

# In Bloom in Western Mass

## Promising Practices in Nature-based Early Childhood Education

Saturday, June 8, 2019

The Hitchcock Center for the Environment  
Amherst, Massachusetts

Ellen Doris

Antioch University New England will host three **In Bloom** conferences this spring. The first, **In Bloom in Vermont**, will be held on the third day of spring, March 23, 2019 in Brattleboro. We're well aware there will not be much in bloom in March, so, we've assigned an "in bloom in snow" theme to **In Bloom in Vermont**. We'll be focusing on how to work with children outdoors in winter.

**In Bloom in Maine**, brings us back to Kittery to work with the vibrant nature-based early childhood community there. We look forward to a warm spring day to celebrate the end of Earth Week! Register early for this conference as it has always filled to capacity. Online registration is fairly simple, as we are now doing workshop sign-ups at morning registration.

Our **2019 In Bloom** season comes to fruition with this first foray to Amherst, Massachusetts. On June 8, 2019, The Hitchcock Center for the Environment will host us for **In Bloom in Western Mass**. We are confident that the clematis, iris, peonies, AND dandelions will all be in bloom!

In the past, In Bloom workshops have catered to teachers of children between the ages of 3 and 6, but children grow up, so we're catching up! This year our workshops are geared to preschool through third grade, so invite your elementary teacher colleagues.

The enthusiasm of early childhood professionals in their valiant efforts to get children outside continues to be inspirational and heartwarming. We've got exciting new keynote speakers this year from Maine, Virginia, Missouri, Minnesota, and British Columbia,

plus a host of new workshop presenters from each region, along with some old favorites. We'll also continue to spotlight the work of Antioch New England faculty members who teach in the Nature-based Early Childhood Certificate program.

During the lunch break we will show our short documentary film, **The Best Day Ever: Forest Days in Vermont Kindergartens**. This 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.

## 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/NENNECE or movie
1:00pm–2:00pm	Afternoon Keynote
2:15pm–3:45pm	Afternoon Workshops
3:50pm–4:00pm	Closing Circle

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## When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you, too, have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with  
light, and to shine."

by Mary Oliver

## Morning Workshops

### Children and Nature: Design Principles for Educators

**David Sobel**, Professor Emeritus, Antioch University New England, Keene, NH

When children have access to free play in natural areas, they do the same things, around the country and around the world. They make special places, go on adventures, develop fantasy games, go hunting and gathering, craft small worlds. These recurrent play patterns can be used as design principles to help structure compelling outdoor activities with children, and these engagements can lead to environmental values and behaviors in adulthood. We'll recollect some of our own significant experiences from childhood. Then we'll explore the nearby environment using some of these recurrent play motifs and design appropriate activities for young children.

### Service-Learning Possibilities: Learning about the Outdoors and Cultivating Problem-Solvers

**Talia Miller**, Service Learning Coordinator, Colrain Central School, Colrain, MA

Service-learning is a method of teaching and learning that encourages students to use their academic knowledge to address community needs. See how empowering service-learning can be with children as young as preschool! Colrain Central School has a new service-learning initiative, with exciting early results. Come and learn about some units we've completed that bridge the outdoors and service-learning in our preschool and primary classes. We'll experience this process ourselves by taking a real need, as presented to us by the Hitchcock Center, and working together to brainstorm possible solutions. Then we'll explore how we can use service-learning in our own programs to solve real community problems.

## Morning Keynote

### Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World

**Sheila Williams Ridge**, Director, Shirley G. Moore Lab School, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN

As studies continue to point to the benefits of time outdoors and nature education, making these accessible to all children, in a variety of settings, is of growing importance. It is equally important for the future of the environment that all citizens have a deep bond of stewardship with nature. Sheila will discuss the challenges and barriers faced by educators who want to increase diversity within their programs. She will share what an equitable and inclusive environment looks like in the classroom and consider equity in terms of staff and the school community. Sheila will also focus on anti-bias education and implicit bias training for staff to prepare them to create an equitable environment.



*Sheila Williams Ridge directs the Shirley G. Moore Lab School at the University of Minnesota and is an instructor for the Institute of Child Development. She is also an adjunct instructor at Hamline University. Sheila holds a BA in biology from the University of Minnesota and an MA in education from Concordia University. She serves on the governing boards for the Natural Start Alliance, the Minneapolis Nature Preschool, and the Friends School of Minnesota, and is co-author of Nature-Based Learning for Young Children: Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Budget. Her special areas of interest include increasing access to nature for all children and sharing the benefits of nature-based education.*



### Documenting and Planning for Little Explorers

**Amy Jackson**, Preschool Teacher, The Center School, Greenfield, MA

The forest is a great place for even the smallest of students to develop curiosity and make discoveries. The environment becomes a teacher as children crawl, climb, run, trip, splash, dig, smell, scoot, name, and ask "Why?" As children learn through their senses, they are constantly building and strengthening their connections in the world. In this workshop, you'll learn to support young explorers by preparing to follow their lead. You'll also learn ways to capture their observations and interactions with the forest and document their movements, investigations and collaborations. You'll explore an outdoor art/documentation gallery and practice documenting, observing and asking questions that can help children strengthen their understanding of their discoveries. You'll also find out what to stash in your adventure pack to make forest art and documentation possible.



Amy Jackson



Carling Sothoron



# Morning Workshops *(continued)*

## Less Screen Time, More Green Time: Facilitating After School Nature Play Programs

**Meg Taylor**, Director, Educator and Consultant, Field & Forest Education Services, Williamsburg, MA

Parents, educators, and healthcare professionals are increasingly concerned with the amount of time children are spending sedentary in front of screens or being supervised in highly structured, indoor activities. A well-crafted, after school nature play (and learning!) program provides children with the active, spontaneous, skill-building, connected, outdoor time they want and need. Experience a replicable framework and some core Nature Play routines and activities for bringing children outdoors after, before, or during school hours. Meg will share her backpack of essentials for leading a school Nature Play program in all seasons with children ages 4 through 12.

## School Days to Forest Days: Routines in the Wild

**Eliza Minnucci**, consultants, ForestKinder, Tunbridge, VT and Adjunct Faculty, Antioch University New England, Keene, NH  
**Meg Teachout**, consultant, ForestKinder, Tunbridge, VT

In 2013 Eliza and Meg founded a Kindergarten Forest Day in Quechee, Vermont. Since then they have collaborated with teachers in dozens of classrooms to develop similar programs. In this workshop you'll experience an abbreviated version of some tried and true outdoor rhythms. From the morning bell to the tick check, learn routines that balance play and learning. An especially good fit for educators looking to start frequent and extended outdoor time with students. Come prepared for the weather, we'll be outside!



Laura Wilhelm-Stone

## Math Beneath the Maples

**Hannah French**, Teacher, Rowe Elementary School, Rowe, MA

Numerous resources describe the teaching of science, social studies, writing, and even reading in the woods. What about math? How can we teach concrete lessons that meet mathematical curriculum frameworks out in the forest? Together, we will forego whiteboards, papers, and pencils as we tackle elementary math topics in new and engaging ways. As we sample a variety of math activities appropriate for primary grade levels, we will change the way we think about outdoor math lessons. Each workshop activity is designed to meet a standard from the 2017 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Mathematics.

## Lunch

A healthy lunch is provided in your registration fee.

Movie Showing at 12:30pm

**The Best Day Ever:  
Forest Days in  
Vermont  
Kindergartens**



Chris Hardee



Robin Huntley

# Afternoon Plenary

## Ted's Tick Talk

**Ted Watt**, Naturalist, The Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Amherst, MA

We want our young people to grow up outdoors, exploring and learning. We also want them to stay safe, and tick-borne diseases pose significant risks. The more we know, the more confidence we will have in adopting strategies to protect children. There are no easy answers... but knowledge is power; we can work to reduce disease transmission. Ted will share life history and identification information about the tick species found in southern New England. We'll learn how to distinguish males and females, find out which species carry particular diseases, and learn when in their life cycles ticks can transmit disease. Ted will also share some strategies for reducing fear around ticks that will ease our minds, along with those of the children and families we work with.

*Ted Watt is an Environmental Educator who has worked at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst, MA for over 20 years. Ted is a highly skilled Naturalist who helps children and adults understand the unique habitats and ecosystems of New England through hands-on instruction and mentorship. He supports teachers to develop curriculum in natural sciences and assists in aligning their science teaching with the Massachusetts Science Standards. Ted is intrigued by all aspects of natural history and has in-depth knowledge about the birds and plants of the Northeast.*



# Afternoon Workshops

## Start small or GO BIG

**Sheila Williams Ridge**, Shirley G. Moore Lab School, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN

The connection with nature is as important as it is wonderful for children. During this workshop we'll discuss the benefits of nature-based learning in every domain of education. We'll also consider barriers that educators face when implementing nature-based experiences in their communities. In addition, we'll focus on a variety of solutions to help programs grow in the implementation of nature-based play and learning for all children, and share ideas and resources.

## Tracking Ticks

**Robin Huntley**, Teacher, Juniper Hill School for Place-based Education, Alna, ME

Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses are a concern in western Massachusetts, and protecting children against ticks can be a major concern in nature-based education. When armed with knowledge, teachers, students, parents, and other school community members can learn how to manage the risk of tick-borne illness. This workshop will guide participants through an inquiry-based study of local tick populations, following in the footsteps of a class of 3rd graders determined to prove that their woods were a safe place to learn and play. We'll conduct our own tick drag, hone our identification skills, record data, and share our findings. Afterward, we'll discuss the value of student-lead studies as a tool for making nature-based learning visible, understood, celebrated and honored.

# Afternoon Workshops



## Integrating the School's Garden into The Early Childhood Curriculum

**Jean Meister and Jenny Coy**, Teachers of 3-6-year-olds, The Common School, Amherst, MA.

You don't have to be a gardener to utilize and enjoy the bountiful learning opportunities that a school garden can provide. Join Jean and Jenny for some hands-on learning in The Common School Children's Garden, and find out how they have effectively brought the garden into their nursery and kindergarten programs. Learn ways to involve students in tending the school's garden, observing its growth and producing things from the harvest. Discover how to integrate a garden environment into literacy, math, social studies, scientific inquiry and the arts. Explore the garden, develop your ideas within small group and whole group discussion, and anticipate the joy that working in a school garden with young children will bring!

## A Garden to Dye For

**Michelle Parrish**, Teacher, Grades 1-2, The Common School, Amherst, MA

Add dye plants to your school garden and your curriculum! Many easy-to-grow plants and flowers can be used to dye natural fibers such as woolen fleece, yarns, or cloth, and are fascinating and fun to explore. This workshop will cover recommended plants for a school garden, as well as harvesting, storing, and using dye plants in the classroom. Participants will make dye-baths with dried and frozen plants, dye skeins of yarn, and visit the dye garden to see what's growing. Activities can be modified for use with pre-school through primary students. Michelle has cultivated a dye and fiber plant garden for use with students for over ten years. She is also a weaver, dyer, and spinner.



Ellen Doris



Wild Roots Nature School

## I Wonder as I Wander

**Colleen Kelley**, Education Director, Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Amherst, MA

Explore the forests of the Hitchcock Center as a continual learner. This workshop will give you the chance to wonder, wander and discover in the woods with other teachers in a relaxed and playful way. We will reflect on the learning stories that evolve from this type of exploration and a variety of focus tools that can be utilized to enhance the experience. Come with open eyes and mind ready to experience the joy and wonder of unexpected encounters!

**Register Here:**

<https://tinyurl.com/y929f5pw>

## Movement and Music in Nature

**Jayne Timpson Winell**, Physical Education Teacher, The Common School, Amherst, MA

This workshop will be an experiential dive into movement, theater and music improvisation games. Improvisation asks us to be fully present and when we improvise with each other we share the gift of our attention and curiosity. We will use a model of sustainability to ask, "What art forms can we engage in that are respectful of nature, interact with the outdoors and use our bodies as the primary medium?" Through exploratory activities, prompts, games and challenges, participants will embody themselves in new ways, and learn to facilitate experiences for children. Jayne has loved dance and music since the age of three. In addition to teaching creative movement to children, Jayne performs with the tinydance project and Theatre Truck.

## The Farm and Forest Are Our Teachers

**Rachel Kennedy**, Teacher, The Hartsbrook School, Hadley, MA

Children long to experience themselves as capable, purposeful, and connected. The Forest Kindergarten and Land Stewardship program at The Hartsbrook School will provide a context in which we can see, feel and discuss the role that purposeful work, movement and imagination play in supporting the essential development and wellbeing of children. Bring your Wellies, rubber boots or protective footwear of some kind – we'll be out and about!



Forest Days Handbook



Wild Roots Nature School

## Thank You to Our Co-Sponsors:



## Registration Fees:

Working Professional . . . . .	\$125.00
Group Rate: per person for 3 or more from same organization . . . . .	\$100.00
Antioch University Alumni . . . . .	\$75.00
AUNE /College Ed students . . . . .	\$50.00

Visit our website: [www.antioch.edu/new-england/inbloom](http://www.antioch.edu/new-england/inbloom)

Questions? Contact Peg Smeltz at Antioch University New England, 603-283-2301, [msmeltz@antioch.edu](mailto:msmeltz@antioch.edu)