

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

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Case study: Nathan

Nathan is 23 months old. During this observation Nathan was outside in the nursery garden exploring the grassed area around the apple tree and pear tree. I interacted with Nathan throughout the observation but only following his lead. I was taking photos during the observation using a digital camera.

Nathan walks over to the apple tree area and straight away picks up a fallen apple from the grass. He holds this in his hand while he continues to walk around the tree area. He looks to the ground at the other windfall apples. He then looks up to eye level towards a branch with leaves on it, he reaches out his hand, grasps one of the leaves and pulls his hand away, plucking the leaf from the tree. Nathan then turns and notices me there with the camera, he walks over to me holding out the leaf in his hand while still grasping the apple in his other hand. He says, "leaf" and lifts his arm and hand up, moving the leaf in my direction, as if for me to inspect. I respond, "yes" and take a photo using the camera.

This seems to excite him as he starts to move more rapidly. He runs away from me, then stops, turns and runs back towards me. This time presenting the apple that he holds in his other hand, saying, "apple". I proceed to take a photo of the apple he now holds up. Nathan swiftly lowers his apple bearing hand and lifts his other hand to present the leaf again. I oblige and take a photo of the leaf again.

Nathan then moves away from me walking around the base of the tree. He notices another apple on the grass. He moves over to where it lies, looks down at it and then inspects his hands and the leaf and apple he is holding. Nathan drops the leaf from one hand and picks up the apple, he now has an apple in each hand. Nathan proceeds to walk around holding an apple in each hand. As he walks closer towards me he stops and inspects each apple, lifting them in turn closer to his face to have a look. He then moves one of the apples near to his mouth, sticks out his tongue and licks the apple. Nathan then turns towards me, moves his hands up and away from his body, holding out both apples upright in his palms. I take a photo.

Nathan looks around again and quickly notices another apple on the ground. He moves over to it and stops. He looks intently at the apples he holds in each hand and makes an attempt to move one to join the other so he would be holding two apples with one hand. This is not successful. Nathan therefore drops one apple and picks up the newly found apple from the ground.

Nathan turns and notices the pear tree with a large pear hanging at his eye level. He walks over the branch and stops. This time Nathan is successful moving one apple to join the other in his other hand. He now clutches one apple in his hand while trapping the second between his arm and his chest, freeing up his second hand. Nathan uses this hand to reach out to the pear in the tree, he grasps his fingers around the pear and pulls. The pear comes away from the branch and is now held tightly in Nathan's grasp. He turns towards me and holds out the pear, smiling. I take a photo.

Nathan then turns slightly and lifts the pear to his mouth, he licks it. While licking it the pear falls from his hand. Nathan immediately squats down and picks the pear up again. This time he brings it back to his mouth but uses his teeth to take a bite. His teeth break the skin of the pear but he doesn't remove any of the flesh. He moves the pear away from his mouth and scrunches up his nose a little. Nathan moves around the area for a little while longer dropping the pear and picking up a leaf before moving away from the area entirely.

Nathan's intrigue and excitement throughout this observation was enticing. He was actively using everything he knew to explore his world further. Nathan delighted in my responses and my use of the camera to take photos of the items he was showing me. His grin was infectious.

Nathan demonstrated excellent use of his visual observational skills, coordination, muscle movement and balance while interacting with the affordances around him. He also showed new learning in his achievement of holding more than two items in his hands and arms. I wonder, was Nathan linking the fruit he found on the ground and on the tree to that which he receives cut up at snack time?

