).

Afternoon Practice-Focussed Session

Look, look the tree's on fire! Developing Environments of Enquiry in early childhood and primary education.

Robin Duckett & Catherine Reding, Sightlines Initiative, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Sightlines recognises children as capable and inquisitive learners, and advocates education as the practice of developing an environment of engagement and enquiry. We provide professional development opportunities in creative, reflective educational practice in the UK and are the UK reference point for the preschools of Reggio Emilia.

Bios. Robin Duckett is Executive Director of Sightlines Initiative. He formed the organisation in 1997 as an independent early years professional development programme for reflective and creative practice in UK early childhood education, leading on from the experience of ten years as a local authority nursery teacher.

Cath Reding is also a Director of Sightlines, and has participated as creative enabler and mentor in projects since 2008, focusing both on the development of experiences in nature and in musicality in the early years. She has been a primary teacher and is a practicing musician.

Into the Middle of Nowhere: Outdoor Environments & Practice for Healthy Children

Cathy Bache, The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery, Fife

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery opened its invisible doors in September 2008, receiving at this time the Nancy Ovens Award for Play 'Outstanding Contribution to Play' and from Play Scotland 'Best Practice in Action'. Based in a 25 acre woodland north of Letham village in Fife, the nursery offers explorative full-time outdoor play, 4½ days a week, for 49 weeks of the year from 8.30am – 5.00pm. With a present roll of about 40 children attending, enthusiasm for outdoor play and learning appears to be rising.

Bio. Cathy Bache is founder of The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery and former Drama teacher. She gained an ATQ in Primary Education before stepping into Early Years practice. A combination of 'causes and conditions' drew her out to the woods with preschool children in 2004: a privileged childhood roaming woodland and countryside, an eccentric grandfather that taught her to light and dance around campfires at an early age, formative parenting years living in Norway discovering the joys of doing the outdoors with her own children, a year in Newfoundland 'daily walking in all weathers in every season', and a wonderfully supportive group of friends and parents here in the Howe of Fife who have believed and held the dream of The Secret Garden. Cathy draws on her own practice of mindfulness to support and train the staff of the Secret Garden on how to be fully present for the creative child in the natural environment.