

## *March Newsletter (2010)*

*'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire'  
attributed to W.B Yeats*

*(thank you to Akiko Kobayashi, Mia's mummy, for bringing this wonderful quote to my attention, this reminds me of another quote I heard this month... 'we aim to help children climb their own mountains' it seems so relevant)*

*Dear Parents and friends of Cowgate...*

*As I write the sun is shining through the trees and Rosie (Sala Infantil) insisted that I change the 'winter scene' to the 'spring scene' in the vestibule... wonderfully optimistic, Cowgate children ☺*

*This newsletter brings... Thanks and the Fruit Basket, 'The Catherine Brown Story' and Kadi and success, thank you to our parents, parental comments, our Green Flag success, an explanation of the lifejackets, a dynamic plan for planning ahead with parents... Jane has asked me to share her plan with you, information about GLOW, i.e., what is it?, Fair Trade fortnight and our enjoyed success, PHD update, conferences / presentations. This month, I have chosen a small excerpt from 'Learning with Nature' for you...as always there is no need to read on from here, this is*

### *Thanks and the Fruit Basket*

*We would like to thank all the children and their families for supporting the fruit basket. May we say, a very special thank you to*

*Unaysah's daddy...you will see the following little story above the basket...*

*The fruit basket our story...*

*'We are asking children to bring fruit to the centre to share with their friends to promote the virtue of kindness.*

*Kindness, in Cowgate, is shown in small gestures that brighten people's lives. As our children bring in fruit to share with their friends, their friends delight in the little surprises the fruit basket has inside.*

*Being kind to each other, by bringing fruit to share, or supplying fruit for snack, and children's favourite...fruit to take home at the end of a busy day, helps us connect with one another.*

*Being kind to one another makes all our lives brighter...what fruit will you bring'.*

### *The Catherine Brown Story*

*Life is not made up of great sacrifices and duties, but of little things; in which smiles and kindness are given habitually are what win and preserve the heart (Davy, 1778-1829). I am in not in the habit of singling out a child...as you know I could write about anyone of our children and this newsletter could double in size ...I won't do that of course, but I did want to share with you about Catherine, mainly because all the staff were quite emotional about her kind act, and we wanted to celebrate it somehow...this is one way...*

*Well, considering the words of Davy, Catherine Brown's heart is safe...as you know in February our wonderful Teresa spoke to the children about baking love heart biscuits to sell for our Kadi, from*

*Niger. The children enthusiastically set about baking myriad of tasty bites. The children again enthusiastically encouraged their parents to buy some baking... for Kadi (of course 😊) Well our very dear Catherine Brown, went home, collected her penny bank, and expressed to her parents that she would like to take in the money for Kadi. Her parents supported her, and Catherine did bring in her money and popped it in Kadi's bank. This young girl looked for no praise for this action, in fact she almost looked surprised when we talked to her about it...no this child was totally altruistic in her actions. And...I should say this is the second time Catherine has emptied out 'her life savings' for Kadi. Because...she believes it was the right thing to do...and because she does not 'need anything.' Catherine will leave us in the summer for primary school...a credit to her loving family...a kind, principled child who has already left her mark on our world...*

*We raised £85 for Kadi. Teresa, has contacted PLAN to ask for advice on how the money should be spent.*

*From all of us, to all of you, thank you for your support, for buying the baking and a huge thank you to David and Milena for their very tasty contributions. £85.00 will go a long way in Niger. Thank you all, so very much again.*

### *Parental Comments*

*Thank you to the parents who supported our applications for the Care Accolades. Your comments warmed our hearts.*

### *Green Flag Success*

*We are delighted to inform you that we have achieved our 3<sup>rd</sup> Green Flag. We were assessed on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February. The assessors attended Forest School with the children and then Robert (Milne) gave*

them an informed tour. Thank you Robert 😊 Special thanks to Lorraine our eco-school coordinator and the centre community for supporting the assessment. The assessment was not stressful at all, in fact, in future assessments, the children can lead from now on...they do it so much better than us...they tell it just like it is...no frills 😊 Well done everyone.

### Lifejackets

You may have observed the little orange life jackets hanging in the Salle de Jeux. We bought these to support the children going to the Dell. When Donna completes her Forest School course in April, she will be organising day trips to the Dell. The plan is to spend two days each week there. Donna is currently exploring a tent to buy, so that when the children are at the Dell they can still choose to be indoors if they wish. Exciting times 😊

### GLOW

As part of the Children and Families department we are becoming involved with the resource GLOW.

GLOW is the national intranet for education where resources can be shared between schools and nurseries. All staff and pupils (from P1 upwards) will have access to GLOW.

Information about GLOW can be found at:  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/glowscotland/about/index.asp>

Jane and Hazel will be attending a second course on GLOW on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March.

## Information for all parents in the Sala Infantil

*Parent Consultations in the Sala Infantil in the session 2009 – 2010 are being arranged as follows:*

*November 2009 – all parents were invited to have a chat about their child with their key practitioner and/or Jane.*

*March 2010 – all parents of children who are going to school in 2010 are invited to meet with Jane (sign up sheet will be on the door w/6 8<sup>th</sup> March, for meetings in w/6 22<sup>nd</sup> March).*

*May 2010 – all parents of younger children will be invited to meet with key practitioner and/or Jane.*

- *May/June 2010*

*Parents of children who are going to school will be asked to contribute to the Transition Document which then is copied, one copy sent to the school and one given to parents.*

*Parents with younger children will receive a summary of points from the May meeting.*

*In addition, all children joining the Sala Infantil during the year, either as new children to Cowgate or from the Salle de Jeux will have a short 'settling in' form which will be kept in their Personal Learning Plan folder. This will be filled in a few weeks after their start date in the Sala Infantil.*

*All parents are invited to take folders home for short periods during the year and also over the July/August period for children to share them with families and add to them at home.*

## Conferences / Presentations

*This month we have had several invitations to speak at various conferences. All good experience for us. An opportunity to celebrate our work. Can I thank the following people in advance for their support in preparing for these experiences and for giving up your time so generously:*

*March 12<sup>th</sup> – Jane, Lynn and Mark – Presenting to probationer teachers*

*March 17<sup>th</sup> – Lynn, Lian, Michelle and Donna – Presenting to the SPPA (Scottish Playgroup Association)*

*March 20<sup>th</sup> – Lynn, Jane, Donna, Julie and Teresa – Forest School Education Initiative / Eco-Schools*

*That may be all for March ☺ Thanks to you all.*

## Fair Trade Fortnight

*What a wonderful success 'Fairtrade Fortnight' was. The tea parties were very successful, well done to Karen, our Fair Trade co-ordinator and the Fair Trade Committees, the children and staff. Both committees have worked very hard to make the events a great success. Have you seen the wall display in the Sala Infantil? Further evidence that the children are very seriously committed to their Fair Trade principles! And I believe the Fair Trade tea party, held on Lian's birthday (4<sup>th</sup> March), in the Sala Infantil, was enjoyed by all.*

*A website that might be of interest to you:*

<http://www.shivayanaturals.com/>

*This website was recommended to me and I love it ☺*

## Blockplay

*Have you noticed the blockplay in the play/classrooms...the children have been very busy...*

## PhD

*I just want to say how much I am loving doing my PhD, you should do it. I feel so alive. In a few short months I feel I have learnt so much. As I learn, I realise how I very much appreciate being in Cowgate, the children, parents and staff are beautiful. On Thursday I was 'learning' about descriptive statistics...learning is of course, said very loosely here...when I returned from my class Leo came into my office, we (some children and I) were looking at my O.B.E photo's and Leo laughingly asked 'Why are you wearing such a funny hat?' Children are the wisest of all, why indeed was I wearing such a funny hat...one of my little weaknesses, as you know ☺*

*Warm wishes to all...until next month*

*Lynn and the Cowgate team.*

*I ask your forgiveness for any odd inelegancies in either grammar or spelling...I finished this newsletter in the very early hours of the morning (3.45am). Couldn't sleep...*

## Learning with Nature

*“Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked to the sense of wonder. This way of knowing, if recognised and honoured, can serve as a life-long source of joy and enrichment, as well as an impetus or motivation, for further learning.”*

*Ruth A. Wilson, “The Wonders of Nature: Honouring Children’s Ways of Knowing.”*

## Why Learning with Nature is Important

*...research has shown the value of comprehensive nature education for young children that goes beyond simply having well-designed outdoor spaces. Children benefit most in programs that have educators that are knowledgeable about how to use these spaces as an integral part of daily learning, and families who understand and support the need for children to connect with the natural world.*

*“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”*

*Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder.*

## A Few Words About the Growing Problem of Children’s Disconnection From Nature

*“Without continuous hands-on experience, it is impossible for children to acquire a deep intuitive understanding of the natural world that is*

*the foundation of sustainable development. A critical aspect of the present-day crisis in education is that children are becoming separated from daily experience of the natural world.”*

*Robin C. Moore and Herb H. Wong*

*Natural Learning; Creating Environments for Rediscovering Nature's Way of Teaching*

*Educators and mental health professionals world-wide are becoming concerned that today's children are no longer able to spend unhurried hours exploring the natural world in the same ways that previous generations enjoyed. Research is showing that children need connections with the natural world as a regular part of their healthy growth and development (Crain, 2001; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Moore and Wong, 1997; Nabhan & Trimble, 1999). Disconnection to nature is leading to increases in problems such as childhood obesity, children's dislike and even fear of outdoors, and increased reliance on behaviour-regulating medications (Louv, 2005; Rivkin, 1995; White, 2004).*

*Research shows a dramatic decline in the amount of time today's children spend outdoors. Hoffert and Sandberg (2000) site the following statistics: Between 1981 and 1997, the amount of time U.S. children aged six to eight spent playing outdoors decreased by four hours per week while the amount of time they spent indoors in school increased by almost five hours per week.*

*One result of the reduction of children's direct experiences with the natural world is the rise of what researchers refer to as biophobia, a fear of the natural world and environmental issues (Sobel, 1996). Research by Wilson (1994) and Simmons (1994), based on personal interviews with groups of children varying in age from preschool to age nine, found that attitudes children expressed toward various aspects of*

*the natural environment (rain, wildflower, trees, birds) included more fear and dislike than appreciation, caring or enjoyment. Cohen and Horm-Wingerd (1993) believe that children's unfounded fears and misconceptions about the natural environment develop when they have very little actual contact with living things and obtain most of their attitudes through electronic media.*

*Many children no longer spend long, unstructured hours playing outdoors creating positive bonds with nature. Families and educators must now provide intentional experiences and create spaces that give the children the opportunity to better understand and appreciate the natural world...teacher-researchers have documented much evidence of valuable skill development occurring across all learning domains as children spend daily time in well-designed outdoor spaces with nurturing adults (Miller, 2007). This is especially true for children with sensory integration challenges (Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan, 2001).*

*The most wonderfully designed natural outdoor classroom will only be as effective as the adults who explore it with them. As developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky taught years ago, children's learning takes place best as part of caring relationships with adults and other children (Vygotsky, 1962). Adults who themselves delights in experiencing the natural world and understand the rich learning that can take place in natural outdoor spaces will greatly aid children's healthy growth and development...field-testing and research shows great benefits across the curriculum for children who explore well-designed outdoor spaces with nurturing adults. Educators and families who encourage children to master new challenges, develop increasingly complex skills, and closely observe and appreciate the natural world will give children gifts that will last for a lifetime.*

*A new way of thinking may be needed for educators and families as children begin to spend more and more time learning with nature.*

*Outdoor time will come to be seen more than “recess”, and will instead be viewed as an invaluable part of each day’s learning activities.*

*Children respond positively to aesthetically pleasing spaces, and are more apt to engage in pro-social behaviours in beautiful settings. Some suggestions of how to plan an outdoor space, and why these things are important follow:*

- *Children need clearly delineated areas, in outdoor spaces, why?*

*Children need order, especially children who are strong visual-spatial thinkers and children who have sensory challenges. Entering a space with distinct spaces is easier to understand and more calming than entering a space with a jumble of activities arranged indiscriminately. By providing clearly defined activity areas, children are empowered to make choices and plans on their own. These separate activity areas decrease conflicts among children and increase children’s ability to focus on learning activities.*

- *Children may need visual clues, why?*

*A special entry feature helps children stop and focus attention on the outdoor space. Entry features with some depth to them (an arbour to walk through, for example) encourage thoughtful entry into the space instead of a “mad dash” to get to new activities.*

- *Children may need an ‘open-area’, why?*

*Children need enough space to run, jump, dance, or play active games. Designating one space for active play is important for children’s health and well-being, especially in light of dramatically increased rates of childhood obesity and diabetes.*

- *Children need a climbing / crawling area, why?*

*As children grow and develop they need to successfully master physical challenges in order to gain self-confidence and a sense of control over their environments. Learning how to manoeuvre their bodies in a variety of settings helps them gain skills that keep them safer. Looking at the world from multiple perspectives (gazing down from up high, or peering through a crawl-through log, for example) strengthens children's thinking in ways that support mathematical and visual-spatial skills.*

- *Create a space for digging, why?*

*Today's children have fewer and fewer opportunities to interact with wild, natural areas that allow for free exploration and experimentation. Children's ability to "be messy" is also being restricted more and more as much of their time is spent either indoors or in manicured outdoor settings. A well-designed "messy materials" area can encourage children to use their imaginations, experiment with a variety of natural objects, practice carrying heavy objects, and feel a sense of accomplishment and personal mastery over the environment. Children with sensory integration challenges often excel in this area and gain skills in self-control and relaxation after been given enough opportunities to use large muscles to dig or carry heavy objects from place-to-place. The good news for adults is that the design of this area keeps "messiness" manageable since children actually stay relatively clean even as they immerse themselves in wood chips or mulch.*

*Experiencing the rich feeling and aroma of the soil can be calming and beneficial to children, as well as adults. Working with dirt (soil) gives children a chance to experience a texture that is different from sand. In digging areas children may also have the chance to discover insects or earthworms in the soil.*

- *Create a space where children can build with wooden blocks, why?*

*Indoor spaces cannot provide enough room for children to experiment with block construction, and outdoor spaces allow for a different kind of experience. Noise is not as much a factor outdoors as indoors, since the noise from falling block structures is absorbed outside in a way that is not possible indoors. Often children who are reluctant to build indoors are more willing to try this activity outside. Building with blocks provides many chances to strengthen visual-spatial, mathematical and abstract thinking. Proving blocks outdoors that are different from the typical blocks found inside classrooms gives the children a chance to experiment in new ways.*

- *Create a nature art area, why?*

*As children work with natural materials such as sticks, pine cones or leaves, and arrange them into patterns or mosaic-like pictures, they develop close observation skills, classification skills, and a sense of appreciation for the beauty of the natural world. As children handle these natural materials they also gain understanding of weight, mass, texture and shape. In addition, if children are encouraged to sketch natural features in the outdoor environments, they notice details that they might otherwise miss. Children who physically explore the space by walking through pathways or moving from area to area, then draw a map of their path, are often able to successfully put paper to pencil in a way that they are otherwise unable to do. For many predominantly visual-spatial thinkers, this type of activity can serve as a wonderful link to written literacy activities (Miller, 2007).*

- *Providing music, why?*

*Music and movement experiences are vital to children's healthy development. Outdoor settings provide an ideal place for children to experiment with music and movement expression. Outdoor music and movement areas provide a place in children's lives where they are able to make music and dance in an unstructured way, allowing for improvisation and creativity. Concerns about noise are not as great outdoors as they are indoors, and a room for storage of musical instruments is often larger in outdoor spaces. Well-equipped music and movement areas allow children to learn about sound, pitch, rhythm and tonality on their own; learn how to manipulate a variety of musical instruments; and experience concepts related to physics. Using musical instruments made from natural plant materials gives children a chance to experience the richness of nature and to learn about people and cultures world-wide that use these types of instruments.*

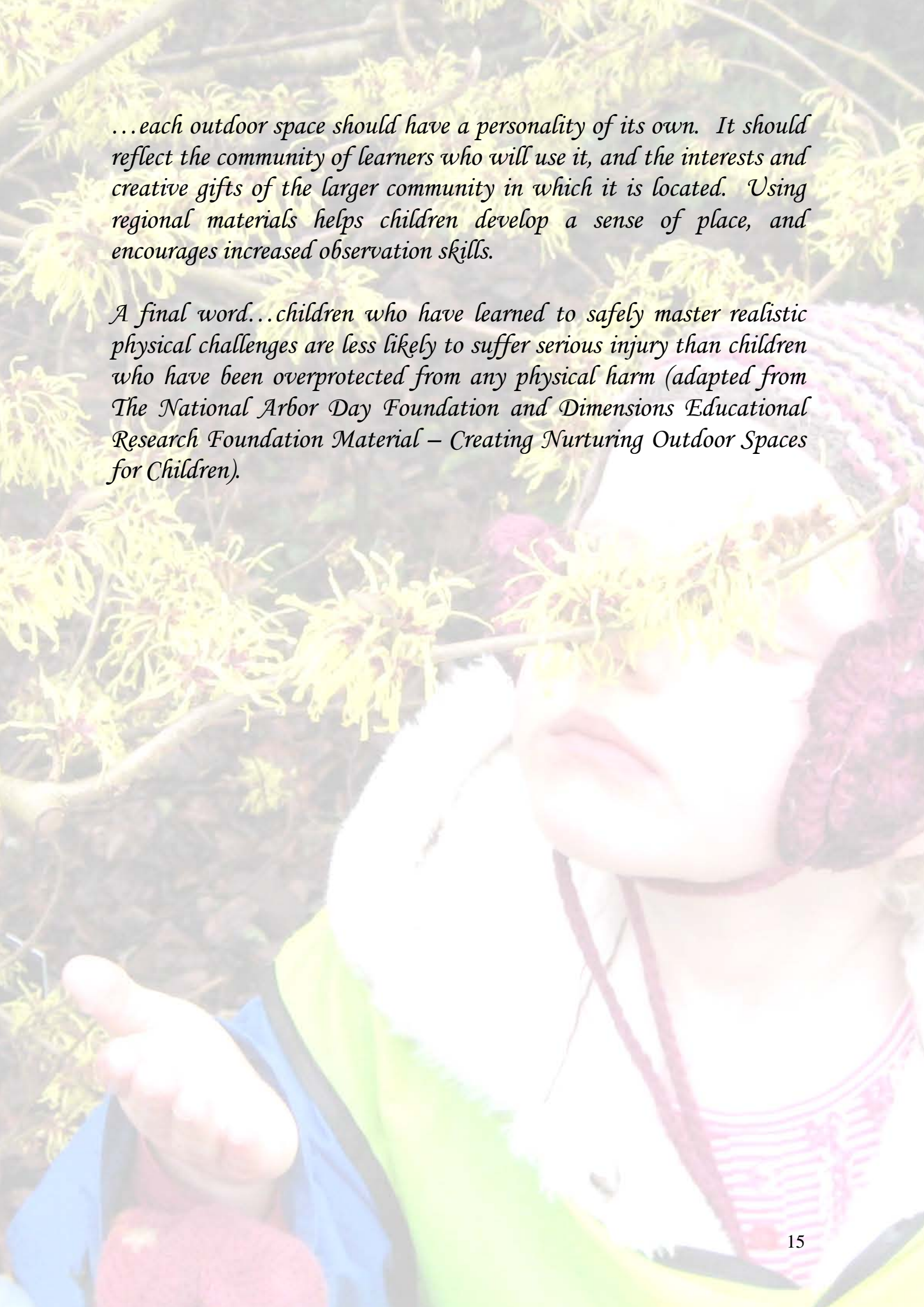
*Nature inspires creative movement.*

- *Providing a pathway through planting, why?*

*Interacting with natural vegetation helps children connect with the wonders of nature, learn about natural systems and seasons, and develop observation skills. When children are able to help plant, care for and harvest a garden, they learn a sense of responsibility and often develop increased appreciation for eating fresh produce if vegetables or fruits are grown (Pothukuchi, 2004). Gardening is especially helpful for all learning styles, since it provides stimulation for all senses.*

- *Provide a greenhouse, why?*

*Greenhouses, whether large or small, give children a chance to closely observe, care for and enjoy flowers, vegetables or worm bins. Especially in colder climates, greenhouses provide children with a longer time period in which to interact with living plants.*

A child is shown from the chest up, wearing a crown made of yellow flowers and a red and white striped headband. The child is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a garden with yellow flowers and green foliage. The text is overlaid on the image.

*...each outdoor space should have a personality of its own. It should reflect the community of learners who will use it, and the interests and creative gifts of the larger community in which it is located. Using regional materials helps children develop a sense of place, and encourages increased observation skills.*

*A final word...children who have learned to safely master realistic physical challenges are less likely to suffer serious injury than children who have been overprotected from any physical harm (adapted from The National Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation Material – Creating Nurturing Outdoor Spaces for Children).*