



University of Delaware Lab School

In Bloom in Massachusetts

Promising Practices in Nature-based
Early Childhood Education

Saturday, April 27, 2024

at Wright-Locke Farm
Winchester, Massachusetts

We're delighted to be back at Wright-Locke Farm in Winchester, MA, just 10 miles from downtown Boston. It's an oasis of green and a hive of activity amidst suburban neighborhoods. Wright-Locke Farm and the surrounding area is the homeland of the indigenous Massachusett Tribe and Pawtucket people. It's history of settlement began in 1638 and it is now being reborn as a community farm for all. The farm offers certified-organic produce through Community Supported Agriculture shares and on-line ordering. It also offers educational programs for children and adults, including *Forest Friends*—a licensed nature preschool, hiking trails that lead to conservation land, and special events for the community. The conference keynote and panel will take place in the beautiful new All Seasons Barn. The workshops will take place in the thoughtfully preserved farm buildings, gardens and woods of the farm.

Wright-Locke Farm acknowledges and pays respect to the indigenous peoples who stewarded the land around Wright-Locke Farm for generations. This area is the homeland of the indigenous Massachusett Tribe and Pawtucket people, who were forcibly removed in the 1600s. The Massachusett Tribe and people with Pawtucket ancestry continue to live throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Schedule for the Day

8:15 am–9:00 am	Registration Morning Refreshments
9:00 am–9:15 am	Opening Circle
9:15 am–10:15 am	Morning Keynote
10:30 am–Noon	Morning Workshops
Noon– 12:50 pm	Lunch Education Garden Tour Working with Animals
12:50 pm–2:00 pm	Afternoon Panel
2:15 pm–3:45 pm	Afternoon Workshops
3:45 pm–4:00 pm	Closing Circle

Teach the Children by Mary Oliver

Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin flowers. And the frisky ones—inkberry, lamb's-quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones—rosemary, oregano. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.

Attention is the beginning of devotion.

Morning Keynote

Creating Culturally-Centered Nature Programs

Ashley Brailsford, Founder of Unearthing Joy, Nashville, TN

Creating nature-based curriculum and programs that center diverse cultural perspectives can be challenging, but is necessary for transforming outdoor spaces into inclusive places. This keynote will share practical strategies and examples from programs that center the stories and roles of Black, Indigenous and Other People of the Global Majority in nature education. Ashley will share examples from her work with young children and parents at the Tri-County Play Collaborative in South Carolina, her work with Unearthing Joy in Nashville, Tennessee, and from her work across the United States.

*Ashley Brailsford, PhD is an early childhood educator and nature enthusiast who launched **Unearthing Joy** to guide the development of culturally-centered, nature-based programming for families, community groups, and organizations that center the stories and contributions of Indigenous, Black and other people of the Global Majority. Her experiences in teaching, professorship, curriculum development and leadership in education coupled with time spent as an outdoor guide informs her programming and development process to transform outdoor spaces into inclusive places that honor culture, explore justice and unearth joy.*



Morning Workshops

Nature-Based Integrated Emergent Curriculum for PreK & K

Katie Baker, Co-Director, Turn Back Time, Paxton, MA

Exploring the outdoors we come upon a tree stripped of its bark, gnawed so thin that it has cracked in two pieces. Sawdust and woodchips at the base of the tree seem fresh. Who has been here? Join Katie Baker, nature based educator and consultant, on the adventures of emergent curriculum—where the interests and experiences of the children inspire learning opportunities in an exciting and interactive way. Katie will guide you through the emergent process, starting with the excitement of finding a new interest, demonstrate how to integrate an emergent theme into hands-on learning experiences, and reflect upon and relate the learning that has taken place to educational guidelines. Attendees will engage in activities related to native flora and fauna and experience an integrated emergent curriculum first-hand.



Educare Central Maine

Morning Workshops

Small Fires, Warm Hearts: Fire Building and Tea Ritual to Nurture Community, Comfort and Connection

Susan Chlebowski, Outdoor Learning and Play Consultant, Waldoboro, ME and Community Connections for Children, York, PA

In this hands-on workshop, we will practice simple and portable tea-making that involves children in every step of the process, including foraging, small fire building and boiling water using a Kelly Kettle. You will leave with the confidence to boil water anywhere you go, ideas to start or enhance your own outdoor warm beverage practice, an equipment list, and an understanding of how a tea ritual offers children a chance to slow down, warm up, care for each other and connect to nature in a unique way. If you need to link tea-making to learning standards, this workshop covers that as well.

Guiding Behavior in an Outdoor Setting

Sara Murray, Co-founder, Toddler Connections Leader, and Teacher Coach at Boston Outdoor Preschool Network, Boston MA

Discuss and practice three key Montessori-inspired strategies to help anchor your communication in mutual trust and respect and increase cooperation and connection in your class. The second part of the session will be an opportunity to brainstorm, discuss, and strategize approaches to solving behavior challenges you may be experiencing in your class. Please bring situations currently on your mind, and we will work together to help lessen your behavior-related frustrations.

Wild About Squirrels

*Susie Spikol, Naturalist, Harris Center for Conservation Education, and Author of *The Animal Adventurers Guide*, Hancock, NH*

Leap, scamper and chitter! Eat and talk like a chipmunk! Come spend the day as a squirrel and discover how these common and accessible wild mammals can lead us to connect to nature, see adaptations, and celebrate the everyday animals that live in our world. Through hands-on experiences, imaginative play, and model-making, find out how to get your students excited and curious about these fluffy rodents. Find out how young students can design simple inquiry-based squirrel studies and become community scientists by participating in Project Squirrel. Come get your squirrel on!

Digging and Dumping: Soil Science for Children

Ellen Doris, Faculty and Director of Nature-based Early Childhood Program, Antioch University New England, Keene, NH

Digging and dumping are pastimes that many young children adore, and no wonder! Sandbox play is fun. It also leads to insights about particles, percolation, texture and structure, runoff, erosion, and other concepts that are crucial to understand. In this session, we'll learn what's beneath our feet through activities that are easily adapted for children. We'll dig, dump, survey and map, separate soil components, compare how different soils filter and retain water, and search for ground-dwelling creatures. Sand castles, mud paint, poetry and song will enrich our exploration.

Morning Workshops *(continued)*

Journaling with Forest Friends: A Journey to Find a Meaningful Documentation Method

Megan Recupero, Teacher and Co-Director of Forest Friends Preschool, Wright-Locke Farm, Winchester, MA

When we started our preschool program, we imagined the children leaning with their backs up against trees, deeply engaged in nature and documenting their ideas in journals. In practice, it took several years for our program to arrive at a process and vision that matched the philosophy of our program. This workshop will focus on our program's journaling journey by examining materials, methods and prompts. Participants will have the opportunity to hike to different inspirational points on the farm and in the woods, engage in documentation of their own, and learn about quiet spots and meditation through journaling.



Sarah Timm

Lunch

Optional Lunch Opportunities

We enjoy treating you to a tasty and healthy lunch. If you would also like to maximize your time at the farm, take advantage of these extras:

Education Garden Open Hour: Visit the garden at Wright-Locke Farm. Have questions about gardening with young children, setting up an education garden, or creating a garden curriculum? Or would you like to spend a few quiet moments with growing things? Stop by our Education Garden to take a peek and ask questions. Forest Friends Teacher Megan Recupero will share resources and answer questions.

Working with Animals Open Hour: Chat with Sadie Brown, Wright-Locke Farm educator, and meet the animals on the farm - chickens, goats and honeybees. Learn about the roles the animals play in the fields and educational programming.

Afternoon Panel

Building and Fostering Equity in Nature-Based Early Childhood Programs

Sarah Besse, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Boston Outdoor Preschool Network (BOPN)

Jill Canelli, Preschool Director for Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Preschool and the Mass Audubon Early Education Manager for the MetroWest Region

Kelly Meehan, Past Regional Director for the Department of Early Care and Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and currently the Vice President for Children's Services and Community Partnerships at People, Inc.

Nature-based early childhood programming is easily available to middle class white families, but how do we provide access to a wider range of children from diverse families in urban settings? We know that all people deserve equitable access to nature, protection against the threats from climate change, clean air and water, and abundant plants and wildlife that bring joy to our daily experiences and that enhance our quality of life. Sarah, Jill and Kelly will each describe how they work to incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, justice and accessibility in their programs. They'll discuss enrollment policies and ways to provide scholarships, teacher professional development, and different approaches to family engagement. They'll also discuss some initiatives to provide tuition-free nature based-programing for a diversity of students across the Commonwealth.



Sarah Besse



Jill Cannelli



Kelly Meehan

Afternoon Workshops

Mindfulness and Yoga for the Outdoor Classroom

Mandy Slavik, Equity Programs Coordinator, Lead Preschool Teacher, Boston Outdoor Preschool Network, Boston, MA

Nature is an ideal environment in which to practice mindfulness, and early childhood is a great time to begin sowing the seeds of mindfulness for a lifetime of personal, collective, and environmental wellbeing. Join us for an experiential workshop that explores some simple mindfulness practices and yoga postures and games that you can incorporate into an outdoors classroom setting. Practices are presented with a preschool age group in mind but can easily be scaled down or up to meet different age groups. We will be outside the entire time so please dress comfortably, in warm layers, and be prepared to move and take notes on your experience and observations.

Composting in the Classroom and Beyond

Sadie Brown, Youth Programs Educator, Wright-Locke Farm, Winchester, MA

Rot, decomposition and decay - processes essential to all life on earth - often have negative connotations in a society which avoids deep consideration of death, where our waste goes and how our species is interconnected with others on earth. In this workshop we will move beyond fears of bad smells, slimy textures and mortality to embrace with wonder the regenerative power of fungi, worms and other decomposers who work as nature's recyclers to make new life possible on this planet.

Come explore and excavate the farm's compost pile and see how firsthand sensory exploration of this dynamic ecosystem can spark children's curiosity and excitement! We will discuss various composting systems that work well in school settings and learn how to create a worm composting (vermicompost) bin that can be set up indoors in any classroom.

Afternoon Workshops (continued)

Connecting Family Stories with Literacy & Art to Promote Culturally-Centered Curriculum

Ashley Brailsford, *Founder of Unearthing Joy, Nashville, TN*

Our family stories hold promise for centering culture in our curriculum. Participants will have the opportunity to utilize natural materials to collage an image that supports their family story in nature and connections to how art play supports young children's development. Participants will also learn strategies for language and literacy development through family stories to honor children's literate lives and cultures.

The Connection Between Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging (DEIB) and Nature

Michelle Dolan, *Director and Muhammed Abdalah*, *Early Childhood Teacher, Nest Program, Wheeler School, Providence, RI*

The best way to make multidisciplinary connections is using the framework of "same, but different". In this workshop, participants will explore examples of a classroom that uses "same, but different" providing documentation of teaching and learning in a nature-based preschool, along with curricular next steps. Nature provides a barrier-free context to explore the intersection of all subjects via STEAM and DEIB. There will be opportunities to explore this concept in a hands-on, inquiry-based way within the natural setting, ending with a debrief, where participants will come together to share their findings. The workshop will culminate with a collaborative art experience that will exemplify what teachers can potentially do with their students while inspiring their own curiosity and inner child.



Wright-Locke Farm

Please come prepared to select your workshops at the morning Registration Check-In on the day of the conference.

REGISTER HERE

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Designing Natural Playscapes for Young Children

Liz Luc Clowes, *Landscape Designer/Architect and Director of Community Engagement & New Food Forest Construction at the Boston Food Forest, Boston, MA*

Liz has designed an outdoor education area for the Oak Meadow Montessori School in Littleton and a micro-forest for the Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester. This spring she is designing a food forest for young children through her work at the Boston Food Forest. Liz will share images of some of her projects and then conduct a mini design charrette focused on your own classroom or school sites. Whether you've got lots of asphalt, or lots of open space, you'll get good ideas for how to take your outdoor spaces to the next level. This would be a good workshop for pairs of educators from the same site to facilitate working together.

"Sticky" Math Learning: Joyful Teaching Experiences Through the Outdoor Lens

Anne M. Stires, *Nature Connection Consultant, Anne Stires Educational Consulting, Alna, ME, Affiliate Faculty, Antioch University, Keene, NH*

Join us to reconnect with the joy of teaching math outdoors! Learning outside for students can be filled with joy, wonder, and curiosity, leading to increased inquiry, language development, and engagement. Teachers and students who participate in outdoor experiences during the school day, report feeling more physically and emotionally well. Specifically, math skills are easily transferable and the learning is "stickier" outside!

In this workshop, we will engage in hands-on early childhood and early elementary math lessons. The activities are connected to the math standards that many programs and schools are expected to follow. Together, we will connect mathematics to the outdoors on our school grounds, nearby green spaces, and to the neighborhood.

Registration Fees

Individual Working Professional \$125

Group Rate \$100
(per person; 3 or more from the same school)

AU students or alumni \$75



Wright-Locke Farm