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**A Case Study of Children's and Adults'
Perceptions of 'Being Outside' in One Early
Childhood Centre**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

This research was a qualitative semi-participatory case study carried out over 14 weeks, in one early childhood centre. Increasingly many young children in this country only get outside on adult terms and these terms stem from the values, beliefs and attitudes of the teachers as well as centre management practices. Therefore this study explored: (1) fourteen young children's views on their outdoor experiences in an early childhood education setting; (2) parents', teachers' and the centre owner's views on the value and role of the outdoors in young children's lives; (3) participants' views on the role of the teacher in the outdoor environment. Procedures used included cameras, photo elicitation, drawing, touring, observations, and focus groups. The discussion centres on the importance of 'playing', the 'elements of opportunity' that being outside at the centre offered and the teacher's role. An interesting outcome was that the views and feelings of the participants overwhelmingly demonstrated what a significant role the outdoors had in all their lives and how much they valued an outdoor environment at their centre. Parents and teachers indicated that the outdoors offers more for children than the indoors – more health and holistic development, exploration, active movement, hiding, imaginative, learning, risk taking and problem solving opportunities. It is argued that there was a strong interrelationship between the adults' beliefs and values, in particular the centre owner's, and the provision for outdoor play. It is also argued that young children do notice, appreciate and value the natural world if they are given the opportunity to experience it everyday for long periods of time, with adults who share in the joy, wonder and awe of it. This study argues that children need to be in optimal outdoor spaces that contain as many rich sensory experiences and natural elements as possible. The central claim of this thesis is that children are motivated to be outside so they can play. For the children in this study 'play' included: being physically active and moving in increasingly complex ways; exploring their place, their world; and engaging with nature, humans and non-humans, and the natural world. It is argued that when the adults in the child's life know this and value these elements of the outdoors, and hold a 'critical pedagogy of place', then comes mutuality, joint participation, shared wonder, holistic growth, and learning environments are developed that mirror the learning they are to support; a sense of harmony is created. It is about all interrelationships between people, places, thing and events.

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