



In Bloom in Western Mass

Saturday, May 14, 2022

at the

Hitchcock Center for the Environment
Amherst, Massachusetts

Iris Ponte, director of the Henry Frost Children's Program in Belmont, Massachusetts, said this about her learning during the 2020-2021 school year.

"As a preschool educator, I used to think 30 degrees was cold. Not anymore... We have learned to layer, eat warm foods in Thermoses, and keep moving. I was not trained to be an outdoor educator, but I have learned to embrace it. In fact, I do not think I will ever be able to work with children again without prioritizing the outdoors."

The children have adapted and adjusted in ways we could never have imagined. They cheer when we have ice rain, and they cannot wait to see how the snow transforms our play spaces.... Our curriculum has taken on a whole new dimension, as we push away the boundaries of our school walls and play yard fence, and explore beyond. We have learned that weather is to be embraced, the seasons to be understood, and for the first time in my life, I have been teaching young children completely outdoors for five hours a day."

Hitchcock Center for the Environment

Welcome back to what we hope will be the new normal of convening early childhood and early elementary teachers to learn about and engage in nature-based education. We're planning conferences that can accommodate 100-125 folks and we're hoping to be mask-less. Time will tell. We're continuing to expand our focus, so we now are planning workshops to address teachers of pre-K through 4th grade students in our two New England events. We're also planning on workshops that continue to address what we've learned about outdoor learning during the pandemic.

Antioch University New England will again host three **In Bloom** conferences this spring in the eastern United States.

We'll be offering our first conference in the mid-Atlantic states at **In Bloom in Delaware** on the campus of the University of Delaware and in conjunction with the University of Delaware Lab School and the Human Development and Family Sciences Department. The Delaware conference will be on Saturday, April 2, 2022 and will focus on early childhood education for toddlers through children age six. Come south for an early spring experience.

Next is **In Bloom in Western Massachusetts** on Saturday, May 14, 2022 hosted at the beautiful Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst, Massachusetts. We'll focus on pre-K through grade 4 students and teachers here.

Our last event will be **In Bloom in Maine** in mid-coast Maine on Saturday, June 11, 2022 at the Blueberry Cove 4-H Camp and Learning Center in Tenant's Harbor—a beautiful new location for us. Right on the water, so bring your bathing suit.

For you mid-westerners, let us draw your attention to a new conference: **The Midwest Early Childhood Educator Symposium: Honoring the Earth and Each Other Through Fostering Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion** on June 4, 2022. Antioch University

will serve as co-sponsor to this event of the Northern Illinois Nature Preschool Association (NINPA) and the Morton Arboretum outside of Chicago.

In the early stages of the pandemic, it became clear that transmission of the virus in closed, indoor spaces was much more likely than outside in the open air. Indoor ventilation systems facilitated exposure to the virus, outdoor spaciousness facilitated dispersal of the virus, and allowed children to socially distance. For the last two school years, many early childhood centers and elementary schools across the northeast have realized that one solution to keeping schools open year-round was to move classrooms outside as much as possible. This preserved equal access for all children, rather than just the children with technology and a good internet connection. Educating outside has been one part of the solution to the diversity, equity and inclusivity challenges of the pandemic.

We've got exciting new keynote speakers this year from around the country. Some new speakers will be Rose Brusaferro from Baltimore discussing the differences between nature-based early childhood programs in east and west Baltimore, Ayana Verdi, Director of the Verdi Ecoschool in Melbourne, Florida and Tara Williams, Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children. And we'll spotlight the work of Antioch New England faculty members who teach in the Nature-based Early Childhood Certificate program.

We look forward to seeing you at one of this year's spring In Blooms. Bring mud boots, raingear, your indomitable spirits and perhaps some backyard flowers.

This event is sponsored by:



Structure for the Day

8:00am-9:00am	Registration Opens Workshop signups Morning refreshments
9:00am-9:15am	Opening Circle
9:15am-10:15am	Morning Keynote
10:30-Noon	Morning Workshops
Noon-1:00pm	Lunch & Inside-Outside network for educators
1:00pm-2:00pm	Afternoon Keynote
2:15pm-3:45pm	Afternoon Workshops
3:50pm-4:00pm	Closing Circle

Morning Workshops

Poetry Teatime under the Trees

Lise McGuinness, Teacher/Owner, *Free to be a Child*, Florence, MA

Join us for tea, treats, and poetry! At *Free to be a Child*, a mixed-age, home-based program for preschoolers and homeschooleders, weekly poetry teatime has been a beloved tradition for years. When we moved our program outdoors, naturally, teatime moved with us. In this workshop, you'll experience the magic of poetry teatime for yourself and discover how it complements an outdoor program. I'll share some of our favorite poetry books, our children's individual poetry collections, ideas for seasonal decorations from nature, and foraging recipes to create a connection to place. And, of course, we'll enjoy teatime ourselves.

Assessing Preschool/Pre-K Social Emotional Skills in the Woods

Jane Piselli, Early Childhood Educator and Doctoral Candidate at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

We will look at and experience assessment of social-emotional skills (SEL) in outdoor settings. Assessment of SEL can seem tricky or even irrelevant to understanding academic, developmental milestones with the children you teach. Often teachers believe that an evaluation can only be completed indoors with the proper materials. By shifting our perspective concerning assessments from the preparer of interaction to the observer, we notice that our children meet and exceed our expectations. When an evaluation is conducted during outdoor free play, without external prompting regarding the need to achieve, there is often a more accurate and authentic representation of the child's true capabilities. This workshop is most appropriate for teachers of children 18 months to 5 years old.

The Benefits of Risk: From Trees and Ticks to Knives and Poison Ivy

Anne Stires, Educational Consultant, Affiliate Faculty at Antioch University & Founder, Juniper Hill School for Place-Based Education, Alna, ME

From trees and ticks to knives and poison ivy to extreme cold and prolonged sun exposure, to the many other risk-based activities which push children (and teachers) to their edge, we'll go on a journey to understand the importance of risk and how to manage risk in your current or future classrooms or programs. We'll explore the roles of students and teachers in implementing risk-based activities, as well as their experiences of risk and the benefits we have observed. Topics that will be considered are hazard identification, planning for risk, what kinds of risky play to allow and foster (tree climbing, fire building, tool use) versus which to discourage and why. We will take some risks and complete benefit-risk assessments for the activities we do.

Morning Keynote

Cultivating Connection: Using the Community-as-Campus to Build Immersive Learning Experiences for Young Children

Ayana Verdi, Founder, Director, Verdi Ecoschool, Melbourne, FL

The Verdi EcoSchool is the first Urban Farm School in the southeastern United States and the only school of its kind in the state of Florida. Serving children from 3 - 15 years of age, EcoSchool students learn to view themselves as the single most powerful resource within their community. As part of the educational program, the classroom extends to unique settings: exploring the waters of the local Indian River Lagoon, learning about restorative agriculture on a community garden and creating replicas of ancient First Nations tools in ceramics classes at the Foosaner Art Museum and Education Center. Ayana, founder and director of the school, will lead you on an exciting exploration of a day in the life of a student at this place and project-based community school.

In 2016, **Ayana Verdi** established Verdi EcoSchool to provide hands-on educational experiences for children in the historic Eau Gallie Arts District in Melbourne, Fla. It is the first K-8 urban farm school in the southeastern United States. Ayana was awarded the prestigious Drexel Fund Fellowship in 2019 and has extended the successful K-8 program by founding a new high school model which incorporates hands-on, immersive learning through practical, real-world internships. Inspired by the nature-based school her son attended while she lived and studied in New Zealand, Ayana is committed to cultivating community-based and environmentally aware educational options for children.



Verdi EcoSchool



Hitchcock Center for the Environment

Morning Workshops

Scavenger Hunts, Gathering Expeditions, Nature Walks: Engaging Ways To Take Learning Outdoors for Pre-K-Grade 3 Students

Alissa Alteri Shea, First Grade Teacher, Leverett Elementary School, Leverett, MA

Being outdoors relieves stress and anxiety, gives kids the freedom to move, and helps them focus. All of this leads to a more joyful, balanced, productive school day. But once you have your students outdoors, what are you going to do with them? This workshop looks at easy, engaging ways to bring the learning standards you teach indoors outside into nature. This year I challenged myself to have “Wednesday in the Woods,” a day when most of the instruction for my first-grade students takes place outdoors. I’ve had to find creative ways to structure outdoor lessons that connect to our curriculum. In searching for simple activities that would not need a lot of preparation, I’ve found scavenger hunts, gathering expeditions, and nature walks to be the most engaging. Come try them out for yourself in this workshop.

Being Animals

Katie Koerten, Educator, Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Amherst, MA

What better way to appreciate animals in early childhood than to “become” them? Katie offers a series called “Being Animals” to preschoolers through third graders that taps into the enormous capacity for empathy that young children possess. By pretending to be animals in the outdoors, young children develop appreciation and understanding of the local creatures that share our home. Workshop participants will experience animal movements, songs, stories, and unstructured play that Katie uses to craft the Being Animals series. Katie will also share the ways she makes connections to literacy and STEM through an animal lens. Come be a bear, an owl, a squirrel, and more.

The Earth Moves Under My Feet: Salamander Curriculum for the Early Grades

Renee Bachman, Third Grade Teacher, Leeds Elementary School, Northampton, MA

Did you know that the red-backed salamander population in a forest may weigh as much as all the small birds or small mammals in the same area? Come participate and learn about SPARNet, a Citizen Science Project, and look for Red-backed Salamanders in the Hitchcock Center forest. I will share with you how I have incorporated this study into my science curriculum as a long-term research project and share books, resources, and protocols so that you can do this study with your students. Be ready to get your hands a little dirty!



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Lunch

We enjoy treating you to a tasty and healthy lunch. During the lunch hour, Liza Lowe and other regional coordinators will update you on Inside-Outside chapters. There are now more than a dozen **Inside-Outside** chapters of nature-based educators in New England, the mid-Atlantic states and across the country. Learn how to join or start one. Contact Liza Lowe at elowe@antioch.edu.



Afternoon Keynote

Re-Imagining Education and Co-Creating Change: How a professional learning community (PLC) for Maine administrators is implementing nature-based change in PreK-8 schools

Anne Stires, Affiliate Faculty, Antioch University, Keene, NH, Educational Consultant and Founder, Juniper Hill School, Alna, ME



Why outdoor, nature connected learning? Why now? What are the concerns? How do we implement outdoor learning in small steps? How do we make sure it continues long after the global pandemic? How do we get teachers the professional development and support they need? With the pandemic, many Maine schools have embraced a shift toward outdoor learning—but now, over two years later—administrators, teachers, school communities, and students need continued support.

Anne leads a professional learning community (PLC) for administrators who are leading their schools to be models of “nature- and outdoor-based teaching and learning.” A dozen superintendents, principals and district-wide outdoor learning coordinators from across the Wabanaki lands now known as Maine have been meeting for 18 months. Learn how this initiative is helping to make nature more central to the education of all Maine students.

Anne Stires, M.Ed. is the founder of Juniper Hill School for Place-based Education in Alna, Maine. She is now an independent educational consultant working with schools and programs throughout Maine and beyond to support equitable outdoor learning and nature connection initiatives. She is a regularly featured speaker at many nature-based education conferences and is the facilitator of Maine’s public school Nature-based Administrators’ Professional Learning Community. Anne teaches graduate level courses for Antioch University as affiliate faculty and serves as an advisor to the **Inside-Outside: Nature-based Educators’ Network**. She is the author of a chapter in **Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens** and was a member of the writing team for the **Natural Start Professional Practices Guidebook**.

