



University of Delaware Lab School

# In Bloom in Delaware

Promising Practices in Nature-based  
Early Childhood Education

Saturday, April 1, 2023

at the Audion Star Tower and the  
University of Delaware Lab School  
University of Delaware, Newark, DE

## Morning Keynote

### Start Small—With A Vision

**Kimberly Shaw**, Director, A Safe Place Child Enrichment Center and Elizabeth's Garden, Raleigh, NC

Educators observe children's affinity to be outside. Once you learn the importance of that relationship, you want to commit to what it takes to make that a priority. When you take the steps to create that environment, you inspire people and establish relationships. This is a story to serve as a reminder to "start small, with a vision." Next it's a small garden space on an undeveloped plot of land in the community. Dozens of cherished partnerships, accolades and thousands of work hours later, if you're asked how it got done, the answer is: "we started small, with a vision."



**Kimberly Shaw** is Founder and President of **A Safe Place Child Enrichment Center** and **Elizabeth's Garden**. Starting as a family child care home in August 1997, it has grown to two five-star, NAEYC-accredited centers sitting on 3.5 acres in East and Southeast Raleigh NC. She has served thousands of families by exploring nature-based curriculum

through natural connection, while providing a safe natural space for learning, playing and celebrating community. Ms. Shaw continues to partner with local organizations including the Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University to develop the outdoors as demonstration sites in both centers.

## Schedule for the Day

8:00 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– 12:45 pm	Lunch Inside-Outside network
12:45 pm–1:45 pm	Afternoon Keynote
1:45 pm– 2:15 pm	Travel to UD Lab School
2:15 pm–3:45 pm	Afternoon Workshops
3:50 pm–4:00 pm	Closing Circle

## Venues

Morning keynote, morning workshops, lunch and afternoon keynote will take place at Audion at STAR Tower on the University campus. Then conference attendees will drive to the University of Delaware Lab School for the afternoon workshops.

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# Morning Workshops

## Born to Bond: How Biophilia Explains Our Affinities to Nature

**Rose Brusafarro**, Acting Nature Preschool Director, Nature Forward, Washington, DC

What are some of the most impactful ways we can facilitate children's connections to nature? In this workshop we will explore E.O. Wilson's "Nine Biophilic Values" through art, music, motion, games, building, and interpersonal exercises. You will hear, see, and replicate nature-based activities that resonate most with young children in forest school, as well as examine your own preferences and affinity for different aspects of the natural world. The goal of this workshop is to provide the participant with practical insight and tools that can help them build a positive foundation on which children can bond with the local natural environment. They will walk away with new ideas and resources for strengthening the relationship between children and nature.

## Language Development, Nature and Movement

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

Early language development can be rooted in understanding the natural world. We'll examine how language emerges in traditional cultures and how we can foster language development through scaffolded explorations in nature. We will tie vocabulary development and language differentiation to the kinesthetic and tactile sensory modes. And we'll

hearken back to old-fashioned movement education and try to revive it outdoors. Be prepared to go barefoot, and to create/enact mini adventures inspired by lots of active verbs.



## Nature Club for Primary School

**Katie Miro**, First Grade Teacher, Primary School, Newark Charter School, Newark, DE

Have you struggled with how to get students out in nature while ensuring you cover all of the important curricular objectives you need to teach? Our Nature Club was established by teachers and parents at my school to encourage students' natural interests in the outdoor environment around our school. We believe our nature club has enhanced students' appreciation for nature exploration and preservation. Our nature club allows students to participate in hands-on nature-related topics while allowing them to engage in unstructured play in their natural world. In this workshop, we will explain the process to create your own nature club program. In addition, we will create and explore different activities you can do with your own nature enthusiasts. Let's get exploring!

## The Yucky and the Dangerous: Risk Management in Nature-based Education

**Anne Stires**, Affiliate Faculty, Antioch University New England and Anne Stires Educational Consulting, Alna, ME

Poison Ivy + Berries + Mushrooms + Feathers + Bones + Slush + Dead Animals + Mud + Ticks + Water + Trees = Excited Children & Nervous Parents! As soon as children go outside, they discover and explore. And they are soon sure to come across biting insects, poisonous berries, dead animals, mud and all kinds of exciting loose parts. Our job, as guides and educators, is to support their development by encouraging safe and appropriate explorations. Children are naturally drawn to what is yucky and dangerous. As the adults we have a choice: encourage fear and worry or increase their knowledge base through play first and information next? The latter increases children's confidence and resilience. Explore the "Yucky and the Dangerous" with hands-

on, outdoor activities for children and through role-playing conversations with caregivers and parents.

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## Morning Workshops (continued)

### I am Nature, and Nature is Magic

**Michel Anderson**, Learning Program Evaluator & Consultant, Baltimore, MD

This session will explore the curious relationship between wonder, nature, and magic. Nature and magic are unique in their power to provoke us to think differently, consider wider possibilities, and refrain from accepting the mere surface view of any object, creature, or circumstance. Wonder is their key ingredient. As a nature-based educator, you are a purveyor of wonder—you're already a magician of sorts. Come explore the thin veil between nature, mindfulness, education, and magic theory. You will leave an initiate of ancient secrets that can be used to deepen your students' connection with the mysteries of the natural world.

### Spiders: Good Guys or Bad Guys?

**Kerry Wilson**, Habitat Outreach Manager, Delaware Nature Society, Hockessin, DE

**Amy Shepherd**, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Educator, Dover, DE

In Project-based Learning (PBL) children learn by actively engaging in meaningful, real world studies. This study is place-based and immersive in exploring a spider's local habitat, discussing spiders that are native to our local habitat, and cultural ways that we connect with spiders. Through this study, children will understand a spider's place in our world and their habitat needs. Children will also lessen their fear of spiders and become better stewards of our environment. Students engage in a variety of activities including spider habitat identification and exploration, spider vivarium observations, read aloud and picture book observations, and art. They determine spiders really are "good guys" since they help keep insect populations in check and provide some natural forms of pest control. Make a glider spider and explore the science that you can engage your students in while having fun.

\*This unit was adapted from a **Teachers21** unit developed by Janet Bowland.

## Lunch

We enjoy treating you to a tasty and healthy lunch. During the lunch hour, we will update you on our Inside-Outside network for nature-based educators. There are now more than a dozen **Inside-Outside** chapters in New England, the mid-Atlantic states including one at the University of Delaware. Learn how to join or start one. Contact Liza Lowe at [elowe@antioch.edu](mailto:elowe@antioch.edu).



## Afternoon Keynote

### Will My Child Be Ready for Kindergarten or First Grade: A Review of Ten Years of Research on Nature-based Early Childhood Programs

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

In conjunction with researchers in Michigan and Minnesota, David has collaborated on research comparing the impacts on children in nature-based early childhood programs vs. children in traditional high quality early childhood programs. Research has focused on early literacy development, numeracy development, STEM learning, motivation, resilience, executive functioning and more. It has been conducted in private nature preschools, publicly funded Headstart programs, university lab schools and public preschool programs. In the spirit of "slow and steady wins the race," an interesting story has emerged about the benefits of nature-based programs. Spoiler Alert: The answer to the question, "Will My Child Be Ready?" is: a definitive "Yes!"

**David Sobel** is a Professor Emeritus in the Education Department at Antioch University New England in Keene, NH. He consults and speaks widely on child development, place-based education, and nature-based early childhood education. He has authored nine books and more than 80 articles focused on children and nature for educators, parents, environmentalists and school administrators in the last 30 years. His most recent books are **Wild Play: Parenting Adventures in the Great Outdoors** published by Green Writers Press, **The Sky Above and the Mud Below: Lessons from Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens** and **Best Bike Rides in New England**.



### Moving to the University of Delaware Lab School

## Afternoon Workshops

### Down and Dirty in the Garden: Preschool-Style

**Jen Cipolla**, Program Manager, Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids, Hockessin, DE

There is lots of fun to be had in the garden! From sizing up the soil to growing like baby plants to munching on garden refuse as decomposers! We will walk through an entire growing season as preschoolers. When you take your students into the garden you can encourage them to use their senses to observe and investigate, their bodies to model and move and their voices to sing! The garden is a place to be creative and investigative. Students not only learn science and math skills but build compassion and self-esteem as well.

# Afternoon Workshops (continued)

## Use the Outdoors as Your Stage: Co-creating Informances with Kids

**Zero Jones**, Director of Smith Urban Nature Preschool, Philadelphia, PA

There are so many ways to express a thought, feeling, or story! As Loris Malaguzzi of Reggio Emilia says, children have a hundred languages they use to communicate. Anchoring our workshop with storybooks, we will use natural materials, instruments, movement, fabric, and more to explore and create multimedia "informances." An informance is an informal performance, grounded in play and storytelling. Informances can be used to make learning visible; they're a great way to get families and communities involved in the classroom! The ideas we will explore in this workshop can be used in a variety of settings, with various ages, and can extend as far as your imagination will stretch. Prepare yourself for some silly, improvised fun!

## Endless Discoveries Across the State of Delaware

**Katie Pollock**, Master Teacher, University of Delaware Lab School, and **Christine Skrobot**, Associate Director Children's Learning Environments, Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC), University of Delaware, Newark, DE

Delaware is surprisingly diverse for a small state: you'll find cityscapes to beachfront; forests to farms. This session will highlight the diverse early childhood programs that use their unique backdrops to get children and educators outside playing, learning, and thriving. The Let's Go Outside Initiative supports family child care professionals, administrators, and educators with professional learning experiences and the funding to make outdoor learning a little easier, a little better, and a whole lot more impactful. Let's explore how programs, like yours, embraced their uniqueness and individualized their outdoor experiences for kids.

## Nurturing a Sense of Wonder with Toddlers

**Debbie Torbert**, Master Teacher, and **Polly Lung**, Lead Teacher, University of Delaware Lab School, Newark, DE

Have you ever noticed a child watching a caterpillar crawling across a leaf? Asking "Where is the moon?" as our child stares thoughtfully out the window in the car. Walking into the forest and stating, "It is cooler under the trees." Or looking up at the sky expressing, "The sky is so blue." Even very young children are naturally fascinated by the world around them.

Children's sense of wonder can be hard to identify, but in this session, we will explore strategies to slow down and take the time to notice the extraordinary things in nature as we encourage a sense of wonder with toddlers.

## Anytime, Anywhere Math: Engaging Young Children and Parents with Math in Nature

**Sarah Ryan**, Instructor, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, College of Education and Human Development, University of Delaware, Newark

Families and caregivers tend to focus on literacy activities with young children more frequently than math activities. Yet there are many opportunities to playfully engage young children in thinking and talking about shapes, numbers, and patterns during everyday life, both indoors and in nature. Anytime, anywhere math activities, like shape hunts and counting collections, have the potential to develop children's mathematical knowledge and a disposition to look for math in the natural world. In this session, participants will engage in math activities in the outdoor classroom involving shapes, quantities, and patterns. We will then reflect on the math concepts and opportunities for math talk embedded in these simple but versatile activities and preview two short videos designed to teach families and caregivers how to engage children in math outdoors.

## Exploring Learning Spaces in Outdoor Places

**Kimberly Shaw**, A Safe Place Child Enrichment Center/ Elizabeth's Garden, Raleigh, NC and Early Childcare Mentor, Raleigh, NC

Nature has special ways of providing us with everything needed to express ourselves creatively. Outdoors we learn through play. Children have the freedom to engage with nature as they see fit. The realization is: anything you do inside, you can do outside in a similar format, and with less restriction. And diversity is key! When outdoor spaces are created with children in mind, they offer activity areas that provide opportunities for exploration, discovery and creativity for all (children with different ages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities). This session will allow participants to experience hands-on activities in a variety of outdoor learning activity areas.

## Registration Fees

Individual Registration: . . . . .	\$125
School Group: . . . . .	\$100
. . . . . (3 or more teachers from same organization)	
AU Alumni, AU & UD current students . . . . .	\$75

### For more information:

contact Peg Smeltz, [m-smeltz@antioch.edu](mailto:m-smeltz@antioch.edu)  
or Dorit Radnai-Griffin, [doritrg@udel.edu](mailto:doritrg@udel.edu)

## Register Here

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