

Early Childhood Education: Current realities and future possibilities, ed Cathy Nutbrown

Chapter 5: A grassroots approach to developing early years outdoor experiences: building a community of practice

Elizabeth Henderson, Emma Gordon, Helen McKinnon, Jacqueline Bremner and Maggie MacDonald

Case Study: Alfie

Alfie is 15 months old. During this observation Alfie was outside in the nursery garden area. He had not yet started interacting with anything available to him in the garden but was walking around the area.

Alfie is walking around the grassed area of the garden when he loses his balance and falls over. He catches himself on the ground on his two hands and two knees. Alfie pauses for a moment once in this position, initially looking down at the ground. He then looks sideways, but no one is in his line of vision.

Alfie then turns back to face the ground and pauses momentarily again. Beginning to move Alfie pushes his hands down onto the ground and lifts his knees off the ground pressing his toes down onto the ground. He is now raised up and balanced on his two hands and two feet. In this position by moving his weight backwards over his bottom he is able to lower his heels to the ground, and lighten the weight over his hands. Then, by further moving his weight backwards and by remaining balanced, Alfie is able to lift his hands off the ground. He uses his balance and muscle strength to lift his upper body upright and successfully regains his balance on his two feet.

Once standing on his two feet Alfie looks around towards me, catches my eye and smiles.

Alfie shows determination in this observation. Although I wonder if this would have been the case if an adult intervened right at the start when he first fell to the ground and looked around? Sometimes by not intervening we see the true magic happen. Alfie was able to make a solid connection with the ground, remain balanced, and right himself back onto his two feet. This was not the first time that Alfie had achieved this but this was the first time it was observed taking place without adult support. His smile at the end demonstrated to me that he was satisfied with his achievement. We can therefore hint towards the social learning taking place here as well as Alfie's body movements; weight distribution to support balance, confidence and autonomy. All of which will go a long way to supporting his ongoing development.

So, although this may seem simply like a child standing back up after a fall, for Alfie there is so much learning taking place.

