Outdoor Learning Environment: Vignette

While playing outside, Benjamin runs to the fence to watch large trucks drive by. Hearing the different sounds the trucks make, his caregiver, Mr. Barton, says, “Those are some loud noises! What are all of those trucks doing today, Benjamin?” Benjamin says, “Dirt...big dirt!” He then stares at the garden and runs over to join Sarah and Tony. Mr. Barton watches Benjamin and says, “The trucks are hauling dirt. You remembered we have dirt in our garden.”

Sarah and Tony have been pouring and dumping water out of measuring cups they fill from a large red plastic pail. Colorful flowers of many different sizes have been planted within an enclosed garden near the gate opposite the parking lot. Sarah and Tony fill their cups and dump the water over the flowers. Sarah looks up at Ms. Janiessa and says, “Uh oh! Water gone!” Ms. Janiessa walks over, bends down and says, “You’re pouring water over the pink flower. When you look to find it, the water has disappeared...it’s gone! The water has seeped into the dirt and you cannot see it anymore.”

Ms. Marley is sitting on the grass with infants DeShaun and Evelyn. DeShaun is sitting on Ms. Marley’s lap, picking up handfuls of grass and leaves and feeling them in his hands. Evelyn, who has just started to belly crawl, is using her feet and hands to push herself slowly forward on the grass. She stops to rest and then pushes her body forward again.

In the meantime, Marcus hops off his tricycle and grabs a blue plastic ball. Marcus throws the ball and runs after it. As he tries to grab the ball again, he drops it. Marcus bends down, uses both of his hands to grab the ball and holds it close to his chest while running toward Mr. Barton. Mr. Barton calls out, “It’s almost time to go inside for lunch. Three more minutes.”

Answer the following questions:

1. Do you feel this is a welcoming, inviting and comfortable outdoor learning environment for infants, toddlers and caregivers? Why or why not?

2. Do you feel the environment offers developmentally appropriate materials and opportunities for infants and toddlers to freely explore and discover new things? Why?

3. Do you feel this space encourages infants and toddlers to connect with nature? Why?

4. Do you believe this outdoor learning area supports infant and toddler movement and motor skill development? Why or why not?