



# Castleton University

## Early Childhood Educators Institute Summer 2021 Course Syllabus

NOTE: To this date, the Agency of Education has not completed its analysis of the endorsement standards for early childhood for this course. When the Agency of Education does complete analysis, this syllabus and the Institute website will be updated.

**Course Title:** Curriculum Development for Nature-Based Early Childhood Educators

**Number of Credits:** 3 graduate or undergraduate credits - expectation differences noted in the syllabus

**Level:** Graduate & Undergraduate

Students may elect to take this course at the undergraduate level. If so, some assignments and expectations for scholarly writing (paper page length, APA expectations) will be minimized to the level of complexity for what would be expected of an undergraduate student. Any adjustments to course expectations for this purpose should be determined collaboratively by the instructor and the student(s).

**Course Code:** EDU 5515 C15 (graduate) & EDU 4710 CFS16 (undergraduate)

**Dates:** July 20 – November 1, 2021.

This course is part of the 2021 Early Childhood Educators Institute and requires attendance all 4 days of the online institute July 20, 22, 27 & 29. The course continues in an online environment until November 1, 2021 at the latest.

**Times:** July 20, 22, 27, 29 from 9:00 am - 4:05 pm.

**Format:** Online asynchronously and synchronously using Zoom videoconferencing.

**Location:** Online

**Learning Management System or Technology Tools:** Zoom for synchronous meetings & Google Docs/ email for submitting assignments

**Instructor:** April Zajko, M.Ed. ~ [aprilzajko@gmail.com](mailto:aprilzajko@gmail.com) ~ 802-424-1046

**Course Cost to Student:** \$375 for this 3-credit course. The institute fee is \$200. Total: \$575

**Course Description:** Early childhood educators who support a nature-based approach in their classroom often discover that they need to embrace a unique design to curriculum development. This curriculum work often differs from conventional approaches included in college or previous internship experiences. In the context of examining indoor and outdoor environments, preschool and kindergarten teachers will discuss how to utilize nature to foster skill development in young children and how to meaningfully embed early learning standards in a nature-based program. We will discuss how we can incorporate authentic observations to assess and monitor our student's growth and to continually enrich our programs. Participants will feel empowered to incorporate developmentally appropriate teaching practices including: interactions, learning environment (indoors and outdoors), daily schedules, routines, and implement a dynamic nature-based approach in their classrooms. Participants will design a nature-based integrated curriculum unit that includes language and literacy, mathematical thinking, nature and sciences, social studies and creative expression for early education. Due to the small class size and course format, participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their current practices as they begin to consider and solidify new concepts presented.

**Audience:** Preschool & Kindergarten Teachers

**Course Goals:**

Upon successful completion of this course, participants will be able to integrate nature-based teaching practices that promote whole-child development with nature as the organizing concept of the curriculum. Participants will feel confident that they are implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum that honors the child while also meeting early learning standards.

**Course Objectives:**

Through participation in this class, the student will be able to:

1. Define how nature-based early childhood programs can promote whole-child development with nature as the organizing concept of the curriculum.
2. Discuss the developmental benefits of a nature-based approach for early childhood education and explore strategies to support diverse abilities in an inclusive setting.
3. Integrate developmentally appropriate teaching practices into their classrooms by considering adult/child interactions, offering nature rich learning environments both indoors and outdoors, developing uninterrupted blocks of time in the daily schedules for deep engaged learning, examine daily routines, and develop strategies that honor children's ownership of their learning.
4. Explore ways to incorporate authentic observations to assess and monitor our student's growth and to continually scaffold student learning & enrich our programs.
5. Practice creating meaningful learning experiences for children with an intentional cycle of objective observation, documentation, reflection, and response.

6. Utilize a nature-based approach for building early learning skills based on the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) with focus on Math and Science standards.
7. Reflect on one's professional role as a teacher, consider how to apply new concepts for nature-based teaching practices, and how to communicate evidence-based practices with families to build two-way communication about the role of nature in early childhood development.
8. Design a nature-based integrated curriculum unit that includes language and literacy, mathematical thinking, nature and sciences, social studies and creative expression for early education.

**Required Readings/Texts: (required texts not included in cost of course)**

***"Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practice Guidebook"*** by the North American Association for Environmental Education's Natural Start Alliance. ISBN: 0578545659

***Vermont Early Learning Standards*** - having a paper copy for this course is encourage and can be printed from this link:

<https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-early-education-early-learning-standards.pdf>

***Loose Parts Play: A toolkit.*** Casey, Theresa and Juliet Robertson. (2016) Inspiring Scotland, Edinburgh.

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

**Other Suggested Readings/Texts:**

Handouts, articles, and suggested websites will be shared digitally from the instructor one the course begins. These will be used as reading assignments and references for the projects.

Pre-course readings available July 1st to read prior to our first meeting date.

Post-course readings will serve as a way to integrate the content of our four days of synchronous learning.

**Assignments:**

**Self Assessments** - participants will complete **two** self analysis assignments - one prior to the course and another several weeks after the course. Self-assessments are meant to increase student metacognition, identify areas that they want to focus on, and help set goals related to the implementation of the course content.

**Reflective Written Assignments** - students will complete **four** reflective written assignments throughout the course as a way to synthesize the new content and find applications within their classrooms. These one page papers are meant to bring relevance and connections between their current teaching practices and the nature-based approaches we are examining in the course. Detailed prompts will be provided by the instructor - participants will submit via Google Docs. Cite at least one course reading using APA or MLA format.

### **Webbing Activity for Nature-based Integrated Curriculum Unit**

### **Observation & Documentation Tool**

#### **Projects:**

**Nature-based Integrated Curriculum Unit** - students will develop a nature-based curriculum unit aligned with the VELs that includes language and literacy, expression for early education.

**Nature-based Practices Research Paper (graduate students only)**- students will write a research 3-4 page research paper exploring their teaching practices and how they intend to offer nature-based teaching in their classroom or program. Cite a minimum of 5 course readings, using APA or MLA format.

#### **Evaluation:**

##### **Evaluation - Undergraduate:**

Participation	4 x 5 = 20 points
Self Assessments -	2 x 5 = 10 points
Reflective Written Assignments -	4 x 5 = 20 points
Webbing Activity	10 points
Observation & Documentation Tool	10 points
Nature-based Integrated Curriculum Unit	30 points

##### **Evaluation - Graduate:**

Participation	4 x 5 = 20 points
Self Assessments -	2 x 5 = 10 points
Reflective Written Assignments -	4 x 5 = 20 points
Webbing Activity	5 points
Observation & Documentation Tool	5 points
Nature-based Integrated Curriculum Unit	20 points
Nature-based Practices Research Paper	20 points

#### **Grading:**

Participation grade is based on attendance for four days of synchronous course instruction, active in-class participation, and engaged small group work. All participants are expected to attend all four synchronous summer sessions in July and complete the required reading assignments. Those taking the course for credit will be expected to design their own nature-based integrated curriculum unit and write a research paper.

**Final Projects/Papers Due: October 1, 2021**

**Grading Policy:**

Grades are indicated by letters with a designated “quality point” value assigned to each as follows:

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3

Additional grading information can be found in the Castleton University Graduate Catalog, under Academic Policies, accessible online at:  
<http://catalog.castleton.edu/index.php>

**Academic Honesty Policy:**

Castleton University is a learning institution committed to the highest standards of scholarly conduct. The students, faculty, and administration make up a scholarly community whose integrity and success necessarily stem from a mutually agreed upon code of academic standards and principles that promote trust and honesty and prohibit the attempt to gain unfair academic advantage. Membership in the Castleton community means sharing responsibility for upholding and safeguarding these academic standards and principles.

Any violation of academic honesty will be considered cheating and will be dealt with accordingly by the appropriate authorities.

For more information click the link below to access the Castleton University Graduate Catalog Academic Policy section:

[http://catalog.castleton.edu/content.php?catoid=16&navoid=1204#Academic\\_Honesty](http://catalog.castleton.edu/content.php?catoid=16&navoid=1204#Academic_Honesty)

**Use and Ownership of Copyrighted Materials:**

For information and guidance, faculty and students are referred to the Vermont State College Manual of Policy and Procedures as it relates to the use and ownership of copyrighted materials. Guidelines are set out in Policy 416, accessible online at the following address: <http://www.castleton.edu/library/information-literacy-graduation-standard/information-literacy-tutorial/information-ethics-citing-sources-and-fair-use/>

**Accommodations:**

Castleton is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities so that no such student shall, by reason of a disability, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of Castleton University. For more information, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services, at (802) 468-1428.

**Course Drop Policy:**

Castleton University offers courses to educators with the expectation that participants will complete the course. However, the University realizes circumstances arise in one's personal life that may cause disruptions. **The policy for dropping a course is that a participant will notify the instructor in writing of the intent to withdraw from the course. The withdrawal notice should be made within the first week of the course and should include the reason for withdrawing.** After week one, changes in class status will be considered for health, bereavement, and personal or emergency situations only. Those who withdraw without adhering to this policy may receive a failing grade on their transcript and/or be liable for associated course costs. For more Academic Policy information, check the link below to access the Castleton University Graduate Catalog: <http://catalog.castleton.edu/content.php?catoid=23&navoid=2159>

**Transcript Request:**

[www.castleton.edu/transcripts](http://www.castleton.edu/transcripts)