

# 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 25<sup>th</sup>)
- 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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) in Red Leaf Press.

# Thursday, June 1 – Saturday, June 3, 2023

## DAY 1

### Thursday, June 1st

1:00-4:00	Check-in & Settle-in
2:00-4:00	CDL Tours
5:00-6:30	Keynote: David Sobel
6:30-8:00	BBQ Dinner
8:00-9:00	Bonfire & Music

## Day 2

### Friday, June 2nd

6:30-7:00	Sunrise Yoga
7:30-8:30	Breakfast
9:00-10:00	Keynote: Rachel Larrimore
10:10-12:00	Concurrent Sessions
12:00-12:50	Lunch
1:00-4:00	Concurrent Sessions
4:30-6:30	Recreation Activities
6:30-7:30	Dinner
7:30-8:30	Black Light Night Hike
8:00-9:00	Sip & Paint

## Day 3

### Saturday, June 3rd

6:30-7:00	Sunrise Yoga
7:30-8:30	Breakfast
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

## DAY 1: Thursday, June 1<sup>st</sup>

### Pre-Conference Activity

2:00 and 3:00 pm

#### SIU Child Development Lab Tours

We encourage all who are available to join one of the Pre-Conference Tours of the Child Development Lab at Southern Illinois University. The first tour group will leave Touch of Nature on a bus at 2:00 and the second group will leave Touch of Nature on a bus at 3:00. The Child Development Lab embraces a Reggio Emilia Approach to instruction while integrating the beauty of the Shawnee National Forest in the classroom environment.



### Opening Keynote: David Sobel

5:00 pm

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

In conjunction with researchers in Michigan and Minnesota, David has collaborated on research comparing 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. Research was conducted in private nature preschools, publicly funded Head Start 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!"

### Dinner in Freeburg Hall

6:30 pm



#### Evening Activity:

#### Campfire and Music by Matt Basler

8:00 pm



## DAY 2: Friday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Morning Activity: Yoga with Joan**

6:30 am

**Breakfast in Freeburg Hall**

7:30 am

**Friday Keynote: Rachel Larimore**

9:00 – 10:00 am

### **Playing Beyond Walls: Leveraging the Power of Outdoor Play in Early Childhood**

“Children learn through play!” “Children need to be outside more!” These are common phrases in early childhood education. But why does play and outdoor time matter? And how do we integrate play-based, nature-based, and developmentally appropriate practices in our teaching all at once? These can be overwhelming questions. This keynote will address why play based and nature-based approaches are critical for both children and our communities. Then, using a continuum of nature-based early childhood education, she will provide the group with concrete ways, no matter your starting point, to better integrate nature into your program structure, physical environment, and teacher-child interactions. You’ll leave smiling, energized, and ready to change the world!

**Morning Workshops**

10:10 – 12:00 am

### **Supporting the Development of Executive Function through Outdoor Games**

David Sobel. 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 will 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, and Toes and other games used successfully around the country.

### **Communicating with Parents about the Nature-Based Approach**

Rachel Larimore. Implementing a nature-based approach can bring challenges such as communicating with families about the value of such a program. Yet it’s important for families to have a buy-in for your approach. This workshop session will provide ideas for engaging and connecting with potential and current families.

### **Journaling with Young Learners to Draw Connections in Nature**

Grant Miller. Get outside. Draw. Reflect. Connect. Nature journaling with young children can emphasize key concepts in science, mathematics, and (especially) social studies. Join us on a trek through the woods and participate in ways nature journals can introduce learners to core concepts and themes central to social studies and the inquiry process.

### **Place-Based Learning = Learning is Everywhere**

Jill Raisor and Simone Nance. Research based practices and technology enhanced activities demonstrating learning inside and outside of the classroom will be detailed. The presenters will share real-world learning activities which model all six principles of place-based learning.

### **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.

### **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.

Lunch in Freeburg Hall

12:00 - 12:50 pm

## Afternoon Workshops

1:00 – 4:00 pm

### Using Small Worlds to Promote Children’s Language and Literacy Competencies

Lisa Daly. Small world play is an imaginative play experience for children that involves miniature playscapes and imaginative play. In the presentation, Lisa shares the value of small world play to enhance children’s competencies. Fascinating stories and captivating photographs are shared of small world examples and how they support a strong foundation for emerging language, communication, and literacy competence in school and beyond. Also revealed is how play with small worlds supports English language learners and strengthens family connections. Lisa walks through the essential components, resources, and step-by-step guidelines for creating small worlds.

### Connecting the Learner to the Landscape

Steve Garipey. It is time to re-connect a generation of young learners to the natural systems and landscapes of the planet. Developing integral relationships between children and the planet takes intention, planning, and cooperation, but it is vital to the future of the planet. The SIU STEM Center is working to bridge the worlds of formal classroom education and the non-formal education professions to create a paradigm where all worlds, including the learners and educators, benefit through connecting to place. Join me for an interpretive hike on the Rocky Ledges Educational Trail to explore and discuss these matters and help enact a plan to implement existing techniques, strategies, and resources to move all education toward including place-based intentions and outcomes. Outdoor clothing, trail shoes, notebook and writing utensil.

### Distinguishing Between Outdoor Hazards, Risks, and Fears

Rachel Larimore. There are many safety considerations when taking children outdoors, particularly when going beyond the play area. This session will discuss the differences between hazards, risks, and fears related to plants, animals, weather, and humans. We’ll also discuss teacher-child interactions to support safe outdoor adventures.

### Using Nature Scavenger Hunts with Young Learners to Promote Curiosity and Wonder

Lea Maue. Participants will take part in an on-site scavenger hunt exploring physical, earth, and life sciences concepts through an interactive and collaborative approach. Be prepared to trek and explore followed by opportunities to describe, collaborate, and share in this interactive and hands-on session. All materials will be provided.

### 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.

### Leave No Trace

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.

Recreation Activities

4:30 - 6:30 pm

Dinner and Scholarship Awards

6:30 - 7:30 pm

Evening Activities:

7:30 - 8:30 pm

**Black Light Night Hike**

7:30 - 8:30 pm

Touch of Nature Outdoor Education Center offers a unique and exhilarating night-hike program that allows participants to explore the beauty and mystery of nature under the stars. Led by experienced guides, the program takes hikers through the wooded trails of the Shawnee National Forest, where they will encounter a variety of nocturnal wildlife and experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the forest after dark. The hike culminates in a stunning view of the stars and where hikers can relax and share stories of their adventure. This unforgettable experience is perfect for nature enthusiasts, outdoor adventurers, and anyone looking for a thrilling and memorable night out in the woods.

**Sip and Paint**

8:00 – 9:00 pm

Join artist, Emma Metz, for an evening of representing nature through acrylics. A cash bar will be available and acrylic art materials will be provided.

**DAY 3: Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> or 1-day conference****Morning Activity: Sunrise Yoga with Joan**

6:30 am

**Breakfast in Freeburg Hall**

7:30 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.

### Devil's 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.

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### 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.

*Thank  
You*



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