

# In Bloom in Vermont:

## Promising Practices in Nature-Based Early Childhood Education

Wednesday, June 10 2015  
Shelburne Farms  
Shelburne, Vermont

You're invited to our fourth year of **In Bloom** conferences. We'll be on our homeground at Antioch University New England in Keene, NH on May 14. In addition we'll convene exemplary early childhood educators from downtown to down on the farm in Boston on March 17, in New Haven, CT on April 25, and in Shelburne, VT on June 10. Each conference will have unique nationally (and internationally) recognized keynote speakers and unique workshops by local practitioners. All events will focus on the educational and health benefits of being outside with children.

### The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound

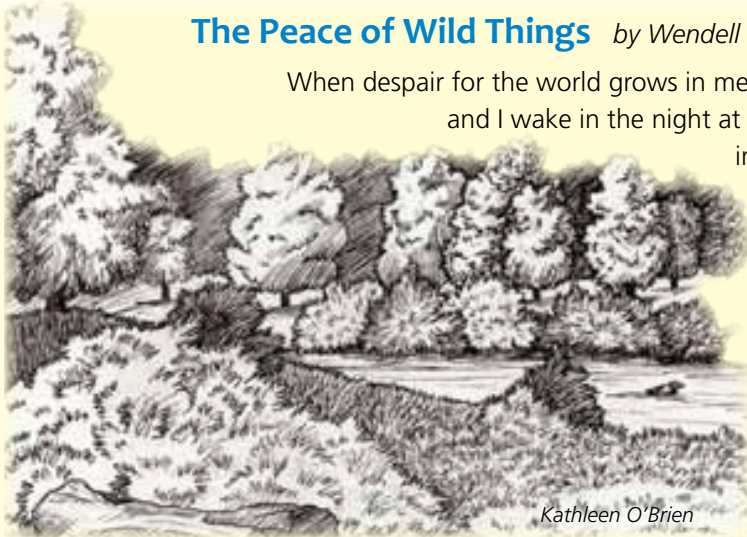
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.



Kathleen O'Brien

### Structure for the Day

- 8:15–9:00 Registration Check-In
- 9:00–9:10 Opening Circle
- 9:15–10:15 Morning Keynote – David Sobel  
**What Research Says: Comparing a Nature  
Preschool with a Traditional Preschool**
- 10:30–12:00 Morning Workshops
- 12:00–1:00 Lunch
- 1:00–2:00 Afternoon Keynote – Patti Bailie  
**Best Practices for Nature-Based Early  
Childhood Programs**
- 2:15–3:45 Afternoon Workshops
- 3:50–4:00 Closing Circle



### Overview

Come into the presence of still water and rest in the grace of the world at one of the 2015 **In Bloom** conferences. Nature preschools and forest kindergartens have flourished in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and Europe since the 1960s. In the last few decades they've started to take root throughout New England. Public school kindergartners in Vermont are spending one full day a week in the deep woods on Forest Fridays. Preschoolers are exploring naturalized play yards in New Haven. Children climb trees, make mudpies, whittle sticks, take care of animals AND expand their vocabularies, do real math, conduct investigations and develop resilience in nature-based programs. Learn from cutting edge educators who are redefining what's possible in early childhood education.

**9:00 – 9:10–Opening Circle**



## 9:15 - 10:15 – Morning Keynote: What Research Says: Comparing a Nature Preschool with a Traditional Preschool

David Sobel, Antioch University New England, Keene, New Hampshire

There's a small, but emergent, body of literature about the impacts of nature-based early childhood programming on children's health, physical development, social/emotional development and readiness for school. Much of the research has been done in Europe and now there are a few studies emerging in North America. David will share the surprising findings from a recently completed study conducted in Midland, Michigan. A comparison of a nature pre-school and a high quality, more indoors-oriented preschool generated some results that resonated with the European findings and other findings that left us puzzled. After a presentation of the findings, audience members will be asked to suggest new research initiatives.



## 10:30 - 12:00 – Morning Workshops

### Patch of Sunlight in a Wood

Joplin James, Kindergarten Teacher, Shelburne Community School, Shelburne, Vermont

Join Joplin James and his enthusiastic kindergartners in their Outdoor Classroom, a special place in the forest near Shelburne Community School that infuses their learning as they observe the subtle incremental changes through the seasons. The children will share what happens as they take their school work outside under the canopy of trees and demonstrate their investigative skills: making observations, measuring, recording, and making predictions and hypotheses. As adults, we can observe how the complex brain of the child is engaged by being in such a dynamic setting. As C. S. Lewis says, "Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy."



### Reflecting on Spiritual Moments in Nature

Patti Bailie, Early Childhood Education, University of Maine at Farmington and Deborah Schein, Early Childhood Education at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont

Spirituality is a system of spiritual development that provides a force that connects us with the natural world. This workshop will provide opportunities for participants to explore the connection between spiritual development and nature in order to intentionally provide experiences for young children that recognize spiritual moments in nature. Participants will also have the opportunity to reflect on their own spiritual moments in and with nature through guided hikes and journaling. We will spend most of our time outdoors so dress for the weather.



### Farm to Fire: Harvesting, Processing, Cooking, and Feasting Around the Fire in the Outdoor Classroom

Jed Norris, Early Childhood Program Coordinator, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont

Access and harvest some of the bounty from the farm! We will be experiencing the educational garden through the senses of a young child, harvesting our food, and then moving to the outdoor classroom. We will build a fire together, process our foraged bounty, and make ourselves a feast. Come experience a typical day working with preschool aged children in our outdoor classroom and creating food over the open fire. We will be discussing the spontaneity of the space, the commitment of children to engage with creating their own food, all while gathering around our fire to enjoy our feast.

### Early Childhood Programs at the Sustainability Academy: Nature-based Curriculum in an Urban Public School

Kestrel Plump, Early Childhood Education Fellow, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont

This workshop/learning journey will take place at the Sustainability Academy (SA) in Burlington, VT where we will tour the school and discuss how to integrate nature-based curriculum into a public school setting. We will also talk about nature-based play in an urban setting and then move physically into the garden spaces. There we will explore what plants work well to grow with young children and experiment with different ways beyond weeding and watering to include the garden in your curriculum. We will discuss making simple herbal medicine with preschoolers and common first aid plants that we find in the school lawn.

**Morning Workshops**  
(continued on next page)





## 10:30 - 12:00 – Morning Workshops

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### Bugs and Slugs

*Ellen Doris, Antioch University New England, Keene, New Hampshire*

Children encounter bugs, slugs, and a host of other tiny creatures in the course of everyday explorations. Some kids respond with fascination, while others are tentative or even fearful. Either way, adults can encourage children to deepen their acquaintance with creepy crawlies through focusing on ways to find, catch, and care for them. In this session we'll hone our own bug-catching skills, learn to identify some common mini-beasts, and consider ways to facilitate children's investigations. We'll also focus on ways to make outdoor spaces more bug-friendly, how to accommodate bug guests indoors, and concerns about ticks, mosquitos and other pesky bugs.



## 12:00 - 1:00–Lunch



## 2:15-3:45–Afternoon Workshops

### The Use of Tools and Fire in the Forest Classroom

*Amy Butler and Mary Zentara, Teacher Naturalists, North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, Vermont*

Offer young children the opportunity to gather around a fire in the forest and to use real tools to cut, hammer or build and you've got a rich modality for teaching that is sure to stimulate learning. This past fall at the North Branch Nature Center's Forest Preschool, a child was drawn to make a xylophone out of sticks. We set to work using saws and collaboratively created our own musical instrument. This process encapsulated an emergent and child-led curriculum in an outdoor setting, all the while weaving in literacy, math, science and fine motor skills for preschool and kindergarten age students.

### Professional Learning Communities in Nature-based Early Childhood

*Jen Brown, Naturalist/Educator, Four Winds Nature Institute, Chittendon, Vermont*

Allowing the space and time for unstructured outdoor play in education can be a paradigm shift for teachers, administrators and parents alike. Creating a support network of like-minded professionals fosters community, collaboration, commitments and change. In this workshop, we'll follow a group of early childhood professionals as they participated

## 1:00-2:00–Afternoon Keynote

### Best Practices for Nature-Based Early Childhood Programs

*Patti Bailie, is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Maine at Farmington. and a faculty member in Antioch New England's Nature-based Early Childhood Certificate program. She was the founding director of the Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*



Nature preschools and forest kindergartens provide nature experiences for young children unlike those found at most traditional preschools. They offer a model for integrating nature into an early childhood curriculum and they infuse developmentally appropriate practice into environmental education programs. The variety of nature-based early childhood programs continues to expand. But what makes a program nature-based and how do we know if it is of high quality? Using the Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool and other similar programs as examples, this presentation will shed light on best practices for nature-based early childhood programs and introduce a newly designed rubric that has been used to determine the quality and amount of nature in a program.

in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for one year and shared thoughts, ideas, concerns, inspirations and most importantly, support with one another.

Through outdoor activities, visualizations, photos, videos, written materials and conversations with some of the PLC participants, we'll share the atmosphere of this unique professional development experience and its lasting impact on allowing more children access to frequent outdoor play.

### The Forest Fridays Program in a Vermont Kindergarten

*Eliza Minnucci, Kindergarten Teacher and Meg Teachout, Outdoor Educator Ottauquechee School, Quechee, Vermont*

Eliza and Meg will take you through a sample day in their public school Forest Kindergarten program. Learn the rhythms and routines they've developed to provide students with teacher directed and independent exploration time in a wild space. Participate in outdoor science, math and literacy activities and have a chance to learn how you too might implement a one-day-per-week Forest program in your school. We'll spend the session outdoors, just as we do with our students. We'll also make time to describe how we fund our program and to answer your questions about getting started in your educational setting. Bring your enthusiasm for the outdoors and clothing appropriate for the weather.

## 2:15-3:45-Afternoon Workshops



### Elephant in the Field: A Farm and Nature-based School

**Marlena Tucker-Fishman**, Founder of Elephant in the Field and **Linda Wellings**, Facilitator of Wonder, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont

Marlena Tucker-Fishman founder of Elephant in the Field in Waterbury VT, will use the Market Garden at Shelburne Farms to share how she integrates their family farm into a full-day holistic education facility, farm camp, and after-school program serving children from birth-12 years old. The workshop will explore how raising animals and managing a farmstead can create an immersive program for young children. Marlena will use the garden as her classroom, starting the day with African drumming and dance, following interests of the group to experience a day at Elephant in the Field.



As nature-based early childhood programs aspire to have children outside every day in all kinds of weather, we'll have a mix of indoor and outdoor activities. Please come prepared to be outside even if it's cold and rainy—waterproof boots, raincoats, rainpants, and mittens might be necessary to keep you comfortable.

A healthy lunch is included in the registration fees. If you have dietary restrictions please include that information in the 'special needs' space in the registration login.



 The Coach Barn at Shelburne Farms • 802-985-8686

### Go Outside and Play

**Jean Coffey** Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Children's Hospital at Dartmouth and Clinical Assistant Professor, Geisel School of Medicine, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

Free, unstructured play in nature has been shown to be beneficial for a child's physical and mental health. Children who spent time outdoors on a daily basis were noted to have less stress and improved self worth (Wells and Evans, 2003). Children who have a nature deficit due to overscheduling in organized activities and being tethered to technology lose the connection to the outdoors and put their health at risk. Childhood obesity has taken the spotlight as one such health risk for children. The effort made to get children outside and away from unhealthy food and screens (TV, computer etc.) may play a critical role in reducing obesity and therefore promoting health. The prevalence of overweight was demonstrated to be up to 40% lower among children who spent time outdoors. (Cleland, et al, 2008) If started at a young age, engaging in free unstructured play in nature could cultivate healthy habits children can carry into adulthood. This seminar will explore the current literature on the value of a nature experience and strategies to facilitate nature experiences for children.



### 3:50-4:00 Closing Circle

This event is sponsored by:



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**Registration Fee: \$75**  
**AUNE Alumni Fee \$50**  
**Sponsor Fee: \$50**

(Staff of Four Winds Nature Institute and Shelburne Farms)

For more information, contact Peg Smeltz at Antioch University New England, [msmeltz@antioch.edu](mailto:msmeltz@antioch.edu), 603-283-2301. To register, visit our website at: <http://www.antiochne.edu/in-bloom-2015>