

Naturally Equipped to Learn: The Importance of Playfulness, Curiosity, and Well-Being

The 28th Annual Kindergarten Conference - A Focus on Children Ages 4, 5, & 6



Workshop Descriptions:

1. Promoting Children's Play Where You Work

Facilitator: Dr. Peter Gray, Research Professor

Peter will dive more deeply into findings and implications of play research and will discuss how to use research as a tool to inform others about the essential role of play in the development of young children. Peter will also share stories of community initiatives where teachers, families and administrators have set out to bring play back into children's lives and provide the opportunity to reflect on roadblocks in our own current settings and to problem solve solutions in small groups.

Toward that end, we will consider questions such as:

- What are the challenges to permitting and fostering children's play in the kindergarten or preschool where you work?
- What are the physical limitations (e.g., concerning stimulating outdoor and indoor spaces and objects for play?)
- What, if any, state regulations or administrative pressures restrict play in your setting?
- How, if at all, do parents' expectations and demands tend to restrict play in your setting?
- How might your own concerns about safety or your own sense of what it means to "teach" limit play in your setting?
- Given these challenges, what can you do to overcome them to make the K or Pre-K experience the joyful person-building opportunity it should be for the children in your setting?

Participants will discuss these questions in small groups and come together for a general discussion where we will share and elaborate strategies to protect and promote play in our Vermont Communities.

2. Hope is the Hermit Thrush's Song: Engaging Young Children in Outdoor Learning

Facilitator: Amy Butler, North Branch Nature Center, Director of Education

The Hermit Thrush's song is hauntingly beautiful and ethereal. This brown backed and black speckled chest bird is secretive and shy, yet once it's spring song is heard, there is no stopping how it fills your heart with hope. In the face of Covid19, outdoor learning was adopted by hundreds of teachers in the northeast this year. With ample fresh air and more room to distance safely from peers, many schools moved class outdoors for a significant part of the day. We will hear from teachers about their challenges and successes of being outdoors more than ever before and the benefits gained from time partnering with nature as co-teacher. Amy Butler, Director of Education at North Branch Nature Center, will provide simple strategies and routines that can support outdoor learning. Be ready to share your own stories of hope in a new age of public education and

bring your questions and plans for more time outdoors in the coming school year. The Hermit Thrush is the Vermont state bird and is found in all 14 counties.

3. Math Instruction that is in Harmony with Children's Natural Curiosity

Facilitator: T.J. Jemison, International Math Coach and Consultant

Mr. Rogers is quoted as saying "*Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood*". Come join for a session about bringing curiosity and play to math instruction. We will look at children's literature, visual images, games, and problems that engage students in mathematics through play and wonder. We will engage in tasks and activities to take back to classrooms to enrich mathematical understanding.

4. Becoming a Media Mentor: Playful Media Interactions for Young Children

Facilitator: Heather Duhamel, M.Ed. & Certified Media Literacy Educator

Presented by Vermont PBS

This workshop highlights research and provides guidance on how to integrate safe online learning experiences for young children (PreK-K) in a digital age. Digital Skills are developed over time and with access and the support of a knowledgeable "Media Mentor." Together, we will explore hands-on ways to explore multimedia sources- podcasts, online story, video and interactive content online and offline. In small groups we will dive deeper and look specifically at two PBS Learning Collections in PBS LearningMedia that focus on Informational Literacy and STEAM for Preschool/K-2. This "Appy Hour," will empower participants to try new digital tools and safely integrate them into classroom or hybrid learning environments.

5. Fostering Problem Solving through Play, Self-Talk, and Storytelling

Facilitator: Christine Hertz Hausman, Author and Educator

Young children are inherently problem solvers. From their earliest days, they notice, wonder, experiment, innovate and playfully make sense of their world. In this workshop, we will take a close look at how we can nurture and support children to use a similar mindset in our classrooms. We will consider how to make our emotional and physical environments conducive to problem solving and how we can leverage play, self-talk and storytelling to support our children's curiosity, flexibility, and metacognition.

6. Teaching Is Storytelling

Facilitator: Julie J. Benay, Educator and Consultant

Have you ever tried using puppets in your teaching? In this workshop, I will convince you to try! We will discuss the history and cultural impact of puppetry around the world, then bring it home to discuss how and when to fit puppets into your kindergarten day. Julie will model using puppets, and participants will break into small groups to practice and give one another feedback. Participants should bring some form of puppet, or just plan to use your hand as a puppet! In the second half of the workshop, we will discuss storytelling without props or puppets. We will look at the history of storytelling and talk about the neuroscience of storytelling and the connection with reading comprehension and narrative writing skills. Participants will again have the opportunity to practice and gain feedback from peers.