

# **Back to Nature: Working Towards a Sustainable Future in Early Childhood Education**

Jennie Deutscher (University of Manitoba)

## *Abstract*

Sustainability in Early Childhood Education is an emerging area of interest in Manitoba and around the world. Teaching children about nature and the outdoors early, will allow them to have positive, hands-on experiences that will encourage a life-long love of nature. Many children have very little experience with the nature and the outdoors. Children are often not growing up with the same connection and experiences with nature as past generations. Issues such as nature deficit disorder, obesity and addiction to electronics are increasingly affecting children.

Positive programs around Canada and the world have been introducing children to the concept of environmental sustainability and giving them an appreciation for the natural world and their connection to it. Current sustainable practices in Early Childhood Education include, but are not limited to, growing gardens, nature play, raising chickens, recycling, mud days, farm visits and two-week outside programs. These concepts being taught to children to give them an understanding of the natural world around them and a respect for the role they play in that world.

Manitoba has an opportunity through Early Childhood Education to introduce children to nature and create knowledgeable ambassadors for the future of the environment. Teaching sustainability beginning in the early childhood year allows for the largest window of learning for children. By using examples from successful programs that are already established and by creating new and exciting ways to teach sustainability to children, Manitoba can move towards being a leader in educational sustainability practices.

This research is being completed as part of my undergraduate thesis. The purpose is to research environmentally sustainable practices in Early Childhood Education and develop recommendations for the future. This project will take place in three phases with one objective associated with each phase. The objective of phase 1 is to research existing Early Childhood Education sustainability practices in Canada and around the world to gather best practices. Phase 2 will be presenting this research document and information to interested parties for discussion purposes. The final phase will be the writing a document with recommendations on the way ahead for sustainable practices in Early Childhood Education.

At the time of the conference phase 1 of this project will be complete. Information on existing Early Childhood Education sustainability practices in Canada and around the world will be compiled and ready to be shared with interested groups.