

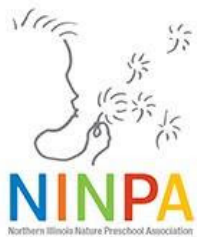
Midwest Early Childhood Educators Symposium

Lessons from the Forest: How Great Programs Place Nature at the Heart of the Curriculum

June 1, 2019

The Morton Arboretum, Thornhill Education Center
4100 Illinois Route 53, Lisle, Illinois

Presented in partnership by



Questions and Assistance

If you need assistance during the conference, the staff at the conference registration desk and the members of the conference committee will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Cell Phones

Please silence cell phones during sessions as a courtesy to presenters and participants.

Wi-Fi Access

Public wireless internet access is available in the Thornhill Education Center at: Morton-WiFi. Guests registered for the conference block at the hotel can also access Wi-Fi in their rooms.

Lunch

Please pick up a box lunch downstairs at lunch. Seating is in the downstairs classroom and on the Thornhill patio. The box lunch options are:

- Arboretum Club (Sliced Turkey Breast, Bacon, Tomatoes, Arugula, Cranberry Aioli, Baguette)
- Roast Beef and Cheddar (Roast Beef, Cheddar Cheese, Lettuce, Tomato, Pretzel Bun)
- Caprese (Vegetarian: Fresh Mozzarella, Tomato, Basil, Pesto, French Baguette)

If you submitted a dietary restriction other than vegetarian, please speak to the catering or conference staff near the box lunch pickup to get your lunch.

Continuing Education

Stickers for Gateways to Opportunity certification are available in each session and Gateways forms are in your registration packet. For Regional Office of Education CPDHs, evaluation forms are in your folder; turn in your completed evaluation at the registration desk at the end of the day to receive your CPDH confirmation.

Schedule: Saturday, June 1

8:30–9:15 a.m. Registration, Coffee, and Demonstrations (Thornhill Lobby and Patio)

9:15–9:30 a.m. Welcome and Introduction (Arbor Room)

Megan Dunning, The Morton Arboretum, Sean Shaffer, Chicago Park District, Megan Gessler, The Morton Arboretum and the Northern Illinois Nature Preschool Association (NINPA); Catherine Koons-Hubbard, Schlitz-Audubon Nature Center and the Wisconsin Nature-Based Early Childhood Association (WiNBECA)

9:30–10:30 a.m. Keynote Presentation

Lessons from the Forest: How Great Programs Place Nature at the Heart of Their Curriculum
Christy Merrick, Special Projects Advisor, Natural Start Alliance

10:30–10:45 a.m. Coffee Break

10:45 a.m.– 11:45 a.m. Concurrent Session 1

Panel on Outdoor Safety and Emergency Planning (Arbor Room)

Vince Gortner, Director of Visitor Operations, The Morton Arboretum (moderator), Tim Erdman, Safety Coordinator, The Morton Arboretum, Steven Schindlbeck, RJM Strategy Group

How Learning to Put on Your Own Rainboots Leads to Academic Success (Founder's Room)

Catherine Koons-Hubbard, Preschool Director, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center

From Roots to STEMs: Mud play as a building block of early childhood education

(Thornhill Front Steps/Mud Kitchen. Rain Location: Godshalk Hall)

Laura Scheinholtz, Ph.D., Stefanie Wiencke and Jessica

Vosburgh; The Mud Squad. Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program

The Power in Nature Play and Nature-Based Early Learning (Classroom C)

Marilyn Brink, Manager, Professional Development and Early Childhood, Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo

11:45–12:45 p.m. Lunch and Demonstrations

Please pick up a box lunch downstairs. Lunch seating is on the lower level and outside on the patio.

12:45 p.m.– 1:45 p.m. Concurrent Session 2

Nature Play: A Catalyst for Language Development (Arbor Room)

Jessica Fong, Velma Thomas Center

Branching Out: Tree Climbing in U.S. Early Childhood Settings (Founder's Room)

Carla Gull, Ph.D., University of Phoenix, Loose Parts Play

12:45 p.m.– 1:45 p.m. Concurrent Session 2, cont.

Activating Natural Space in the City: One Nature Preserve, Four Approaches (Godshalk Hall)

Christa Donner, Arlene Brennan, Karen Brennan, Emily Klein, and Gary Morrissey, West Ridge Nature Preserve

Through the Lens: Nature Photography with Children (Classroom B)

Patti Darby, Preschool Teacher, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center

Risk vs. Hazard in Outdoor Education (Classroom C)

Rachel Schaller, Environmental Education Teacher, Elmhurst Academy of Early Learning

1:45–2:00 p.m. Break

2:00–3:00 p.m. Concurrent Session 3

You're Not in This Alone! Enhancing the Curriculum through Collaborative Community Connections (Arbor Room)

Peter Dargatz, Woodside Elementary

When Nature Calls (Founder's Room)

Catherine Koon Hubbard, Preschool Director, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, Virginia Wigen, Nature Center Director, Aldo Leopold Nature Center, Matt Flower, Environmental Education and Early Childhood Specialist, Urban Ecology Center, Tara Von Dollen, Early Childhood Coordinator, Aldo Leopold Nature Center

Integrating Nature in an Urban Classroom (Godshalk Hall)

Rebecca Gonzalez, Director, Bucktown Academy and Lily Culver, Lead Teacher, Bucktown Academy

The ABC's of ASL: Sign Language and Nature Based Early Childhood (Classroom B)

Kathryn Rybicki, Supervisor of Youth & Family Programs, The Morton Arboretum

Naturally Introducing Mindfulness and Yoga (Thornhill Patio. Rain Location: Classroom C/D)

Kim Cuenca, Yoga Instructor

3:00 p.m. Evaluations and raffle results (Arbor Room)

We are grateful to the following sponsors for making this event possible:

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Environmental Education Association
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Kodo Kids

Presenter Biographies

Arlene Brennan

Arlene Brennan holds an M.Ed and was a Waldorf Kindergarten teacher/Chicago Public School teacher for 35 years, as well as a student teaching supervisor and Golden Apple Finalist. After retirement, she has been a Parent Coach/Homework support for immigrant families. She currently serves as a volunteer and board member of West Ridge Nature Preserve.

Karen Brennan

Karen Brennan graduated with a science degree from The University of KwaZulu-Natal. She later studied Waldorf Early Childhood Education through Arcturus and spent five years working at the Chicago Waldorf School. She is currently spearheading a Parent- Child meet-up at the West Ridge Nature Preserve.

Marilyn Brink

Marilyn Brink has a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education and is the Manager, Professional Development and Early Childhood, Chicago Zoological Society/Brookfield Zoo. She has been in the field for 30+ yrs. She was awarded Chicago Zoological Society PRIDE Award in 2013 & 2018, her NatureStart Professional Learning Program won Top Honors at the Education at 2018 Assn. of Zoos & Aquariums Conference.

Lily Culver

Lily graduated from Illinois State University with a B.A. in Early Childhood Education and has her Type 04 Certification in Early Childhood. Lily has spent the past three years teaching preschool in Chicago.

Kim Cuenca

Sharing yoga since 2008, Kim currently teaches children, families, and adults at a local counseling center, a public library, and pediatric therapy centers. She's Yoga Alliance-registered with additional training for children, special needs, restorative, and trauma sensitive yoga. She's been trained by Mindful Schools to teach mindfulness to students K-12.

Patricia Darby

Patricia is an early childhood environmental educator, working at Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool in Milwaukee, WI since 2013. She holds a BFA in Photography and a MS in Environmental Education. She had previously taught science and art as a specialty teacher to grades preschool through middle school and worked in the field of Gifted education. She currently teaches mixed age preschool classes, K4, and parent/toddler classes.

Peter Dargatz

Peter Dargatz is a national-board kindergarten teacher at Woodside Elementary, a public school in Sussex, Wisconsin. He created a nature kindergarten program in 2015. Additionally, he coordinates Tyke Hikes for the Ice Age Trail Alliance and is a member of the Wisconsin Nature-based Early Childhood Association (WiNBECA).

Christa Donner

Christa Donner earned an MFA in studio art and has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for the past 10 years. She is Design Chairperson for the Nature Play Area at West Ridge Nature Preserve, where she also runs a Forest Play Week program with Arlene Brennan.

Tim Erdman

Tim Erdman is the Safety Coordinator at The Morton Arboretum. He is a recent addition to the Arboretum safety & security team and is also completing his 30th year in law enforcement in that same large nearby community where he served in front line and supervisory positions related to school safety and active shooter response planning. Tim brings this expertise to his new role at the Arboretum where he is responsible for training our staff in the ALICE Active Shooter response model and other emergency response skill-sets.

Matt Flower

Matt is the Environmental Education and Early Childhood Specialist at the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee, WI. He holds a B.B.A. from UW Whitewater and has 16 years experience in Environmental

Education. In 2017, Matt received a Nature-based Early Childhood Graduate Certificate from Antioch University of New England. Matt also is a Certified Trainer with The Registry, which provides Early Care Professional Development in Wisconsin.

Jessica Fong

Jessica Fong works at Velma Thomas Center, Chicago Public Schools. She has been an educator for 8 years and holds Masters degrees in Early Childhood and Dual Language Education. In 2017-18 she was awarded a Chicago Fund for Teachers Action Research Leadership Fellowship where she investigated the effects of nature play on the development of young children.

Rebecca Gonzalez

Rebecca has been teaching preschool for eighteen years in the public and private school system. Five years ago she opened up her own preschool in the Bucktown neighborhood. Rebecca has her Type 04 Certification in Early Childhood Education from DePaul University, her Masters in Child Development from Erikson Institute, and is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher.

Vince Gortner

Vince Gortner is the Director of Visitor Operations at The Morton Arboretum. He joined the Arboretum staff in 2013 after completing twenty years of service in law enforcement in a large nearby community where he served in front line, supervisory, and progressively advanced leadership positions. He is responsible for safety and security operations and risk management at the Arboretum and plays a key role in ensuring the safety of visitors and staff alike.

Carla Gull

Carla Gull has been in education for over 20 years with an Ed.D. in instructional leadership. Carla teaches at University of Phoenix and hosts Loose Parts Play and the podcast, Loose Parts Nature Play. She is a Certified Interpretive Guide through the National Association for Interpretation.

Emily Klein

Emily Klein co-teaches the Forest Play Group at West Ridge Nature Preserve. She holds a BFA and a Waldorf Early Childhood Teaching Certificate and worked at the Chicago Waldorf School for 3 years. Her background also includes teaching and developing youth art classes in a community center setting.

Catherine Koons-Hubbard

Catherine is the Director of the Nature Preschool at Schlitz Audubon Nature Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Prior to this, she was a Nature Preschool teacher for 8 years and an Environmental Educator for 14. She holds a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Gary Morrissey

Gary Morrissey is a retired Chicago Public School teacher with a BS Ed. and MS Ed. and is a certified Illinois Master Naturalist serving on the Cook County Master Naturalist Advisory Board. He also volunteers with BackYard Nature Center and West Ridge Nature Preserve, and serves on their Boards of Directors.

Kathryn Rybicki

Kathryn is the Supervisor of Youth and Family Programs at The Morton Arboretum, where she has

worked since 2016. Before coming to the Arboretum, Kathryn has worked as a Lead Teacher at Kiddie Academy, as a Teacher at Mental Health and Deafness Resources, and most recently as a Team Leader at Creative World School in Plainfield. She holds Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Illinois State University and is an ESL interpreter.

Rachel Schaller

Rachel is an Environmental Education Teacher at the Elmhurst Academy of Early Learning

Laura Scheinholtz

An author and workshop designer, Laura has promoted recycling play in early childhood for 10 years. She holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, where she received the Morgridge Center Civic Engagement Award for her work on play and child development in the community.

Steven Schindlbeck

Steve Schindlbeck brings over 30 years of law enforcement and government experience to the RJM Strategy Group, a private consulting firm that conducts safety and risk assessments of entities ranging in size and complexity from large corporate campuses to religious centers and preschools. Their team offers workplace violence prevention and response training programs, strategic security audits, and site improvement planning based on the principles of crime prevention through environmental design.

Tara Von Dollen

Tara is the Early Childhood Coordinator at Aldo Leopold Nature Center where she has worked since 2010 developing and teaching their child-adult Wonder Bugs Preschool Program. Her education includes a BS-Wildlife, Fish, Conservation Biology, University of California-Davis, an Elem Ed. Teaching Certificate, Sacramento State, and a M.Ed—Environmental Education, UW-Stevens Point. She also holds an Early Childhood Diploma from North American Montessori Center(NAMC).

Jessica Vosburgh

Jessica Vosburgh is part of the Mud Squad at Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program, in the Forest Preserve District of Kendall County.

Stefanie Wiencke

Stefanie Wiencke is the Programs Manager and part of the Mud Squad at Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program, in the Forest Preserve District of Kendall County.

Virginia Wigger

Virginia is the Director of the Aldo Leopold Nature Center in Wisconsin. She began working at ALNC in 2007 and oversees all of the education programs. She grew up exploring the prairies of North Dakota and holds a bachelor's degree in Biology from Concordia College and a graduate certificate in Environmental Education from University of Minnesota Duluth. She enjoys all outdoor activities, but canoeing, camping and gardening are at the top of her list.