



Castleton University

Early Childhood Educators Institute

Summer 2022 Course Syllabus

Course Title: Forest and Nature-Based Approaches for Early Childhood

Number of Credits: 3 graduate or undergraduate credits (45 hours of new learning)

Level: Graduate & Undergraduate

This course will be offered at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Any registrant who has not yet earned a Bachelor's Degree will be automatically registered for the undergraduate section. Some assignments and expectations for scholarly writing (paper page length, APA expectations) will be matched 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). Any registrant who has earned a Bachelor's Degree will be automatically registered for the graduate level.

Course Code: EDU 5515 C36 (graduate) & EDU 4710 C04 (undergraduate)

Course Dates: July 26 – October 1, 2022. Note: This course is part of the 2022 Early Childhood Educators Institute and requires attendance all 3 days of the online institute July 26, 28 & August 2, 2022. The course continues in an online environment until October 1, at the latest. Final grades will be accessible on November 4, 2022.

Institute Times: July 26, 28 & August 2 from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm.

Course Zoom Dates and Times: One morning and one afternoon synchronous Zoom session on July 26, 28 and August 2 plus two optional synchronous Zoom sessions for project support TBA.

Format: Online asynchronously and synchronously using Zoom videoconferencing.

Location: Online

Learning Management System you will be using (if any): Zoom, Google Drive, and email

Instructor Name & degree: Michelle Black, B.A., Early Childhood Education; M.E., Elementary Education; M.A.E., Special Education

Instructor Email Address: mblack906@gmail.com

Instructor Phone #: 802-377-2488 (texting is fine).

Michelle Black has over 30 years of experience teaching children from birth through elementary school, including early intervention and special education. She has spent a lifetime promoting outdoor learning in all weather. Michelle was the licensed preschool teacher at Wren's Nest Forest Preschool in New Haven, VT, and is now an early childhood special educator for the Addison Central School District in Middlebury, VT.

Instructor Office Hours: Tuesdays and/or Thursdays 4-6pm, by appointment, via phone or Zoom.

Course Cost to Student: \$375 for this 3-credit course. The institute fee is \$200. Payments are due and payable to Castleton University.

Course Description: Forest and nature-based early childhood programs are holistic, interdisciplinary, and sensory-based approaches to learning. These philosophies aim to foster students' independence and initial understandings of their interconnectedness with the natural world. Forest and nature-based approaches create a space for children to cultivate their natural sense of awe and wonder. Children come away with a deep level of comfort with and love for the land they play and learn on.

This class includes natural history content for early childhood, integrating nature-based activities into existing curricula, sense of place and sustainable practices, family and community connections, healthy risk-taking and risk management, and the benefits of nature-based play for social-emotional health and learning outcomes. The course also includes considerations for special education supports and accommodations. Strategies for connecting outdoor activities to mandated early learning standards and assessments will be discussed.

Audience: Birth through age 8.

Work Required prior to the institute, if any: Recommended: Begin reading the two required texts: *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning*, and *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

Course Goals:

- Learners will deepen their own awareness and appreciation of the natural world and increase their comfort within it.
- Learners will demonstrate increased understanding of practices and strategies for the implementation of forest- and nature-based approaches.
- Learners will develop their understanding of the variety of approaches and how to incorporate this knowledge into standards-based learning in their individual early childhood settings.

Course Objectives:

1. Increase understanding of forest and nature-based early childhood education practices, including their relationships to social-emotional learning, family and community, sustainable practices, and standards-based learning.

2. Describe the characteristics of forest and nature-based early education programs.
3. Understand and apply current research and evidence-based forest and nature-based early childhood practices to early childhood program policy and practice, to develop VELs-aligned curriculum activities with respect and consideration for the diversity of culture, class, and abilities of young children and their families.

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

Kimmerer, Robin, W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Sobel, D., Stires, A., Bailie, P. E., Fritz, R. W., Finch, K., & Kenny, E. K. (2016). *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning*. Redleaf Press.

Other Suggested Readings/Texts:

Natural Start Alliance. (2019) *Nature-based Preschool Professional Practice Guidebook*. (2019) North American Association for Environmental Education.

Washington State Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards

https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/Outdoor_Preschool_Pilot_Standards.pdf

Additional videos, papers, and texts will be provided online by instructor.

Assignments:

Homework assignment for undergraduate and graduate credit (due July 31st). Risk assessment project: 1-2 page grid and narrative descriptions of risks and hazards at your site.

Projects:

Final project for undergraduate credit (due Aug 26th). Create a "vision" (350-500 words) of your school in the near future, incorporating philosophies, physical environment, ideas and/or modifications, and curriculum standards, as discussed or researched. Project will demonstrate understanding of differentiated instruction, including specific goals for learning, environment plan, and appropriate accommodations. (For graduate credit: Students will also create a second vision further into the future [350-500 words]).

Evaluation:

Each week will have three participation components: personal and individual nature connection activities, virtual meeting sessions, and group discussions.

Participation in individual and personal nature connection activities, online class meetings, and ongoing discussion forums are central to student learning in this course and weigh heavily in the final grade.

Online participation: Participate in small and large group discussions; view and engage with virtual materials; respond to and engage with other learners: 35%.

Reading responses, journal entries, and other short, independent assignments: 35%.

Final project for undergraduate and graduate credit (due Aug 26th): 30%.

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

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