

By **Tori Savage/GUEST CORRESPONDENT**

Thu Dec 10, 2009, 04:09 PM EST

WESTBOROUGH - What will the wilderness around us look like 10, 20 or 50 years from now? What sort of Earth will our children inherit? And what should we do about it?

On Saturday, Nov. 14, early childhood educators gathered in Westborough to discuss these very issues at the Growing Up WILD: Exploring Nature with Young Children workshop sponsored by MassWildlife.

Hosted by the Congregational Preschool and facilitated by Pam Landry, the Education Coordinator of MassWildlife, and Gini Traub, from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation, the program brought more than 20 early childhood educators from across the state together to explore ways of promoting the relationship between children and nature.

In the morning, participants took part in activities that demonstrated how to involve nature in the classroom. The afternoon session was spent in small groups in which educators discussed how they might utilize ideas from the Growing Up WILD project handbook in their own classrooms. The day ended with a peer teaching exercise, with each group presenting a topic chosen from the Growing Up WILD project handbook, including such units as: Wiggling Worms, Bird Beak Buffet, Ants on Parade, First Impressions, and Terrific Turkeys.

Landry, Traub, and Congregational Preschool teachers Anne Deysher, Gretchen Doret and Bobbi Savage were pleased with the program's turnout, the exchange of lesson ideas, and the enthusiasm shared by all the educators.

The Growing Up WILD program, developed by the Council for Environmental Education, is an early education program that builds on children's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Incorporating the natural world into the lives of children will promote not only environmental consciousness and appreciation of nature, the program asserts, but also creativity, learning through play, physical wellbeing, and a sensory inquisitiveness.

Experts like Richard Louv, author of national bestseller "Last Child in the Woods," argue that children will (and may already) suffer from what Louv calls "Nature-deficit disorder." To counter this development, Growing Up WILD and the MassWildlife educators are working with parents and teachers of preschool children to bring nature into the classroom and children out into nature as much as possible.

Growing Up WILD teaches that people must coexist with nature, growing alongside it; the relationship is not one of ownership, but of stewardship.

For more information on Growing Up WILD workshops, contact pam.landry@state.ma.us or 508-389-6310.

Comments (0)