

In Bloom in Maine

Promising Practices in Nature-based Early Childhood Education

Saturday, June 15, 2024
at Educare Central Maine
Waterville, ME



Join us for **In Bloom in Maine** at Educare Central Maine in Waterville! The workshops will take place in the play yards and outdoor areas of Educare, as well as in the nearby forest and stream areas. There will be tours of the school and outdoor play areas, as well as parts of the adjacent elementary school. At lunch, participants will have the opportunity to meet with Antioch University/Inside-Outside's Maine chapters and the Maine Early Childhood Outdoors network. We will enjoy providing you with simple morning refreshments and a healthy lunch as part of your registration fee.

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.

We acknowledge that the In Bloom in Maine 2024 conference will be on the traditional, territorial lands of the Wabanaki, People of the Dawnland. Educare Central Maine and George J. Mitchell School occupies the traditional homelands of the Tacconet band of the Kennebis/Canibas tribe of the Abenaki people.

As products of colonization, and many of us descendants of white settlers, we are visitors to these stolen lands and waters and must acknowledge the violence and atrocities committed here.

At this gathering, we are grateful for the time to honor and cherish Indigenous lifeways and our shared connection to and care for the lands and waters. As stewards, we are all protectors of the animals and plants—the rocks, soils, birds, trees, mushrooms, and insects. We extend gratitude to our keynote presenter, panelists, and the workshop presenters for all the work they do to inspire truth and reconciliation.

Schedule for the Day

8:15 am–9:00 am	Registration–Select Workshops 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, MeECO/DHHS and Inside-Outside Chapters meetup
12:50 pm–2:00 pm	Afternoon Keynote
2:15 pm–3:45 pm	Afternoon Workshops
3:45 pm–4:00 pm	Closing Circle
4:00 pm–5:00 pm	Educare Center Tours

Morning Keynote

Animacy: Penobscot Connection to Land and Waters as a Guide to Early Childhood Education

Maulian Dana Bryant, Penobscot Nation Ambassador, Penobscot Nation, Indian Island

The Penobscot peoples' connection to nature/stewardship of lands and waters is animate, current, and lifetimes long. Interrelationships abound in the natural world. Using this platform, Maulian will share her ideas for educators in this important time of speaking truth and working together to increase knowledge, equity, and justice. As educators of young children, we can make a difference in how we teach (our language and ideas matter), where we teach (as in, outdoors, in green spaces) and what we teach (by teaching culturally responsive, empathy-based, social emotional curriculum). As in every professional field, centering indigenous voices in nature-based early childhood education is vital. Maulian will speak about how deep connection to the natural world fits into her parenting, the Penobscot community, and her activism work.



Maulian Dana Bryant is the Ambassador to the Penobscot Nation. She is also a well known and admired social activist, mother of three children, and daughter of former Penobscot chief, Barry Dana (dedicated educator, artist, and preservationist of Penobscot culture). Maulian has been working for many years to end racism

toward indigenous people. Most recently, she led the political fight against the use of Indian mascots in schools—Maine was the first state in the nation to end the use of Indian mascots. She is a public speaker and human rights educator. She works with political representatives to submit bills to the Maine legislature, most recently about missing and murdered indigenous women and prosecution of non-tribal offenders.

Morning Workshops *(continued)*

Nature- and Place-based Mapping with Young Children

Kate Cass, Kindergarten Teacher, and **Sara Giuliano**, Second Grade Teacher, Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences, Gray, ME

Maps are of high interest to young children and help them make sense of their world. Providing opportunities for children to work with maps through play, construction and drawing serves to deepen their connection to their sacred places including home, school, and the natural world. In this workshop, participants will engage in play and exploration with 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional maps, create maps of important places, and interact with resources for putting mapping work into practice with young children in the indoor and outdoor classroom settings.

A How to Guide to Emergent Learning in Nature

Megan Vaillancourt, Lead PreK Teacher & Outdoor Learning Coordinator, and **Mattie Jernigan**, Lead Teacher, Educare Central Maine, Waterville, ME

Interested in building your program's emergent learning in nature? Do you have children in your care that love mud, worms, bugs, water, tree climbing? Are you unsure how to support their learning? Let's do the work to learn how to support their interests! Nature-based environments open up children's natural curiosity through their play, explorations, and asking questions. Join us in hands-on exploration and discussion on how to extend children's curiosity into emergent learning.



Educare Central Maine

Morning Workshops

Curriculum Learning...Outside! Implementing Literacy and Math in "Pop Up" Classrooms

Meg Kenter, Lower School Teacher, Berwick Academy, Berwick, ME

In this workshop, we will share pieces of writing and math curriculum that can be taught in outdoor pop-up classroom settings. We will explore the benefits of preparing curriculum kits to take on the go and demonstrate engaging outdoor lessons that align with curriculums. We will also focus on ways to bring nature learning inside to create anchor charts for future lessons and find developmentally appropriate ways to utilize technology to share nature learning with families at home. All lessons are inspired by various curriculums such as Wild Math and Primary Writing Success. (Somewhat geared toward teachers of K-2).

Coming Back Home: Routines of a Nature-based Educator

Amy Butler, teacher, educational consultant, and author of *Educating Children Outdoors—Lessons in Nature-Based Learning*, Jay, VT

Each day there are opportunities that can help us connect with the natural world. From the walk into the school building to our end of the day tasks, nature is inviting us into awareness with its patterns and seasonal rhythms that unfold around us. These moments can cultivate curiosity and awe that help us to rediscover our deep love for the world we live in. In this workshop, Amy will share nature-based routines that teachers can practice with students and colleagues that are nourishing and healing. Through guided experiential exercises and sharing stories in a supported circle, participants will dive deeper into what it means to create experiences that help us regenerate, connect, and belong.

Morning Workshops *(continued)*

Nature Art (and Spanish!) with Young Children

Vero Poblete-Howell, Arts and Spanish Language Educator, Camden, ME

Let's get messy! Young children love art and one of the most important things we can do is offer them creative experiences in nature daily. Now...how about in combination with another language? Arts educator, native Spanish speaker, and nature enthusiast, Vero Poblete-Howell, will facilitate a workshop where we combine the two. We will have the opportunity to have a visual art experience through the lens of our early childhood/early elementary students, and learn some Spanish along the way. ¡Ven - sé una artista en la naturaleza!

Supporting the Development of Executive Function through Outdoor Games

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

Research over the past decade suggests that it's more important to focus on the development of executive functions in preschool children than to focus on early literacy and math skills. But what is "executive function (EF)" anyway, how do you measure it, and what can you do to develop it? After a brief review of the research on EF in preschool children, we'll engage in an array of outdoor games (some traditional, some new), and we'll analyze how different components of the games develop different aspects of EF. Be ready to play Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, a variation of Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes, and other games used successfully in programs around the country.

Lunch

We enjoy treating you to a tasty and healthy lunch. Participants will have the opportunity to meet with other educators from Maine chapters of Inside Outside Nature-based Educators' network as well as have a conversation with Maine Early Childhood Outdoors' policy and advocacy group and Maine's DHHS/OCFS child care licensing specialists.

Co-Sponsors:



Registration Fees

Individual Working Professional	\$125
Group Rate.	\$100
(per person; 3 or more from the same school)	
AU students or alumni.	\$75

Afternoon Panel

Closing the Nature Gap at Educare Central Maine: A Vision for What is Possible

We live in a world full of natural wonders. Many children are afforded the opportunity to grow up in nature, but this is not the case for all. Young children living in poverty may face the daunting reality of limited access to safe and equitable outdoor experiences. During this panel discussion, you will learn why- and engage with how- one public-access school in Maine made the shift towards nature-based early education to help close the "nature gap" for the children and families it serves. Their passion for equitable access to nature for all children also helped to create Maine Early Childhood Outdoors - a statewide network of nature-based early childhood education advocates.

Educare Central Maine Panel of Teachers & Administrators

- Erica Palmer, Education Manager, KVCAP Child & Family Services
- Rhonda Kaiser, School Director
- Brittany Foss, Early Childhood Education Supervisor, KVCAP Child & Family Services
- Megan Vaillancourt, Lead Preschool Teacher and Nature-based Coordinator

Erica Palmer (moderator) currently works with KVCAP Child & Family Services as Education Manager for Educare Central Maine where she supports a program of 60 staff dedicated to providing an integrated approach to early childhood programming and parent, family, and community engagement. She has been working in the field of early childhood education for more than 12 years.

Rhonda Kaiser (panelist) has worked as a professor, coach, and trainer of early childhood professionals for 35 years. She currently serves as the School Director at Educare Central Maine. She believes that a positive and healthy school culture and climate is the foundation of a high-quality learning environment that creates the conditions for effective teaching and learning to occur.

Brittany Foss (panelist) started out at KVCAP as a teacher in an infant and toddler classroom. After earning a master's degree, Brittany moved into the coach and supervisor role for infant and toddler classrooms. She is also an adjunct faculty at KVCC and is a Maine Roads to Quality certified trainer.

Megan Vaillancourt (panelist) has been teaching preschool at Educare Central Maine for eight years. She is currently working on completing her Master's degree at the University of Maine, Farmington. Her teaching focus has been in the infant and toddler classrooms and she now serves as coach and supervisor there.



Afternoon Workshops

The First Blade of Sweetgrass: Weaving Wabanaki Ways of Life into Teaching Practice

Gabriel Frey, Passamaquoddy artist and traditional black ash basket maker, from Sipiak & currently living in traditional Penobscot territory

Join Passamaquoddy artist and traditional black ash basket maker, Gabriel Frey, as he walks through the steps of harvesting and processing the black ash tree for basket making. Gabriel will have physical examples from each step in the process to actively work with and sample. Participants are encouraged to ask questions about the process and we will create a conversation about ways to weave Wabanaki studies into our work with children. Gabriel will also read from the children's book he wrote with his wife, Suzanne Greenlaw, called *The First Blade of Sweetgrass*.

Nature Moves: Simple Strategies to Support Children's "Movement Diet"

Mae Corwin, Owner/Teacher, Sundara Yoga, Brunswick, ME

Come, move your body! We understand the important role of nutrition in learning, but what is a healthy "movement diet?" In this workshop, participants will learn simple ways to integrate diverse movements into the classroom. We will examine "movement diets" of modern students to understand how the wildness and innate abilities of children have changed over time. Drawing on movement traditions from around the world and rewilding practices, we will reverse-engineer motor skill milestones to support learning at any age. *This session will be experienced in such a way that people of any fitness level can participate. Dress comfortably to move through diverse landscapes.

Climate Education in the Early Years - Laying the Foundation

Seal Rossignol, Outdoor Learning Coordinator, Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences, Gray, ME & Education Director, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy, Norway, ME

Let's not shy away from climate education! There are many ways to prepare our children to understand the issues and be excited about the solutions- many of which they will be engaged with as young adults. Climate education in the early years is about laying the foundation- amplifying connections with nature and fostering an understanding of the inter-connection that exists among all living creatures. In this workshop, educators will engage with activities and resources that support developmentally appropriate content. Let's pull on our can-do pants, call on our love for the outdoors, and engage with our natural curiosity and empathy along the way.

Tours of the Sweatt-Winter ECE Center will be offered on Friday afternoon from 5:00-6:00pm at UMF. Tours of the Educare Central Maine facility will be after the conference from 4:00-5:00pm.

Exploration and Inquiry: Teaching Nature- & Place-Based Science (connected to NGSS standards)

Jasmine Smith, Founding Director, The Community for Place-Based Education, Bar Harbor, ME

How do educators model exploration and inquiry in place-based science teaching and learning? We need to be able to do this work whether we find ourselves in the school yard, neighborhood city park, or town forest. In this workshop, participants will go on a nearby early childhood/early elementary level expedition together. Then we will share, discuss, and craft meaningful, student-centered learning experiences that connect to NGSS standards- centering inquiry-based practices. Participants will leave with language, examples, and ideas to facilitate both planned and emergent science explorations, inside and out.

Let the Children Play! (But, What Are They Learning?)

Lisa Henderson, Co-Founder, Sprouts Farm & Forest Kindergarten, Millis, MA and Co-Facilitator, MSAD17 Pre-K Outdoor Professional Development, Oxford Hills, ME

Children learn through just about every experience they have in a day. Come to this workshop to explore first hand how children can build a strong foundation for learning through nature-immersive play! Participants will PLAY— explore, observe, build, balance, gather loose parts and more— in nature's classroom. We will share about the benefits of risky play, the importance of observation, and how to say yes to more kinds of playful learning. There will be handouts and ideas for implementation.

Increasing Accessibility: Mini Explorations in Nearby Nature

Annie Coaluca, Executive Director of Early Learning and Family Services, Bath Area Family YMCA, Bath, ME

If we can agree that access to the rest of nature is fundamental to our humanity, to our very being, it could open the way to a renewed ecological solidarity—an intertwining of human rights and the rights of all nature.

Richard Louv

The United Nations has determined that access to nature is a basic human right. We know about the vital importance of increasing accessibility to nature for children's well being and for equity in education. So, what can we do? One YMCA, play-based enrichment program - for children 18 months to 5 years old - practices mini explorations in nearby nature. With six classrooms, they also serve as the Bath public school district's preschool program. Participants will have the opportunity to experience "a day in the life" of the program, engage with activities, and learn outdoor routines. They will leave with practical takeaways and ideas for their own programs to increase accessibility: truly, nature for all.

Workshops will be selected at Registration on the morning of the conference.

REGISTER HERE

www.antioch.edu/annual-events/in-bloom-conferences