



2026 ACT Conference: Constructivist *Learning is Connected Learning*

Location: Reno, Nevada

Host: Anne Lowry

All events and sessions will be held at the [Atlantis Casino Resort Spa](#).

Optional tours available for [Aleph Academy](#) and the [Nevada Museum of Art](#).

Conference Schedule:

Please note that all times will be PDT (Pacific Daylight Time).

Date	Time	Event
Saturday, October 17, 2026	6:15 p.m.	ACT Board Meeting & Dinner
Sunday, October 18, 2026	9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Optional School Tour of Aleph Academy
	11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Registration/Lunch
	1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Welcome/Keynote Keynote Speaker: Dr. James Pelech 
	3:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Breakout Sessions – 1
	4:45 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Breakout Sessions – 2
Monday, October 19, 2026	<i>Beginning at approximately 8:15 a.m.</i>	<i>Breakfast Available</i>
	9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Breakout Sessions – 3
	10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Breakout Sessions – 4
	12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
	1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Breakout Sessions – 5
	2:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Breakout Sessions – 6
	4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Breakout Sessions – 7
	5:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Closing Session: <i>Invitation to Virtual Chats</i> <i>Announcement of 2027 ACT Conference</i>
Tuesday, October 20, 2026	TBD	Optional Tour: Nevada Museum of Art <i>Additional cost may apply.</i>

Schedule for Breakout Sessions:

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS – 1 3:15 P.M. – 4:30 P.M.				
Session Title	Session Description	Presenter(s)	Presenter Bio(s)	NV Registry Approved
<i>Awe & Wonder: Rediscovering Piaget Through Contemporary Science</i>	Dacher Keltner's recent bestseller Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life describes awe as a powerful human experience that quiets the ego, expands perception, and opens us to new possibilities for learning. While the language is contemporary, the underlying ideas echo Jean Piaget's constructivist theory, in which children's interests and cognitive perturbations drive the construction of knowledge. Through playful investigations of balance using open-ended materials, participants will explore how moments of awe and wonder become catalysts for sense-making and discover how constructivist educators can intentionally cultivate these experiences across learning contexts.	Beth Van Meeteren Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa	Beth VanMeeteren is Professor and Director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa. Mentored by constructivist scholar Dr. Rheta DeVries, she served as lead teacher in the Freeburg Early Childhood Program, an experimental constructivist laboratory school. Her scholarship focuses on early STEM and engineering education, and she has co-authored four Teachers College Press books on early STEM learning. She leads the STEMwonder initiative, which supports educators nationally and internationally in designing constructivist STEM experiences for children from birth through age eight.	
<i>Right Math, Wrong Time: Two Empirical Piagetian Studies Challenging the Timing of Mathematics Instruction</i>	Join us to analyze videos and student work from two studies revealing a DAP mismatch in math and leave with concrete strategies for honoring young children's readiness while challenging capable first graders.	Shushan Vardanyan The University of Mississippi	Dr. Shushan Vardanyan is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education whose primary scholarly interest is the application of Piagetian theory to understanding and supporting young children's thinking and learning. She also studies children's play, culture and development, and outdoor education. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2019 and has 12 years of experience working with young children in Dubai and the United States, including teaching kindergarten through fourth grade.	
<i>Piaget's connected learning in the age of A.I.; Guiding students through confusion</i>	We often hear only teaching content with one-right answer can be limiting; generative AI now intensifies this trend by offering quick shortcuts that erode independent and critically evaluated thoughts. This workshop is designed for educators who want to scaffold the use of open ended questions and puzzling events, while maintaining a disposition of care. K-8 teachers can stop by to explore how setting work and organizational norms, using predictable routines, and offering student choice are techniques to normalize possible negative psychological challenges of entering into not knowing (or uncertainty) and support students' perseverance.	James Foss University of Minnesota Crookston	James Foss is an educator and curriculum writer who has worked in early childhood and elementary education both nationally and internationally for over 25 years. In 2018, he joined teacher education faculty at the University of Minnesota Crookston and is now an Associate Professor residing in Grand Forks, ND, with his wife, and three children. He has served on the ACT board since 2019.	

<i>Connect Student Assessment and Learning using Piaget's Three Types of Knowledge Theory and Practice (Part I)</i>	Explore Piaget's Three Types of Knowledge- Social, Physical, and Logico-mathematical Knowledge, with hands-on use to assess instructional level, planning, and teaching at the student, classroom, and school levels.	Fred Hiltner Formerly with Juneau School District (Alaska)	I taught grades K-2 in Juneau for twenty-one years, working in both single-age and mixed-age classrooms. I worked closely with Dr. Constance Kamii taking courses from her at University of Alabama-Birmingham. We also worked together designing constructivist-based assessment tools for the Juneau School District. Former board member and presenter for the National Coalition for Equity in Education, NCEE.	
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS – 2 4:45 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.				
<i>Connect Student Assessment and Learning using Piaget's Three Types of Knowledge Theory and Practice (Part II)</i>	Explore Piaget's Three Types of Knowledge- Social, Physical, and Logico-mathematical Knowledge, with hands-on use to assess instructional level, planning, and teaching at the student, classroom, and school levels.	Fred Hiltner Formerly with Juneau School District (Alaska)	See previous	
<i>Mentoring Young Educators Towards Pedagogical Change</i>	Many constructivist educators begin their careers in environments that do not support a constructivist view of learning and teaching. Teachers often understand the importance of building habits of mind that promote success in school and in life and find an impetus for change by observing students and reflecting on what they are noticing. This reflection can be a lonely endeavor unless the educator finds a community of practice that supports pedagogical change and provides opportunities to talk through fears and share the joy of giving students voice in their learning. For some educators, a coach or mentor has been integral in their transformation. For others, the transformation of their own practice encourages them to flip their role from educator to coach. In this session we will discuss strategies for supporting, mentoring, or coaching constructivist teachers who are experiencing the internal struggle of navigating standards while advocating for constructivist practices. Stories from classrooms and interviews with educators will be included. Participants will have an opportunity to share their own journey in small group discussions with other educators.	Christina Sales Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa (retired) Sherri Peterson Program Coordinator, Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA Beth Van Meeteren Professor and Director of the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa	Christina Sales, a retired assistant professor from the Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, taught young children for more than 30 years. While at the Regents' Center, she was mentored by Dr. Rheta DeVries and worked closely with classroom teachers across the state of Iowa to help them incorporate constructivist activities into their classroom curricula. She also helped establish Freeburg School, a demonstration experimental school for constructivist education. At Freeburg, Sales served as a teacher and curriculum coordinator as the entire faculty worked together to develop constructivist curriculum which they continue to share. Christina has made numerous presentations throughout the US and in Japan, Thailand, Brazil and Mexico on geometry research, ramps & other constructivist curricula. She is coauthor of Promoting Spatial Reasoning in the Early Years: Exploring Pattern Blocks and Pattern Block Puzzles, (Young Children Summer 2025), Ramps & Pathways: A Constructivist Approach to Physics with Young Children (NAEYC 2011) and Developing Constructivist Early Childhood Curriculum: Practical Principles and Activities (Teachers College Press).	

			Sherri Peterson is the Program Coordinator at the Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, a state-wide center dedicated to research, program development, and dissemination in early education. Sherri has worked as an early childhood educator for over four decades as teacher, mentor, consultant, and coach. Currently she is collaborating with educators at a university childcare program, developing infant and toddler STEM curriculum. This work is disseminated to early childhood educators through Iowa's early childhood workforce registry and presented at local, state, and national conferences as well as through her writing in early childhood publications and in "Investigating STEM with Infants and Toddlers," a book published in spring 2022 by Teachers College Press. Beth VanMeeteren, Ed.D. see previous	
<i>Curiosity in Action: Nurturing Young Minds Through Experiential Learning</i>	For this presentation, we are presenting project work through the lens of the text Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years, as well as artifacts shared from a Reggio Emilia inspired lab school program.	Andrea Anderson Appalachian State University Lucy Brock Child Development Lab Denise Brewer Appalachian State University Randa Dunlap Appalachian State University	Dr. Anderson is the Director of the Lucy Brock Child Development Lab at Appalachian State University. She has worked in Head Start, public school pre-K, and Child Care Resource and Referral. She loves introducing preservice teachers to constructivist theory and the joy of early education. Drs. Anderson, Brewer, and Dunlap work together at Appalachian State University's Reich College of Education as they all teach courses related to Child Development. Dr. Brewer (Associate Professor) and Dr. Dunlap (Assistant Professor) teach in the Department of Child Development, Literacy, and Special Education.	
<i>AI as the Newest Member of the Learning Environment</i>	Generative AI is now part of many students' learning environments, whether instructors plan for it or not. This session explores how Constructivist pedagogy can help learners actively construct understanding, develop metacognitive awareness, and make purposeful decisions about when AI supports learning—and when it bypasses it. Participants will experience practical strategies that strengthen learner agency rather than dependence.	Vanessa Van Winkle-Ghaderi Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute	Vanessa Van Winkle-Ghaderi is an instructor and academic advisor at the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute. She designs and teaches classes that help international students develop English language and academic skills, including technology literacy, in preparation for matriculating to the university. Her primary goal is to prepare students to guide their own continued learning after they complete organized studies.	

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS – 3 9:00 A.M. – 10:15 A.M.				
<i>The Fallen Apple Tree Inquiry: Demonstrating child-centered, authentic learning in an early childhood setting</i>	This session will bridge constructivist theory and practice to illustrate inquiry in a preschool classroom. We will make children's learning visible by sharing children's representations and theories about a weather event that impacted the outdoor environment. Children's ideas and questions are highlighted to demonstrate our pedagogy.	Andrea Anderson Appalachian State University Emily Neff Lead Preschool Teacher at the Lucy Brock Child Development Lab at Appalachian State University	Dr. Andrea Anderson (see previous) Ms. Neff has supported young children and families across various settings. She directed summer camps and has been an infant and toddler teacher. She loves guiding children through inquiry-based curriculum.	
<i>A Journey from Winter and Hats, to Fiber and Sheep.</i>	Building on the interest of winter, urban prekindergarten children and their teacher co-constructed an exciting study, moving from winter and hats to yarn, weaving, natural fibers and sheep through exploration, play and reflections.	Jacquelyn Berkowitz Somerville Public Schools	Jacquelyn Berkowitz has been teaching public PreKindergarten at the Winter Hill Community Innovation School in Somerville, Massachusetts since fall 2018. She holds a Masters Degree in Creative Arts in Learning in Early Childhood Education from Lesley University and a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Dance from Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. Ms. Berkowitz has experience teaching children from three to nine years old and has taught in public and independent schools. Ms. Berkowitz brings the arts into the classroom through painting, music, movement, and storytelling. She enjoys being out in nature and bringing the love of learning to young children.	
<i>From Incubation to Inspiration: How Constructivist Learning Hatches Enduring Understanding</i>	At Randolph School, an emergent curiosity about chickens grew, over six years, into the Chicken Coop Expansion Project, a living case study in constructivist pedagogy spanning care, construction, grant-writing, and problem-solving. This session traces that arc through student stories, photos, and primary-source documents (student-written grant proposals, parent-built construction plans), alongside current research on what employers, colleges, and families are actually asking schools for. Participants will leave with a concrete framework for building their own multiyear, integrated learning experiences.	Josh Kaplan The Randolph School	Josh Kaplan is Director of The Randolph School, an independent, progressive school in Wappingers Falls, NY. He holds an M.S. in Curriculum & Teaching from Fordham University and began his career teaching grades 3–12 in Harlem public schools for a decade before moving into school leadership. He also serves as a guest lecturer at Marist College and SUNY-Dutchess, a faculty trainer for Samsø Frie Skole in Denmark, and serves on the board of the ACT. Josh is also, or perhaps most importantly a parent of a 2nd and 5th grader, so this work is deeply personal to him and inspired by his daughters who are his teachers.	
<i>What is Line? Investigations of ECE students and teachers</i>	Our presentation offers both an overview of a collaborative project of a Reggio Inspired Professional Learning Community and how this social-constructivist work influenced each teacher and the children in multiple early childhood classrooms.	Theresa (Terry) Randolph Early Childhood Educator Encounters	Theresa Randolph, MS, - Terry (she, her, hers) is retired from a career as an early childhood educator with children and teachers that spanned over 30 years. She is inspired by the Reggio Approach and collaborative discovery.	

		Anne Lowry, Pre-K Teacher, Trainer Aleph Academy, Early Childhood Educator Encounters Elizabeth (Liz) Krause Infant-Pre-K Substitute Teacher Truckee River Child Development Center, Early Childhood Educator Encounters	Anne Lowry, MEd, is currently a preK teacher at Aleph Academy, a Reggio–inspired preschool in Reno, NV. Anne uses the constructivist principles of the Reggio Emilia approach in her classroom, focusing on the relationships between science, geography, storytelling, and art. Anne provides professional development on these topics, both locally and nationally, and has published on constructivist STEM teaching in preschool and continues to explore how children use play, provocations, and documentation to create their own learning, and how teachers and schools can facilitate such learning. She is currently the chair of the National Science Teaching’s Association Early Childhood-Elementary Science Teaching Committee. Elizabeth Krause, BA, is currently a substitute teacher for Patagonia’s Truckee River Child Development Center in Reno, Nevada. Liz (she, her, hers) has worked in early childhood education for 16 years. She’s a member of the ECE Encounters study group at the Nevada Museum of Art. She loves to see how children make sense of their world and how they communicate their thinking.	
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS – 4 10:30 A.M. – 11:45 A.M.				
<i>Utilizing the I-Graphic Organizer: A Constructivist Approach to Active Learning, Quiz/Test Preparation, and Authentic Assessment.</i>	In this session, participants will actively experience the “I-Graphic Organizer” – a Constructivist strategy for both active learning and authentic assessment. This session, based on the field experiences of both middle and high school students as well as college undergraduates in a teacher preparation program, explores the value of utilizing this evaluation tool to help students make connections to prior learning and to visibly document their learning process.	James Pelech Retired College Professor, ACT Past President Randa Dunlap Appalachian State University, ACT President	Dr. James Pelech, a former ACT President, brings over 48 years of teaching to the Board. He taught at the High School Level for 30 years; in this capacity he taught all levels of mathematics, instituted an integrated curriculum unit and had an article on the graphing calculator published. At the collegiate level Dr. Pelech taught methods and assessment courses, as well as working with student teachers and Doctoral students. Dr. Pelech created a partnership with a local private school; in this capacity he co-taught with teachers and was also the Board President. He has published three books based on Constructivism, and a fourth book will be published shortly. He served in the Army Reserves for over 20 years, being activated in 1996 as a senior logistics officer supporting Operation Joint Endeavor. Presently, he is President of the Board of the Institute of Learning Centered Education and is on the Board of the Army Transportation Museum,	

			where he is directing the creation of the Museum's STEAM program. Dr. Randa Dunlap is an Assistant Professor of Child Development, Literacy, and Special Education at Appalachian State University and has advised, taught, and supervised preservice teachers in Tennessee, South Carolina, and North Carolina. She received her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from East Tennessee State University where she examined constructivist strategies for teachers to promote empathy with young children. She has experience teaching in Reggio Emilia-inspired, multi-age preschool classrooms and working with third-grade children in public elementary school classrooms. While working at the University of South Carolina – Aiken, she taught a series of language and literacy methods courses, and she currently teaches a variety of classes related to Child Development and Family and Child Studies. She has been actively involved with ACT since 2016.	
<i>Coming Alive: Co-constructing Curriculum with College Students</i>	Thinking and Doing: From Following Syllabus Requirements and Assignments to Active Involvement in Planning and Co-Constructing Curriculum in Course Work with the Instructor.	Sonja de Groot Kim Retired Faculty, Kean University	Faculty at Kean University 2006-2017. Faculty Liaison to the Kean University Child Care and Development Center. Board member and Treasurer ACT, Board member New Jersey Educators Exploring the Practices of Reggio Emilia. Director Rita Gold Early Childhood Program at Teachers College. Head Teacher and Director Wimpfheimer Nursery School at Vassar College.	
<i>Color, Light, Structure, and the Natural World: Preservice Teachers Grapple with Big Ideas in an Early Learning Lab</i>	The purpose of this session is to share the experiences of preservice teachers as they grapple with the big ideas of science in a specially designed early learning lab at a Midwestern university.	Juana Reyes Lewis University	Juana Reyes, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor of early childhood education at Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, and a co-editor of Affirming the Rights of Emergent Bilingual and Multilingual Children and Families Interweaving Research and Practice through the Reggio Emilia Approach. She is a consulting editor for the Innovations, the educational journal of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance (NAREA). She represents NAREA on the Ideal Learning Roundtable for the Trust for Learning. Research interests: Latina/feminist epistemologies, transformative learning theories, and design of learning spaces.	
<i>Critical Exploration in the Classroom: A Case Not So</i>	This paper will deviate from most developmental psychology textbooks and popular social media to present a neo-Piagetian educational perspective by describing some historical lineage and to integrate a	Yeh Hsueh University of Memphis	Yeh Hsueh teaches human development at the University of Memphis where his students come from various education majors such as music, physical education, counseling, language, art,	

<i>Much in Agreement with “Take Theory into Practice”</i>	case of Eleanor Duckworth’s personal development, with the historical development of some methods such as clinical method, revised clinical method, and critical exploration in the classroom. This effort is to offer one interpretation of constructivist teaching, a unique case that most literature has not examined.		psychology and research. Before he settled in his current teaching position, he taught preschool, elementary school, high school, and graduate school. His research interest lies in the history of developmental science in the United States and in other countries. Comparative preschool education is another research focus he has had for decades. For over twenty years, he served as a Chinese content consultant for Sesame Workshop, the producer of Sesame Street. One profound educational experience that has long-lasting impact on his learning and life is his engagement with “the critical exploration in the classroom” which many consider a significant and exceptional contribution Eleanor Duckworth and her students have made to education.	
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS - 5 1:15 P.M. – 2:30 P.M.				
<i>STEMwonder: Connecting Movement to STEM Learning with Young Children</i>	Balance is a developmental skill that progresses from birth as children learn to sit, crawl, stand, and walk. It is essential to human movement, the design and engineering of technology, and the aesthetic elements of art. Balance investigations are a perfect fit for infant and toddler classrooms as children actively explore the role of balance with their bodies and within the world of objects. There is a known connection between the development of movement and the development of cognition (Musculus, Ruggeri, Raab, 2021) and research in pediatric medicine has noted that an increase in developmental and cognitive difficulties in children can be explained by a lack of large motor movement. Investigating balance is a STEM experience where children can communicate their interest and understanding, develop motor skills, and engage in all elements of STEM. Through observation, educators discover what infants and toddlers are naturally drawn to investigate and the kinds of problems they create for themselves. Children’s investigations can be supported by providing time and opportunity for engaging with materials that allow children to independently produce an action that is immediate and observable and then to vary their actions for a different result. STEMwonder’s approach to balance experiences is a perfect fit for classroom investigations as children actively explore	Sherri Peterson Iowa Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa	Sherri Peterson see previous	

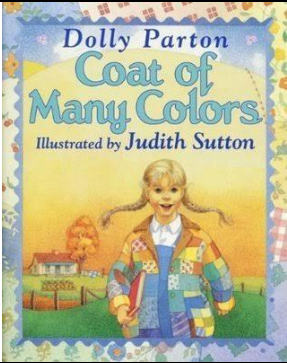
	and connect balance with their bodies and balance within the world of objects.			
<i>Constructivist Learning is Connected Learning: Looking Beyond Yoga to Ancient Gurukul Pedagogy to Deepen Constructivist Practice</i>	This session explores the intersection of constructivist learning, connected learning, and ancient Gurukul pedagogy, inviting participants to look beyond yoga to the broader educational philosophy from which it emerged. Through theory, reflection, and teaching examples, participants will discover how ancient Gurukul principles deepen constructivist practice. Participants will leave with practical strategies for creating connected, holistic learning environments across educational settings.	Malini Adani Founder & Lead Educator SUGO, Online English Tutoring Programs Sugoacademy.com	Dr. Malini Bhavesh Adani is an educator and founder of SUGO (Step Up Gem), a Pay-As-You-Wish online English tutoring program that makes high-quality English language learning accessible and affordable. She holds a Doctorate in Education and brings extensive experience teaching learners from elementary school through adulthood. Her work is grounded in constructivist learning, with particular interest in how meaningful relationships, mentorship, reflection, and authentic learning experiences foster engagement and lifelong learning. Drawing inspiration from both contemporary educational research and traditional educational wisdom, Dr. Adani explores ways to create connected, equitable, and transformative learning environments that place the learner at the center.	
<i>Beyond Activities: Teacher Metacognition as the Foundation of Inquiry-Based Learning in Preschool Classrooms</i>	This session explores how preschool teachers' metacognitive practices shape inquiry-based learning and support children's developing metacognitive abilities. Drawing on findings from a qualitative multi-case study of five inquiry-based preschool classrooms, participants will examine how teachers intentionally observe, document, reflect, and adapt instruction in response to children's thinking. Rather than presenting inquiry as a collection of activities, this session positions inquiry as a constructivist approach grounded in teachers' reflective decision-making. Participants will leave with practical strategies for fostering children's thinking, curiosity, and meaning-making through responsive teaching practices.	Jessica Carter East Tennessee State University	Jessica Carter, Ph.D. is an early childhood teacher educator and consultant whose work focuses on inquiry-based learning, constructivist pedagogy, and teacher metacognition in early childhood classrooms. Her research examines how teachers' reflective decision-making supports children's thinking and curiosity through inquiry-based teaching. Jessica has extensive experience partnering with early childhood educators through teaching, coaching, and professional development to promote child-centered, inquiry-driven learning environments. She is passionate about bridging research and practice to support meaningful learning experiences for young children and the educators who teach them.	
<i>Sound and Soundscapes in PreK</i>	Sounds are all around us and naturally spark children's curiosity. By harnessing that interest, teachers can explore hands-on ways to teach complex ideas like sound and soundscapes—and reveal sound as another powerful literacy.	Anne Lowry ACT, NSTA, NAEYC, ECEE	Anne Lowry, MEd, see previous.	
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS - 6 2:45 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.				
<i>Where Ideas Meet: Dialogue, Connection and the Construction of Knowledge</i>	This session explores how young children construct knowledge through their connections with people, materials, environments, experiences, language, culture, and ideas. Drawing on constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, participants will consider	Christine Richard Growing Place and Santa Monica College Sarah Carlos	Christine Richard is passionate about human development and committed to fostering culturally responsive, high-quality education. Her work focuses on creating equitable, inclusive learning environments where children and educators can	

	children as active theory-builders whose understandings develop through experience, dialogue, and interaction. The session will explore how educators can provide meaningful learning entry points while intentionally noticing, reflecting, and extending the connections through which children's theories grow. The educator is positioned as a connector who creates conditions for meaningful dialogue, inquiry, and co-construction.	Growing Place	thrive. She holds an M.A. in Educational Psychology from California State University, Northridge, and has 35 years of experience supporting children, families, and educators through relationship-based, reflective practices. At Growing Place, she has served as Lead Teacher, Atelierista, and currently Pedagogista, emphasizing collaborative teaching, inquiry, and learning. In addition, Christine is Adjunct Faculty at Santa Monica College and a California Mentor Teacher. She is particularly interested in how children construct theories through their connections with people, materials, environments, experiences, and ideas, and in how educators can nurture these connections through intentional observation, dialogue, and reflection. Christine believes in learning communities where children, families, and educators grow together as confident, compassionate, and creative thinkers. Sarah Carlos is a Lead Teacher at Growing Place, where she has worked with preschool-aged children, ages 2–5, for the past four years. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from UCLA, where her experience in the Applied Developmental Psychology minor sparked her passion for observing and learning alongside children in early childhood classrooms. Sarah values creating environments where children feel empowered to explore their curiosities and share and build upon ideas with one another. Her work is grounded in the belief that children are active participants in their learning and that meaningful learning emerges through exploration, relationships, and shared discovery.	
<i>Seeing the Connections: Using A Constructivist Model to Notice, Interpret, and Nudge Learners' Reasoning</i>	What can a learner's response tell us about the thinking behind it? This session introduces the Constructivist Classroom Reasoning Model (CCRM), a framework for examining how learners coordinate ideas as their reasoning develops. Participants will explore how noticing, interpreting, questioning, and nudging can make connected learning visible and inform instructional decisions.	Kelly Russell Troy University	Dr. Kelly Russell is the coordinator of Early Childhood Education Programs at Troy University. Her teaching and scholarship focus on constructivist pedagogy, children's reasoning, and responsive teaching. She is a longtime member of the Association for Constructivist Teaching (ACT) and has previously served as president of the organization. Her current work includes the development of the Constructivist Classroom Reasoning Model (CCRM), a framework for examining how learners coordinate ideas and how teachers can respond productively to developing reasoning.	

<i>Scaffolding Through Mixed-Age Play: A Vygotskian Approach to Connected Learning</i>	Mixed-age play creates rich opportunities for children to learn with and from one another. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this interactive session examines how cognitive development is supported through peer interactions, shared problem-solving, and naturally occurring scaffolding during play. Participants will explore research and practical strategies for leveraging mixed-age play as a constructivist context for connected learning and development.	Brian Stone Northern Arizona University Sandra J. Stone Northern Arizona University	Brian A. Stone is an Assistant Professor in Flagstaff, Arizona, whose teaching and research focus is on constructivist approaches to learning, play, inquiry, and children's cognitive development, especially in science education. His work explores how social interaction, inquiry, and play support meaning-making and conceptual growth, with particular interest in sociocultural and Vygotskian perspectives on learning. Brian works with pre-service educators and is committed to bridging educational theory and classroom practice to create engaging, child-centered environments. Dr. Sandra J. Stone is Professor Emerita at Northern Arizona University and is an internationally renowned expert in multiage education. Additionally, she has expertise in play, literacy, and constructivist practices.	
<i>Connected Learning: A University Laboratory School's Constructivist Journey</i>	Join us in a reflective presentation about our nearly a decade-long journey of teachers, leaders, faculty, and students learning together to bring constructivist theory to life through emergent curriculum. Hear firsthand stories of educators transitioning from traditional teaching methods to responsive, child-centered practice. Explore how connection, reflection, and inquiry shape learning for both children and adults.	Michelle Darabaris The University of Alabama Children's Program Shannon Spruiell Lead Teacher and Lab Instructor, Toddlers The University of Alabama Children's Program Alison Sizemore Lead Teacher and Lab Instructor, Preschool The University of Alabama Children's Program	Michelle Darabaris brings over 38 years of experience in early childhood education, serving children, families, and future educators across diverse settings. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in early childhood education from the University of Alabama in Birmingham and P-3 classroom teacher certification. She completed master's work in Educational Leadership from The University of Alabama, to obtain her P-12 principal certification. She has led both urban and university-based early childhood programs to national accreditation and excellence in quality standards. As Director of the University of Alabama's nationally accredited laboratory school, Michelle supports curriculum innovation, educator development, pre-service educator development, and interdisciplinary research. Her work centers on constructivist pedagogy, authentic assessment, and making children's learning visible through play. Her research interest focuses on empowering early childhood educators through professional development that inspires reflective, child-centered, and transformative teaching practices. Shannon is a 1997 graduate of Texas Tech University and has just completed her 28th year at the University of Alabama. She continues to find joy in seeing children figure things out and is honored to play a role in their growth and development stories. Working with the	

			undergraduate students is a bonus for her teaching heart. Shannon was a 2020 recipient of a Teacher Excellence Award by the Nick's Kids Foundation, a recognition program funded by Nick and Terry Saban. Alison is a graduate of The University of Alabama and has been teaching for 26 years. Twenty-four of those years have been at the laboratory school at UA where she enjoys teaching the littles and is still amazed at their creative thinking processes. Alison is proud of her work mentoring the college students every single day and was awarded with the Jack Davis Outstanding Alumni Award by our college in 2021.	
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS - 7 4:15 P.M. – 5:30 P.M.				
<i>Promoting Spatial Reasoning in the Early Years: Exploring Pattern Blocks and Pattern Block Puzzles</i>	Pattern blocks are an early childhood material that is often used to stimulate children's thinking about shapes, sorting, categorization, and pattern. This session will put these familiar materials in participants hands with puzzles and challenge participants to use these materials to stimulate much deeper spatial thinking that includes a) coordinating shapes with corresponding spaces; b) distinguishing among and coordinating the sizes of angles and spaces; c) thinking about and using symmetry as they invent puzzle solutions; and d) employing mental imagery. The session is grounded in Piaget's cognitive learning theory and aligns with standards of the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, and the NAEYC Early Childhood Mathematics: Promoting Good Beginnings Position Statement.	Christina Sales Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa (retired)	Christina Sales see previous	
<i>Efficient and Meaningful Documentation</i>	This session explores documentation as a tool for observing, reflecting on, and extending children's thinking, not simply displaying finished work. Participants will learn practical ways to turn everyday observations, conversations, photographs, and children's work into meaningful documentation that makes learning visible and helps inform what happens next. Through examples and reflection, educators will consider how documentation can honor children's voices, challenge teacher bias, and support ongoing inquiry and learning.	Brooke Dyer Webster Groves School District	As a dedicated early childhood educator and teacher leader, she has spent her career advocating for children, educators, and families in public education. Her experience spans preschool and primary education, supported by bachelor's and master's degrees in early childhood education. Beyond the classroom, she serves as a union leader, supporting educator voice, professional growth, and advocacy. Her work is grounded in culturally sustaining practices, emergent curriculum, and Reggio-inspired approaches, with a particular focus	

			on creating inclusive environments for children with special rights. She is passionate about elevating early childhood education through reflective practice, collaboration, and meaningful, inquiry-driven learning experiences.	
<i>Constructing Connection: Learning From Black Fathers of Sons with Autism</i>	This session explores how educators can co-construct knowledge with Black fathers raising sons with autism. Through lived experiences, reflection, and collaborative discussion, participants will examine family knowledge as an essential educational resource. Participants will leave with practical strategies for building culturally responsive, family-centered learning partnerships.	Katherine Temple University of Michigan	Katherine serves as a special educator with a concentration in autism spectrum disorder. She also serves as a trainer-facilitator for of Peace Education and Conflict Management. Katherine was awarded teacher of the year by the National Historical Society, and she then went on to become an ambassador for the state of Michigan for the National Historical Society. She earned a master's in educational administration and an Ed.S. in Autism. Currently, Katherine is a doctoral candidate at University of Michigan, in Curriculum and Instruction. She published an interactive workbook with Pearson Publishing Company entitled, "Connecting Sociology to Critical Thinking," where students are allowed to journal their experience with sociology from a personal perspective and apply principles and theories of sociology to their own personal life stories. Katherine also conducted leadership workshops for students at the Charles H. Wright African American Museum in Detroit. The workshops included subjects on how to be a leader, student leaders stop bullies, and students and teachers against violence and crime.	
<i>Integrating the Coat of Many Colors: The Role of Teachers' Values in Developing Units of Inquiry</i>	In this session, presenters will facilitate a workshop designed to highlight the importance of teachers' values on developing units of inquiry. How do teachers develop a sense of constructivist logic? Sometimes, the teachers' deepest held values can act as an undercurrent in the curriculum planning process, impacting powerful units of inquiry. Just as beloved icon Dolly Parton shared with the world some of her most treasured values through her music, art, and storytelling, this session will examine a specific example of how a teacher's love, care, and values found inspiration in Dolly's work.	James Foss University of Minnesota Crookston Randa Dunlap Appalachian State University	Dr. James Foss see previous. Dr. Randa Dunlap see previous	

					
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