Prompts for reflection: Sleeping outside

Anne Stonehouse: Hello I'm Anne Stonehouse. Resting and sleeping are part of children's daily experience. Seeing them as important parts of the curriculum means taking advantage of the learning opportunities they offer. This vignette took place outside; however, many of the points apply wherever children sleep and rest. The filming took place over approximately 45 minutes. What you will view is only brief snapshots. Consider how Mel's knowledge of the children contributes to the quality of the experience. How does she demonstrate respect? What tells you that she has clear intentions or purposes?

Mel: Can you help me, Van? It's a bit funny isn't it? I don't think it was sort of meant for this, but anyway.

Mel: You hold onto it Eva, and let's turn around. Come around with me. It's kind of not doing its thing here. Come through, come through. There you go.

Mel: Now just mind, because Dot's going slower.

Mel: Put this over in the corner, in there. Drink bottle up on the trolley. Van, do you want your bed down?

Van: Down.

Mel: Do you want your bed down? Because if you hop on that they're all going to fall and you'll go with them. Might not be such a great idea.

Mel: The beds and the mat, sorry.

Mel: That's all right. There we are.

Mel: Are you ready for sleep already?

Child: Coming. My bed!

Mel: This is Dot's bed. That's Eva's bed.

Child: Ooh.

Mel: You going to swap today? Are you ready for bed Eva? Oh how lovely. May I sit with you? Van, hop down. Hop down, Van. Van, hop down please. Do you want me to do that? Do you want me to do that? Yeah?

Mel: After researching outdoor sleep, and applying it last year, this year I knew the children enjoyed doing it. There was also a component of having had lunch, and after lunch I always felt like they can't go straight to sleep, it is that time where the routine goes from eating and then there's a tendency to get straight into sleep.

But I've always felt that children need to digest their food, they need to just have a bit of time after eating, food provides energy I feel sometimes, so I've always wanted a good half hour after eating, so they can have a play. And to enable that sort of outdoor play, and then the benefits of being outside to sleep when they're tired, and have that available to them when they are ready, is so relaxing that I don't even think they realise they're gliding off to a sleep time.

Because there's such a stigma sometimes to sleep time with children, it's like, 'Uh, don't want to go to sleep'. But with this, there's just no stigma attached to it. There's a bed out there for when they feel like that environment where they're running around has become a bedroom, they get that idea of it. They've helped me prepare the beds on the trolley and we've taken it in, even just manoeuvring that trolley, as just the only educator to get the beds out, has ended up quite a routine that they love and look forward to: driving it in with me, and getting the beds down.

It is a lot of work and I do get quite tired, but then to see the rewards from that, to see them be able to have this freedom of play outside, half of them even help me set it up. They've got ownership of their beds, and where their beds are. I just find it the most relaxing way to go into another stage of their day, which is sleep.

There's so many benefits of being outside: it's the fresh air, it's just looking around, observing. We don't see the outdoors as a relaxing place. We see the outdoors as very busy – bikes, balls, sand pits, dirt patch – it's very busy! There might be little bit of a cushion for some books, but we're still looking at books, we're still paying attention. I haven't seen a lot of children just lying back and taking the environment in, looking up above and thinking, 'Oh my, look at this tree! Look at the wind! Look at the blue sky!'

We had an enormous moth that just sort of landed on the tree. Where else would get to just lie and look at it? Because it's not going to go anywhere, it's not frightened by children's actions, because they're lying still. There's so many components: noises they hear, things they see, and the health benefits. I think I might have said, that I found that they were sleeping longer.

I found they were sleeping sooner, and I think being outside helps that health-related issue, where they're not confined. Well, I didn't actually say to Eva or Dot today if they wanted to come to bed. I actually didn't say to them at all. I popped their bed out, they saw where their beds were, and they popped on there themselves. But they do have a rule that I set in place so that we can have some definite lines. If you pop onto your bed, it's sleep time. If that's what you choose, remember you've chosen, so it's sleep time. Because otherwise you'll have them hopping off and coming on, and hopping off and coming on, and they know it. I just don't think Eva and Dot would have hopped on that bed had it been that they wanted to sleep. And after Dot having the day she had, she seemed very tired. She hopped on and she was asleep by 12 o'clock. I would not, had I controlled the space, had I controlled when they go to bed, I wouldn't have put her to bed at 12 o'clock.

Child: This truck brings hot dogs, ice creams.

Mel: It's time for a rest. [soft hushing]

[Mel hums a lullaby]