

# CCEI Early Childhood Environmental Education Hosts MUDFEST at Slattery



The CLASS



The PROFESSOR



The ENVIRONMENT

EEC 4322/EDG 5931 Effective Practices in Early Childhood Environmental Education, offered by dept. of Curriculum, Culture and Educational Inquiry, recently held a class in the environment at The Karen Slattery Educational Research Center for Child Development.

The class, led by associate professor Yash Bhagwanji, is ultimately about helping young children develop positive connections with nature. Graduate students created an environment full of mud, pine cones, coconuts, earthworms, fun and more for Slattery preschoolers to engage in hands-on nature interaction.

“My preservice teachers work with the teachers at the Slattery Childhood Development Center in integrating environmental education within ongoing investigations by the children,” said Bhagwanji. “This model is unique in teacher training because there isn’t much at all about this anywhere in the world.”

The specific ways the preservice teachers assist children is by first helping the children feel joy when they are in, or interacting with, nature. The FAU graduate class is encouraged to provide children with plenty of time for unstructured exploration and discovery learning. At the same time, depending on children’s inquiries or interests, to provide experiences that further enhance their understandings and skills.

Through environmental education activities, children practice language and other developmental skills, develop notions about healthy foods and lifestyles, as well as notions about conservation and sustainability.

“My hope is that all preschools and child development centers include more time for children’s explorations and learning in natural areas,” said Bhagwanji. “Apart from the health and developmental benefits, natural areas are also the best places to learn first-hand about life cycles, food cycles, water cycle, interdependence among living things, and much more!”