

2024 Leadership Institute Presenters



Binta Dixon, Editor-in-Chief of Exchange Magazine

Binta Dixon is the daughter of southern Black farmers, Indigenous story weavers, and courageous medicine womxn. She creates space and support for innovators, educators, and change-makers to share their experiences and create community impact. As the Editor-in-Chief of Exchange Magazine, Binta brings a passion for community building, intentional curiosity, and expertise in writer development and digital storytelling. A key aspect to Binta's personal and professional practice is her lifelong study of nature. She is a flower essence practitioner and herbalist in training, a gardener, and aspiring Earth steward. Her primary nature practices infuse self-awareness and presences with the understanding and deep reverence for the interconnectedness of all life.



Heather Fox, Outreach Director and Education Specialist with Dimensions Educational Research Foundation

As a certified Nature Explore trainer, Heather presents at national conferences, develops and facilitates workshops, and designs outdoor spaces for children. She oversees the Dimensions Foundation Outreach team and mentors Early Childhood Professionals.



Tara Schroder, CEO, Dimensions Educational Research Foundation

Tara Schroder is the Chief Executive Officer of the nonprofit Dimensions Educational Research Foundation whose mission is to inspire joy and wonder in children, educators, and communities with a heart-centered approach to early education. Her work supports the major departments of the Foundation: The Nature Explore Program; Exchange Press; and Dimensions Education Programs.



Jena Jauchius, Landscape Architect, Owner of Nature Play, LLC.

Jena is an internationally recognized landscape architect, nature play expert, and the Founder of N is for Nature Play. Jena has spent her 24+ year career designing sensory-rich, nature-filled play, learning, and therapeutic environments for kids of all ages and abilities. She specializes in designing supportive environments for children with autism and other neurodiversities. In addition to design, Jena loves teaching parents, early childhood professionals, and educators how to create tailored multi-sensory natural play and learning spaces to grow their children's unique

bodies, minds, and spirits.



Kirsten Haugen, Professional Development Director and Education Specialists with Dimensions Educational Research Foundation

Kirsten brings 30+ years of professional development leadership to Dimension's Nature Explore team, leading the development and delivery of engaging in-person and online workshops and presentations, professional development resources, articles and online events; coordinating research efforts; and collaborating on the design and implementation of Nature Explore Outdoor Classrooms around the world.



Ellen Veselak, Co-Executive Director, Child Educational Center

Ellen Veselack is the Co-Executive Director for the Child Educational Center. In her 45 years in the field, she has worked with children from infancy through age six, with most of her experience in the preschool and kindergarten years. Ellen graduated from Indiana University in 1979 with a B. S. degree in Elementary Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood. She spent the first 8 years at the CEC as a Lead Teacher Mentor working with preschoolers and became the Director of the Preschool Program in January of 2005. In collaboration with Dimensions Educational Research Foundation in Lincoln, NE., she leads the research division at the CEC where she studies the developmental benefits of children's education in the Outdoor Classroom. She is also a

consultant and trainer, covering all topics related to quality programming, especially in the Outdoor Classroom, including physical space, materials, and teacher philosophy/attitudes. She has presented at many local, state, national, and international conferences on a range of topics.



Mismiki Montgomery, Early Childhood Curriculum Coach, Ruth Staples Child Development Lab

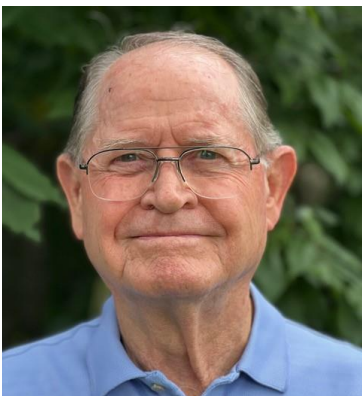
Mismiki Montgomery has 30 years of experience specializing in the field of early childhood development. Mismiki has worked in education and administration, including preschool, elementary education, and various school-age youth development programs. She completed her Early Childhood Development Degree at Southeast Community College-Lincoln, and went on to attain her Bachelor of Science in Inclusive Early Childhood Education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Mismiki is the first Admin Early Childhood Curriculum Coach at the Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory for the College of Education at the University of NE. Her passion is to write and create developmentally appropriate curriculum on topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion, social justice, racism, mindfulness and has also developed an early nutrition intervention program for young children and their families. Her most recent work is a focus on Anti-bias/Anti-racist early childhood classrooms.



Allegra Inganni, Co-Executive Director, Child Educational Center

Allegra has been in the field of education and psychology for over 20 years, specializing in early childhood and school age childcare, as well as individual and family therapy. After graduating from Massachusetts College of Art with a BA in Fine Arts and Art Education, Allegra attended Leslie University for graduate school to pursue her Masters in Counseling Psychology. Prior to moving to California, Allegra was the Program Director for Wellesley College's school age childcare program and worked as both a teacher and family and child therapist throughout the Boston area. Having worked with children throughout her adult career, Allegra has always been an advocate for children.

After serving as the School-Age Program Director for The Child Educational Center in La Canada, CA for many years, Allegra is currently the Co-Executive Director. Allegra works closely with parents, children, and local schools. As a mother of two daughters, Allegra feels strongly about her work with girls and women. Her love of art, education, and human psychology are fulfilled by working with children every day.



Bob Barry, Trustee, Child Educational Center

Bio: Bob is a retired Aerospace Systems Engineer who supported NASA manned and unmanned projects for more than 45 years. His work included simulation and training, flight and ground software, spacecraft design, autonomy, and mission operations. However, like many others, his path to his career work was complicated. Before studying Mechanical Engineering for four years in college, he experienced teaching while in high school and college as a Water Safety Instructor and Instructor-trainer. And, before he graduated, he switched to a obtain a Math/English BA to teach in high

school (ask him why). Feeling not ready to teach, he shifted back to engineering and took his first job supporting NASA on the Apollo Moon Missions. Some 15 years later, he became a volunteer Trustee for the Child Education Center (CEC) where his children (James and Katie) attended in the mid 1980's. He has served continuously on the CEC Board since then. His special interests have included ensuring the CEC's financial stability as it has expanded in size and scope, CEC's Outreach activities, The Outdoor Classroom Project, and collaborations with Nature Explore, including The Leadership Institute. His current focus is on the CEC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals. He recently returned to school for a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education - and concluded that the CEC is truly a great model for High Quality Childcare. One of his favorite activities is sitting in the yards at the CEC and interacting with the children in CEC's Outdoor Classroom natural environments.



Erin Glenn, Managing Editor of Exchange Magazine

Erin engages in community-based work to lift up voices, redistribute resources, invite social change, and ease human suffering. The throughline of her work is an unshakable belief in the equality of souls and the creativity inherent in each of us, and a desire to hold space and strength with people who are marginalized. Currently the Managing Editor of Exchange, Erin has worked in Colorado, Washington DC, and Nebraska on political campaigns and grassroots teams, in non-profits, and as an integral coach, she believes that cultivating presence, trust and well-being at the individual level is essential to our ability to live and work together, and supports people and groups going through stress and transition. Through listening, laughing and storytelling, or writing, editing, and coaching, authenticity and connection help us ask the question: What is possible now?

Additional speakers

- Sandra Duncan, International Specialist on Early Childhood Environments, Author of 7 Books on Nature-Based (Biophilic) Early Learning Environment Design
- LaRinda Hall, Director, Dimensions Education Programs

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