

**CF** COLLEGE of  
CENTRAL  
FLORIDA  
—an equal opportunity college—  
3001 SW College Rd  
Bldg. 20, Rm. 202  
Ocala, FL 34474



# 37th Annual Early Childhood Conference

Saturday,  
March 28, 2026  
7:15 a.m.-4 p.m.



College of Central Florida  
Ewers Century Center  
3001 S.W. College Road  
Ocala, FL 34474

College of Central Florida Teacher Education  
in partnership with  
The Early Learning Coalition of Marion County

CF.edu/ECC

Scan the code to learn more about  
the Early Childhood Conference.



Participants are invited to compete in our contest by designing a puzzle piece that represents your personal connection, influence, and passion within early childhood education.

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## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: GERRY BROOKS

### Relationships with Family and Staff

Gary Brooks is a 27-year veteran educator with 17 years' experience as a principal. His book *Go See the Principal* outlines strategies for making sure that school climbing culture is a priority in everyone's life. His sessions will focus on how to deal in a positive manner with colleagues, students, and parents, and we challenge you to be the best you can be in any situation.

See website for information and registration: [CF.edu/ecc](http://CF.edu/ecc)

For group registration, download the registration form.  
Each student must complete  
the form and return it to Bebe Rahaman  
with payment via [rahamanb@cf.edu](mailto:rahamanb@cf.edu).

**Continuing Education Approvals:** Childcare personnel can receive eight hours of in-service credit. Marion County Public Schools employees will receive six MIP points for sessions attended.

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Topics and concepts presented at this event are for discussion purposes only and are not intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel individuals to believe the topics or concepts presented therein. Nor do they constitute endorsement of such topics or concepts by the College of Central Florida, its Board of Trustees, or any of their officers, employees, or agents.

**English Language Arts and Dramatic Play - B. Velez**

This presentation will explore several different ELA and dramatic play centers that can be used in classrooms throughout the year. Attendees will learn the standards it hits for pre-K and kindergarten.

*Target Audience: P*

**The Road to Positive Personal Climate and Culture - G. Brooks**

Gerry continues his theme of positive personal climate and culture in his breakout sessions by using object lessons to help remember key points in improving relationships between parents, coworkers and students.

*Target Audience: I, F, P, A*

**Building Literacy Through Oral Language and Shared Storytelling - K. Warner**

Learn how oral language and shared storytelling can strengthen preschool literacy development. Participants will engage in an interactive blend of lecture and collaboration to design a five-week series of full-group literacy activities, using one story as the foundation for the entire month. The session will emphasize strategies for incorporating CLASS connections, exploring functions of language, and applying effective questioning techniques to deepen engagement and comprehension.

*Target Audience: P*

**Early Childhood Teachers' Perceptions of Digital Game-Based Learning and Gamification - N. Cakmakci**

This session explores early childhood educators' perspectives on Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) and gamification as instructional tools. Findings reveal that while DGBL promotes engagement and enhances learning outcomes, educators often face obstacles, including insufficient training, limited digital resources, and inadequate institutional support. This discussion emphasizes progress, barriers, and future directions in implementing digital tools in early education.

*Target Audience: P*

**Working with the ABCs of Autism - J. St. Jacques**

This session provides a comprehensive understanding of autism and special needs, focusing on practical strategies for support. Learn how to identify and manage challenging behaviors, create a supportive environment, and communicate effectively.

Explore the importance of acceptance and collaboration with families and support teams.

*Target Audience: I, P, A*

**Nature-based Learning: Creating the Outdoor Classroom - K. Nassoioy**

This session explores opportunities to connect to the natural world and receive the mental and physical benefits it offers. Discover how amazing nature-based activities can transform your playground time into nature-based learning experiences.

*Target Audience: I, P*

**The Power of Connection: - L. Belcher**

A road map of how connections to yourself, your classroom, your team, your families, and every child will help you to focus on social and emotional support during your daily journey. Looking ahead to encouraging each child in reaching their final destinations, this presentation is meant to gain helpful tips, tools, and handouts to make the most of each day. Let us look together at the meaning of behaviors and how we can shift our focus to understanding all behavior is communication.

*Target Audience: I, P, A*

**More Than Just a Read-Aloud - M. Dean**

Read-aloud can have a “wow” factor when you combine them with the “Five Pillars” of Literacy. Come join me to learn about how to engage your students in high quality, high reward read-aloud that focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These pillars are crucial for developing strong literacy skills from early childhood onward and should be integrated into effective reading programs.

*Target Audience: P*

**How Can One Question Change a Child's Life - K. Horn Lehman**

In this session, Kari shares the story of how a single moment of curiosity from a teacher reshaped her child's early learning experience and led to a life-changing diagnosis. Through storytelling and hands-on practice, participants will explore research on informed, curiosity-led classroom strategies that build trust, support self-regulation, and strengthen belonging. Attendees will leave with the "Belonging Blueprint," a simple, practical tool for redesigning daily routines to nurture mindsets, connection, and emotional security for preschool and primary students.

*Target Audience: P, A*

**Where Children Live, Learn, and Play: Partnering with Families and Teachers in Early Intervention - D. Tellado**

This presentation highlights the collaborative role of parents, extended family members, and early childhood teachers in building consistent, individualized support systems. By empowering caregivers and focusing on each child's unique strengths, Early Steps demonstrates how family-centered practices and early intervention during the first three years foster growth, resilience, and lifelong learning opportunities.

*Target Audience: I*

**Integrating STEAM in Dramatic Play Centers - N. Knight**

Participants engage in activities such as planting pretend seeds, observing plant growth, and caring for their garden using play materials like pots, soil, and gardening tools. Each station integrates elements of STEAM: exploring plant biology and life cycles (science), using magnifying glasses or simple apps (technology), designing garden layouts (engineering), decorating pots and drawing plants (art), and counting or sorting seeds (math).

*Target Audience: P*

**Pop Up Puppet Show - E. Bland**

Participants will understand how to connect literature and puppetry arts by creating a pop-up puppet show based on a classic children's picture book. They will learn how to create their own pop-up story along with stick puppets to take back to share with their students.

*Target Audience: F, P*

**Understanding Play Through the Lens of Infants & Toddlers - B. Spencer**

In this session, participants will engage in intentional observation and thoughtful self-reflection to deepen their awareness of how young children learn, explore, and make meaning. We will examine children's play with curiosity and openness, identifying opportunities to support growth through responsive, developmentally appropriate strategies. Hands-on experiences will allow educators to practice noticing, interpreting, and planning, strengthening their ability to create meaningful learning environments for infants and toddlers.

*Target Audience: I*

**Little Readers Start at Home - Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Strategies - D. Garth**

This presentation introduces simple, effective ways to teach phonemic awareness and phonics through every day routines, play-based activities, and evidence-based strategies aligned with the science of reading. Participants will gain practical tools for modeling sounds, blending and segmenting words, and introducing letter-sound relationships in fun, low-stress ways that support reading growth and strengthen the parent-child learning connection.

*Target Audience: P*

**Outdoor Learning Everyday - M. Surman and C. Hall**

An outdoor classroom is simply taking your instruction outside, moving away from paper and pencils, and embracing the development of the whole child. Learning outdoors integrates gross motor, fine motor, sensory, social emotional, and creative development in an airy and less restrictive way. The outdoor classroom evolves from the real needs of children, offers activities that are meaningful to them, and embraces developmentally appropriate practices.

*Target Audience: P*

**Blooming Learners: Stories, Skills, and Social Success for Pre-K Children - J. Woik**

Explore the power of interactive literacy that motivates young learners, strengthen behavior skills, and create a classroom culture where every child feels valued. Examine the techniques that will encourage participation, curiosity, and collaboration in classroom settings. Learn how purposeful language, visual supports, and simple routines can reinforce resilience and help children navigate challenges. Educators will leave equipped with developmentally appropriate, student-centered strategies that boost attention, improve social interactions, and make literacy an anchor for both academic and emotional growth.

*Target Audience: P*

**The Relationship Blueprint: Communication for Every Connection - S. James**

This presentation takes you through a step-by-step plan to master the Relationship Blueprint and successfully communicate with EVERY connection on your campus. Communication and relationships are the KEY to successful schools; we all know it, and now it is time to master it. Learn practical knowledge that is easily adapted to your school for a transformative and long-lasting impact.

*Target Audience: A*

**Redirecting Behavior Through Play - S. O'Neal**

This redirection technique works by shifting a child's focus and energy to an alternative activity while promoting emotional regulation and positive behaviors rather than punishment or negative reinforcement. Redirection through play allows teachers to become proactive, shift focus, and provide alternatives all while the children play.

*Target Audience: P, A*

**Real Horses in the Classroom - D. Garcia-Bengochea**

Reading with Horses provides grade appropriate books and activities for young students. After children read a book, the ACTUAL character visits the classroom to “bring the book to life.

*Target Audience: P*

**Target Audience Key: I = Infant/Toddler; F = Faith Based; P = Preschool/PreK Primary A = Administration**