

ROOTED IN PLAY: The Power of Place

A Conference for Early Childhood Educators — Current and Pre-service



June 1-3, 2023

Touch of Nature Outdoor Education Center

Experience Place-Based Education in a nature inspired environment.

This is an experiential conference focusing on a place-based approach inspired by educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. This conference will provide information and hands-on learning opportunities to support participants, whether you are a novice, an experimenter or an expert in your journey. Breakout sessions will engage you in these practices and provide application strategies. The conference begins on Thursday, June 1st at the Touch of Nature Outdoor Education Center in Carbondale, Illinois. Participants may check-in and settle into their cabins between 1:00 and 4:00 on Thursday, June 1, 2023. Participants who register for all three days may enjoy any and all of the activities noted in the program. One-day registrants will join us Saturday morning, June 3, 2023, for the day's activities.

Highlights:

- Twenty \$6,000 competitive awards to support place-based classrooms for will be given to 3-day conference participants (applications are due by May 25th)
- Collaborative events to cultivate your wonder
- Gateway Registry and CEU approved conference

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



David Sobel

Dr. David Sobel is a Professor Emeritus in the Education Department at Antioch University New England in Keene, New Hampshire; he consults and speaks widely on child development and place-based education with schools, environmental organizations, and the National Park Service. He has authored ten books and more than 90 articles focused on children and nature for educators, parents, environmentalists and school administrators.

He has served on the editorial boards of *Encounter*, *Community Works Journal*, *Orion Afield*, and *Green Schools Catalyst Quarterly*. His articles and essays have appeared in *Orion*, *Encounter*, *Sierra*, *Sanctuary*, *Wondertime*, *Green Teacher*, *Play Rights*, *Educational Leadership*, and the *Harvard Education Letter*. His published books include *Beyond Ecophobia* and *Place-based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities* published by the Orion Society, *Childhood and Nature: Design Principles for Educators* to be reissued in 2023, and *Wild Play, Parenting Adventures in the Great Outdoors*, published by Green Writers Press. He was recognized as one of the Daring Dozen educational leaders in the United States in 2007 by *Edutopia* magazine. [Best Bike Rides in New England](#) is his first bike travel guide and he hopes it's the first of many bike guidebooks.

Rachel Larimore

Dr. Rachel Larimore is an educator, speaker, consultant, researcher, and author. Her work focuses on the intentional integration of nature to support young children's holistic development by learning with nature to expand their worlds and live rich, full lives. She has written multiple books including *Establishing a Nature-Based Preschool*, *Preschool Beyond Walls: Blending Early Childhood Education and Nature-Based Learning*, and the newly published *Evaluating Nature: Evaluating Natureness: Measuring the Quality of Nature-Based Classrooms Pre-K Through 3rd Grade*. Rachel is founder and Chief Visionary of Samara Early Learning, an organization focused on helping early childhood educators start nature-based schools or add nature-based approaches into their existing program.



Lisa Daly



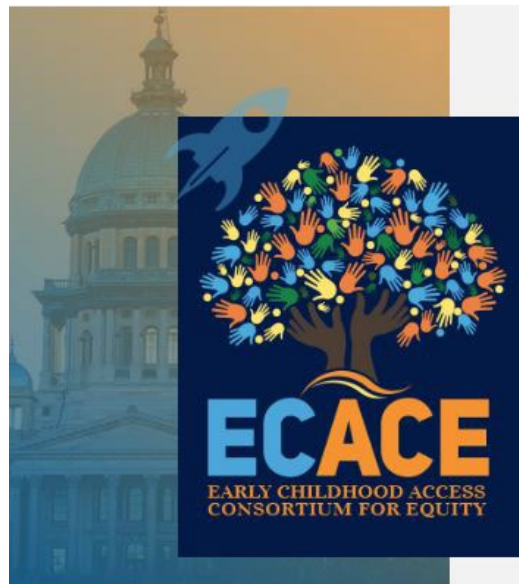
Lisa Daly is passionate about transforming early learning to deepen meaningful experiences and connections, innovation, creativity, and reflection. Her professional work is centered around collaborating with educators to shift teaching approaches and transform learning environments to support children's identities, inquiry, and engagement. Lisa is professor emerita of early childhood education at Folsom Lake College, a child and family advocate, author, consultant, and presenter. Lisa has over 40 years of service as a classroom educator and administrator in preschool, parent co-operative, and college lab settings. She has co-authored *Early Learning Theories Made Visible*, the award-winning, internationally published *Loose Parts* series, and authored *Transforming Your Outdoor Early Learning Environment* and *Loose Parts in Action* (2023 release) with Redleaf Press.

Saturday, June 3, 2023

1 day Conference Schedule

8:00	Registration
8:30-8:50	Welcome
9:00-11:30	Concurrent Sessions
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:50	Concurrent Sessions
2:00-3:00	Keynote: Lisa Daly

The Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity grant provided initial funding for this conference. Additional funding for the conference was secured from Illinois Star Net, Child Care Resource and Referral, and Southern Illinois University.



Saturday, June 3rd

Registration & Check-in

8:00 am

Opening Session: **Setting the Stage**

8:30 am

Christie McIntyre. Join us in welcoming our one-day participants.

Morning Workshops

9:00 – 11:30 am

Transforming Outdoor Environments

Lisa Daly. Imagine a world where all children have access to outdoor play spaces that are captivating, challenging, minimally structured, and open-ended. This presentation provides a framework for designing and maintaining successful outdoor play spaces on a limited budget that sustain true play for young children. Be amazed by intriguing spaces, stories, and visual images of before and after outdoor environment transformations.

The Way of the Paddle

Steve Garipey. Teaching outdoors is a gift, and teaching on the water is a greater gift! Join me on beautiful Little Grassy Lake for an interpretive paddle to consider the power of teaching the body and the brain together and how we can work together to get children on the water. On the water programs in Experiential and Environmental education have deep roots at SIUC/Little Grassy Lake that are even more relevant now than they were in 1970 when Touch of Nature Environmental Center was awarded as one of 11 National Environmental Education Landmarks. Even new brain research is showing our brains are more active on/in the water. The session will be fun, informative, and educational. Paddle on a glacial lake—no experience necessary! Outdoor clothing that can get wet including a shade hat, notebook and writing utensil. Personal flotation devices and paddles provided.

Math, Loose Parts, and Nature

Carla Gull. Nature is full of patterns, cycles, shapes, and numeric opportunities. Take a walk outside with a mathematical lens to discover possibilities. Observe how children naturally experiment with mathematical concepts as part of outdoor play. Notice counting (as children gathered 1, 2, 3, 4 sticks), matching of elements (leaves that were the same), application of geometric shapes (creating rectangles for a house), sequencing (working through the order of the tasks they planned out), symmetry, and understanding perimeter. Nature provides many non-standard examples to deal with complexities. Explore related tools and books to connect nature, loose parts, and mathematics.

Fostering Meaningful Investigations Through Play and Provocation

Kasey Kile and Kodo Kids Colleagues. Learn to differentiate activities, explorations, and investigations. Explore how to expand activities and explorations into meaningful investigations that foster mature play, cognitive development, and critical thinking. Learn 6 provocation styles as instructional strategies to support and intentionally design an investigation-based learning experience for children.

Language Development, Nature and Movement

David Sobel. 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.

Devils in the Details: Shifting Practice Toward Teaching with Nature: Learning from the Nature-Based Early Childhood Education Movement

Rachel Larimore. Does all this nature-based education stuff sound good in theory, but you have questions about HOW to make it happen? Then this is the session for you! This session will help providers, no matter their situation, identify concrete ways to better integrate nature into your program structure, physical environment (inside and outside), and teacher-child interactions.

Lunch

11:30 am

Afternoon Workshops

12:30 – 1:50 pm

Turkey, Salamanders, and Frogs, Oh My! Hands-on and Playful Animal Experiences

Carla Gull. Investigate the logistics of why we might connect children to animals, addressing concerns around connecting to animals, safety issues, and legal considerations. Learn the basics of creating and enhancing the habitat for animals, adding tools to study animals, consider policies, seasonal considerations, and developing nature table collections. Explore how to find evidence of animals in the wild, bringing animals to the classroom, taking field trips including animals, and embracing animal play as part of the classroom through tools, technology, and resources.

Forest Bathing to Promote Wellness

Lea Maue. Learn how to immerse yourself mindfully and intentionally in the surrounding nature/place. Forest bathing, based on the Japanese practice of “Shinrin-Yoku” allows practitioners to step away from the stress of life to promote overall wellness. This session consists of a brief history of forest bathing and its benefits, a forest bathing experience, and connections to place-based classroom practices. Please bring your journal included in your conference bag.

A Tale of Two Cities: Reggio Emilia, Italy and Carbondale, Illinois

Christie McIntyre. How does experiencing place-based education in Regio Emilia, Italy inform teaching practices in Carbondale, Illinois? Travel with me to Italy. Discover how Malaguzzi’s vision of place-based learning inspired early childhood educators around the world for 80 years. Participants will engage in “thinking by design” as they consider how learning about nature is made visible in the early childhood classrooms throughout southern Illinois.

Leave No Trace: Basics for Sustainable Outdoor Experiences

Sydney Pogue. This session will introduce attendees to the fundamental principles of Leave No Trace, a set of ethical guidelines for minimizing human impact on natural spaces. Participants will learn practical tips for reducing waste, preserving natural resources, and respecting wildlife while enjoying the great outdoors. Through interactive activities and case studies, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the importance of Leave No Trace and how it can enhance their outdoor experiences.

Creating Classroom Materials Using Nature

Melissa Viernow, Patty Davis, and Amanda Sullivan. We have all scrolled social media sites and seen those Pinterest-worthy, nature-inspired classrooms full of beautiful, natural materials. We have dreamed of the many ways we could incorporate them in our own classrooms knowing benefits they would have for children’s learning. But what if your program doesn’t have the funds to purchase those materials? This session empowers participants to tap into their inner artist and carpenter to create natural learning materials for the classroom and playground. Come prepared to craft a variety of pieces that will offer alternatives to commercially produced early childhood products typically found on the market.

Play, Stay, Think Here – Environments that Foster Investigation

Kasey Kile and Kodo Kids Colleagues. Through anecdotal stories, discussion, photographs, and practical experiential activities, we will set up and use the environment as a third teacher, present open-ended materials and loose parts. to foster investigations that broaden and deepen children's critical and design thinking skills.

Closing Keynote: Lisa Daly

2:00 – 3:00 pm

Rooted in Play: Reflection, Inspiration, and Next Steps Where do I go from here? When it comes to transforming spaces, educators are often stumped about where to begin, uncertain about what to do and how to do it, lacking inspiration, or unable to visualize creative solutions. In this closing session, learn how to dream big while starting small with what you have.