

In Bloom in Asheville:

Promising Practices in Nature-based Early Childhood Education



Saturday, April 7, 2018 ♦ Rainbow Community School

574 Hayward Road, Asheville, North Carolina

Antioch University New England hosts three **In Bloom** east coast conferences this spring. We're heading down to the southern Appalachians to North Carolina first for **In Bloom in Asheville**, on Saturday, April 7, where we'll expand the curriculum focus from pre K up to 3rd grade. Then we're back north to Kittery, Maine on April 21 and will return to our early childhood focus. On April 28, David Sobel will head out to Jackson, Wyoming to collaborate with the Teton Science Schools for their first **In Mud** conference. To close out the spring, we will be back home in the heart of New England, in Brattleboro, Vermont, (rather than Keene, New Hampshire) on Sat. May 19, to celebrate a new partnership with the Brattleboro public schools.

Witnessing the enthusiasm of early childhood professionals in their valiant efforts to get children outside has been inspirational and heartwarming. As before, at each conference we will feature the good work of practitioners from each region as well as spotlight the work of Antioch New England faculty members who teach in the Nature-based Early Childhood Certificate program. We invite you to come to one of the **2018 In Bloom Conferences: Promising Practices in Nature-based Early Childhood Education!**

Each conference has two keynotes and two workshop sessions, bringing together a diverse array of early childhood professionals, higher education faculty, environmental educators, mindfulness practitioners and naturalists.

During the morning keynote we will show the new movie, *The Best Day Ever: Forest Days in Vermont Kindergartens*. The movie was filmed in public school kindergartens in Hartland and Norwich, Vermont and illustrates the benefits of one day each week spent outside, year round, with Kindergarten children. This grassroots movement has spread to more than two dozen public schools in Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut.

Children, It's Spring

*And this is the lady
Whom everyone loves,
Ms. Violet
in her purple gown*

*Or, on special occasions,
A dress the color
Of sunlight. She sits
In the mossy weeds and waits*

*To be noticed.
She loves dampness.
She loves attention.
She loves especially*

*To be picked by careful fingers,
Young fingers, entranced
By what has happened
To the world.*

*We, the older ones,
Call in Spring,
And we have been through it
Many times.*

*But there is still nothing
Like the children bringing home
Such happiness
In their small hands.*

by Mary Oliver

Morning Keynote—9:15am

David Sobel

Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens

The original kindergarten — the children’s garden —conceived by German educator Friedrich Froebel in the 19th century, was a place where children learned through play, often in nature. That idea is fast eroding. Children aren’t playing in the garden anymore; instead they’re filling in bubbles on worksheets. The new movement of nature-based early childhood education can reverse that trend. There are thousands of forest kindergartens throughout Europe and new programs opening every month in North America. Let’s examine the promise of this healthy approach towards living and learning outdoors with young children.



*David Sobel is Senior Faculty in the Education Department at Antioch University New England in Keene, New Hampshire. He consults and speaks widely on child development and place-based education. He has authored eight books and more than 70 articles focused on children and nature for educators, parents, environmentalists and school administrators in the last 30 years. His most recent book is **Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning** published by Redleaf Press.*

Schedule for the Day

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|-----------------------|--|
| 8:15 am – 9:00 am | Registration Opens Morning Refreshments |
| 9:00 am – 9:10 am | Opening Circle |
| 9:15 am – 10:15 am | Morning Keynote |
| 10:30 am – 12:00 noon | Morning Workshops |
| 12:00 noon – 1:00 pm | Lunch |
| 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm | Afternoon Keynote |
| 2:15 pm – 3:45 pm | Afternoon Workshops |
| 3:50 pm – 4:00 pm | Closing Circle |

Morning Workshops—10:30am

Beyond Recess: The Importance of Play in Natural Landscapes

Marin Leroy, Environmental Education Program Coordinator, and Ona Armstrong, Kindergarten Teacher, Evergreen Community Charter School, Asheville, NC.

This workshop explores the importance of play in natural landscapes, beyond the “playground” and in addition to “recess”. We will share our use of Evergreen’s natural play-scapes and explore the ways students engage with them on a regular basis. We’ll identify the goals of these spaces and how they differ from those of a typical playground. Design concepts, materials, and construction ideas will be discussed, as well as the cultural norms we cultivate to keep kids physically safe as they explore and engage materials such as long bamboo poles and heavy rocks.

Wee Naturalists: The Growth and Development of an Early Childhood Program

Michelle Pearce, School and Public Programs Coordinator, North Carolina Arboretum, Asheville, NC.

Wee Naturalists is a pre-school public program at The NC Arboretum for children ages 2-5 and a parent. In its twelve-year run, the program has seen its share of growing pains: How much do we charge? How many kids can come? How many days a week/month do we offer the program? Is the curriculum really age appropriate? If you have asked these same questions about your program or you are thinking about starting a similar program, come grow and learn more about how we have grown, and what we have learned!



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Morning Workshops (cont.)

Mindfulness as Playfulness: Experience the Transformative Power of Play

Lucy MacGregor, Mindfulness Consultant and Classroom Teacher, Rainbow Community School, Asheville, NC.

We invite participants to experience how teaching and practicing mindfulness through games embedded within a structured framework evokes curiosity, engagement, and fosters repetition thus facilitating learning. Attendees are encouraged to experience first-hand the transformative power of nature play, loosening up and connecting with their creative, playful selves in a safe, non-threatening way.

The Science in Nature-based Education

Rachel Larimore, Nature Preschool Consultant and Founder of Chippewa Nature Preschool, Midland, MI.

STEM learning has been receiving a great deal of attention in recent years, and this session will focus specifically on science. We'll discuss science content, practices, and crosscutting concepts, in addition to children's approaches to learning, that can be integrated into nature-based science teaching and learning. Using a variety of loose parts, we'll bring these concepts to life by modeling our visions of science in nature-based early childhood education.

Sense and Savor: Sensory Experiences in Nature with Young Children

Dr. Susan Dreyer Leon, Director, Mindfulness for Educators program and Chair, Department of Education at Antioch University New England, Keene, NH.

The natural world is our natural place to connect to the senses. Join Susan in an exploration of mindfulness of body through sensory experiences in nature. We will enjoy a "sense and savor" walk, and several fun activities from the **Awareness Through the Body** curriculum. We will talk about the value of mindfulness practices just for educators and possible applications for working with students as well.



Afternoon Keynote—1:00pm

Rachel Larimore

From Preschool to Early Elementary: Learning from One Community's Journey with Nature-Based Education

High-quality nature-based early childhood education (NbECE) doesn't happen overnight, but through community collaboration NbECE can be integrated into all levels of early childhood education. Using preschool and early elementary programs in Midland, MI as an example, Rachel will provide the group with ways, no matter your starting point, to better integrate nature into your program structure and broader community.

For over twelve years **Rachel Larimore** served as the Director of Education at the Chippewa Nature Center in Midland Michigan. In 2007 she founded the Chippewa Nature Preschool, a licensed nature preschool—one of only twenty of its kind in the country at the time. During her tenure she also co-chaired the construction of a LEED certified preschool facility at the Nature Center. She is now a doctoral student at Michigan State University and conducts research in nature-based early childhood education for Antioch University New England.



Lunch—12:00 noon

A light breakfast and lunch are included in the conference fee.

Please indicate dietary preferences when registering.



Photo courtesy of North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, VT. Used with permission.

Photo courtesy of Eyes of the World Discovery Center, Kittery, ME. Used with permission.

Afternoon Workshops—2:15 pm



Awakening a Deep Nature Connection: Exploring the Magic and Mystery of the Natural World

West Willmore, Curriculum Director, Resident Naturalist and Director of Operations for Rainbow Institute, Asheville, NC.

At Rainbow Community School, we believe that environmental

stewards are birthed from a learning atmosphere that sees nature as sacred and divine. In this workshop we will investigate rituals and activities that help infuse a love, appreciation, and reverence of the natural world into our lesson plans and classroom culture even for our “littlest” learner, setting a primary stage of development for life-long environmental stewards.

Honoring Trees as Community Members

Robin Zoubek, Education Director and Atelierista, and Elizabeth Turner, Environmental Educator, Turning Sun School, Atlanta GA.

In what ways do trees affect our communities? How aware are we of their impact? In turn, how do we value them? Do we have positive or negative influence on their lives? Children’s direct interaction with trees develops empathy and enduring advocacy while building scientific knowledge. We will take a walk to investigate the trees around us. We will measure and map the trees, gaining understanding of their physical presence and their relationships to each other. We will ponder their stories and personify them, giving them voices and leaving traces of our relationships to them.

Can You Come Out to Play?

Mary Jo Deck, Shape Specialist, Buncombe Partnership for Children, Asheville, NC.

Let’s take the opportunity to play outside—building forts! This workshop will offer the time, space and materials to explore loose parts free play and then reflect on the play process. We will move outside to investigate place settings, collect stuff and play together. As the design and construction phase is completed, we will gather around to talk about our observations and shared experiences. We’ll link our experiences to the role of early childhood educators as “playworkers”—facilitators of rich, open-ended play for children.

Biophilia and Early STEM Education

Mel Wilson, Experiential STEM Educator, The Learning Community, Asheville, NC.

Biophilia, or man’s inherent love of nature, (Wilson, 1984) is often most evident in young children. Step outside at dusk with a child or stroll a sidewalk alongside them and they will be the first to tell you that the moon looks like a banana or that there is a row of ants marching beside you. As the focus on STEM education rises in America, we must remember that our scientific roots are deeply embedded in nature study. Therefore, biophilia should be preeminent when teaching young children. In this workshop participants will experience hands-on constructivist lessons that aid in building scientific inquiry/thinking and that use nature as an impetus. Participants will leave with philosophical underpinnings regarding biophilia as well as practical applications of various nature-based inquiry activities. Workshop takes place 100% outdoors.

Using the Lens of Observation in Forest Kindergarten

Dr. Jean Lomino, Founder and Director, Wauhatchie School, Chattanooga, TN, and Dr. Jiyoun Shin, Visiting Scholar, Director of Korean Forest Kindergarten Association.

With the rapid growth of the Forest Kindergarten/Forest School movement in the United States, the need for supporting research from the field becomes more urgent. Character development in Forest Kindergarten is the subject of research by Dr. Jiyoun Shin, Associate Professor of Early Childhood at Sahn Yook University, in Seoul, Korea and Dr. Jean Lomino. They will share what they have learned during their study this year, and through hands-on activities they will help workshop participants discover how to use observation and journaling to gather their own data.

Dr. Shin will present the key features of Korean Forest Kindergarten and Korean traditional nature games. We will find our commonalities and cultural differences, but most of all we will learn from each other how to improve teaching practice in Forest Kindergarten.

Registration Fees:

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| Working Professional | \$125.00 |
| Group Rate: 3 or more from same organization | \$100.00 |
| Antioch University Alumni, AUNE and Full-time NC university students | \$75.00 |

Register Here: www.antioch.edu/new-england/inbloom

Questions? Contact Peg Smeltz at Antioch University New England, 603-283-2301, m-smeltz@antioch.edu, or West Willmore at the Rainbow Institute, 931-808-3722, west.willmore@rainbowlearning.org