



North Branch Nature Center

# In Bloom in Vermont: Promising Practices in Nature-based Early Childhood Education Monday, June 13, 2016 Shelburne Farms 1611 Harbor Road, Shelburne, Vermont

After hosting two Spring **In Bloom** conferences in Maine and New Hampshire we travel to Vermont. On Monday, June 13, we'll convene exemplary Vermont early childhood educators from downtown to down on the farm for **In Bloom in Vermont**. Please also tell any West Coast friends to keep their eyes open for **In Bloom in Santa Barbara** on November 5, 2016. Each conference will feature unique nationally recognized keynote speakers and workshops by local practitioners. All events will focus on the educational and health benefits of children being in the natural world.



Colleen Millon



Bob Baile

“Every child should have mud pies, grasshoppers, waterbugs, tadpoles, frogs, mud-turtles, elderberries, wild strawberries, acorns, chestnuts, trees to climb, brooks to wade, water-lilies, woodchucks, bats, bees, butterflies, various animals to pet, hayfields, pine-cones, rocks to roll, sand, snakes, huckleberries, and hornets; and any child who has been deprived of these has been deprived of the best part of his education.”

*Luther Burbank*

Come make mud pies, collect wild strawberries, roll rocks and wander hayfields at one of the **2016 In Bloom** conferences. New nature preschools and forest kindergartens are cropping up each year in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. There's a flurry of preschool, and public school kindergarten and elementary teachers implementing Forest Days—one day a week in the woods not far from their schools. Children stomp in puddles, whittle sticks, paint their faces with charcoal, 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.

*This event is co-sponsored by:  
Shelburne Farms, Four Winds Nature Institute,  
North Branch Nature Center and the  
George B. Storer Foundation.*

## Structure of the Day

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 8:15 am – 9:00 am     | Registration Check-In |
| 9:00 am – 9:10 am     | Opening Circle        |
| 9:15 am – 10:15 am    | Morning Keynote       |
| 10:30 am – 12:00 noon | Morning Workshops     |
| 12:00 noon–1:00 pm    | Lunch                 |
| 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm     | Afternoon Keynote     |
| 2:15 pm – 3:45 pm     | Afternoon Workshops   |
| 3:50 pm – 4:00 pm     | Closing Circle        |

## 9:15 - 10:15 Morning Keynote:

### Early Childhood Environmental Education: Policy Progress with an Eye Toward the Future

**Linda Rhoads, Executive Director,  
Alliance for Childhood, Annapolis, Maryland**

Yes—a policy overview can be exciting! With a growing emphasis on the importance of early childhood education, what are the implications for outdoor and environmental education for young children? There is energy and momentum to support getting little ones outside and Linda will share her perspective on the national policy landscape; the implications on practice; and opportunities for nature-based early childhood programs to have a voice in the conversation.

*Linda Rhoads has worked to promote the value of outdoor and environmental education for more than 15 years. In a variety of roles, she has led successful advocacy campaigns resulting in the passage of bipartisan education legislation at both the state and federal levels. These policy successes were due in large part to her leadership through regional workshops, summits and one-on-one coaching of individuals to strengthen their advocacy skills for greater effectiveness and impact. Linda is focused on strengthening and empowering adult leaders who are working on creative ways to get kids outdoors.*



## 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."

### Why We Build Fires:

### Cultivating Attention, Observation and Tenderness by Teaching with Fire

**Amy Butler, Director of Education, North Branch  
Nature Center, Montpelier, Vermont**

In this workshop we will look closely at how to bring the building and tending of a fire into a daily practice of teaching. Through sharing circles, art, imaginative play, singing and storytelling the foundations of fire safety and awareness can be empowering lifelong lessons for children. We will discuss and practice techniques for introducing fire safety in a school setting and what these unique learning experiences afford both students and teachers.

### Nurturing through Nature: Beginning a Nature-based Program at Home

**Laura Branca, Little Birch Nature Preschool,  
Johnson, Vermont**

We'll begin by experiencing a few ways teachers and business owners can stay nurtured through nature. Using walking meditations, earthing, and sit spots, we'll learn to take care of ourselves so we have more to offer the world. We'll then look at some of the nitty-gritty steps in establishing a nature-based preschool including creating a business plan and budget, advertising, licensing, policies, parent communication and curriculum. Bring your questions and experiences to share.



## 10:30 - 12:00 Morning Workshops

### Where Did My Shadow Go?

**Hannah Lindner-Finley**, Kindergarten Teacher,  
The Gordon School, East Providence, Rhode Island

What is a shadow? Why do shadows change directions? What happens to shadows on rainy days? How many shadows can we find together? Can we make our shadows change shape or color? What are some important strategies for shadow tag, and why do they work?

These are some of many questions we will explore while learning to facilitate scientific inquiry for young children outdoors. During this class, you will learn strategies for balancing exuberant discovery with focused reflection. You will also gather many ideas for exploring shadows with children in any setting—indoors or out!

### Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Gentle: Cultivating Care and Responsibility Through Authentic Nature Play

**Jen Brown**, Naturalist/Educator, Four Winds Nature Institute, Chittendon, Vermont, and  
**Joanne Pye**, Early Childhood and Special Educator, formerly at Caverly Preschool, Pittsford, Vermont

As children, we develop a love and appreciation for nature through wonder-filled hours of outdoor play: building fairy houses, climbing trees, catching fireflies, and watching clouds. This kind of authentic nature play also fosters children's problem solving and communication skills, helps to relieve stress, encourages creativity, promotes physical activity and allows space and time for practicing care and responsibility for others, ourselves and the natural world. Together, let's venture outdoors to learn about the adult role in nature play and try some language that can help to manage behavior and nurture children's curiosity, compassion and confidence.

## 12:00 noon- Lunch

Pick up a lunch and wander outdoors to enjoy a picnic on the lovely grounds of Shelburne Farms. Lunch is included!

## 1:00 - 2:00 Afternoon Keynote

### Helping Heroes: No Hero Too Small

**Charles Winkleman**, Preschool Teacher,  
Burlington Children's Space,  
Burlington, Vermont

It's a bird...it's a plane...it's a Helping Hero! Outfitted with costumes, trash bags, and garden gloves, the Helping

Heroes is a child-directed civic-oriented curriculum at Burlington Children's Space. Learn how it came to be, and how building connections between children, teachers, and the Burlington community helped engrain children in their community, giving them a strong sense of purpose. From picking up trash to writing letters to the legislature and saving endangered species, no job is too big or small for the Helping Heroes.

**Charles Winkleman** received his degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Vermont in 2011. As a civically and politically minded person, he has worked with many local community organizations to enrich the lives of children. Charles currently serves on the city's library commission and is the chair of the Burlington Progressive Party. He resides in Burlington, Vermont, and has spent several years performing improv and standup comedy.



## 2:15 - 3:45 Afternoon Workshops

### Language Development and Nature Education

**David Sobel**, Senior Faculty, Antioch University New England, Keene, New Hampshire

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, create and go on mini adventures and enact lots of active verbs.

## 2:15 - 3:45 Afternoon Workshops

### Early Childhood Guidelines for Excellence in Early Childhood Environmental Education

*Linda Rhoads, Executive Director, Alliance for Childhood, Annapolis, Maryland*

The Early Childhood Guidelines for Excellence in Environmental Education synthesize the best thinking in the field and serve as a valuable resource for assessing existing programs and designing new opportunities for young children. This workshop will explore key principles for environmental learning with young children including unstructured play, developmentally appropriate practices, outdoor space characteristics, and professional development for educators.

### Giving Community Voice to Our Youngest Citizens through Service Learning

*Jed Norris, Early Childhood Program Coordinator, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, and Charles Winkleman, Preschool Teacher, Burlington Children's Space, Burlington, Vermont*

This workshop provides an opportunity to engage with colleagues around curriculum themes of community and mapmaking. Our communities are rich in resources, yet we often miss out on how and what children can offer to their communities. Children are naturally tuned in to their communities, and we will examine how children use dramatic play to explore community themes, and how you can support your students towards civic engagement. This time together will allow participants space for reflection, facilitated small group discussion, large group discussion, and engagement in a service learning project for Shelburne Farms.

### Cooking in the Mud Kitchen

*Mary Zentara, Lead Forest Preschool Teacher, North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, Vermont*

Do you have memories of making mud pies as a child? Join us as we reconnect with our childhood and get busy cooking in the mud kitchen. Mud has been a foundational, sensory learning medium for young children throughout the ages. By providing two truly intriguing terrestrial elements, earth and water (and a whole host of other natural materials) in a culinary, outdoor setting, you cook up a dynamic, developmentally appropriate learning environment. Earth and water, along with pots and pans, connect domestic side of life with many wonders of the natural world. Come cook in the mud kitchen, learn how to set up your own, and find out about the numerous benefits of mud exploration and authentic play.



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### Forest Days: One Day, Every Week, All Year, Outside!

*Eliza Minnucci and Meg Teachout, Teachers, Ottauquechee School, Hartford, Vermont*

At the Ottauquechee School in Hartford, Vermont, we take our public school kindergarten classes to the forest one day, every week, all year. We'll share how we got started, the routines that work for us, and a few of our favorite activities. If you are interested in the idea of a Forest Day for your class, we'll give you the confidence and logistics to get started. Our workshop will follow the rhythm of our Forest Day. Of course, we plan to head outside, so dress for the weather!

## 3:50 - 4:00 Closing Circle

#### Registration Fees:

Working Professional – \$100

Group Discount: 3 from same organization – \$75

AUNE Alumni & Co-sponsors – \$75

AUNE Students – \$50

Thank You to our co-sponsors!



For more information and to register, visit our website: [www.antiochne.edu/in-bloom-2016/](http://www.antiochne.edu/in-bloom-2016/). Questions? Contact Peg Smeltz at Antioch University New England, [m-smeltz@antioch.edu](mailto:m-smeltz@antioch.edu), 603-283-2301.