

# Speaker Biographies

## **Deborah Kong, President of Early Edge California**

Deborah has worked for nine years as a key member of Early Edge California's leadership team as it has successfully advanced an early learning agenda. The mother of a 5 year old, she has a real-time appreciation for the current sense of urgency and opportunity for dramatically expanded and improved early childhood education. After 15 years as a journalist, including a position as a national writer for the Associated Press, and as a reporter for the San Jose Mercury News and Philadelphia Inquirer, Deborah pursued a Masters of Public Policy degree at UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy so that she could take a more active role in effecting change. She also received her bachelor's degree in English with a specialization in Asian American Studies from UCLA. The granddaughter of a Chinese immigrant who came to America in the 1920s without any knowledge of its language and culture, and who ended up graduating from UC Berkeley, Deborah carries a special value for the critical role education can play in helping families achieve the American Dream.

## **Kitty Dixon, Senior Vice President of Early Learning at the New Teacher Center**

At the New Teacher Center, a national non-profit dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers and school leaders, Kitty brings a background and passion for teaching, learning, leadership and school effectiveness from her twenty years as a teacher, literacy coach and trainer, Reading Recovery teacher leader, principal and director of curriculum and instruction.

Throughout her career, Kitty chose to teach and support schools in high-poverty areas with predominantly high percentages of English Learners. These opportunities sharpened her skills and fueled her passion for excellent teaching and quality support for every teacher and principal as well as equitable working and learning conditions for all.

Kitty joined the New Teacher Center in 2000. She's spearheaded projects ranging from a one day convening of over 15,000 teachers across one summer day in California, Better Together, to creating online technology tools and resources to reach new teachers and mentors, building a districts continuous improvement effort over 10 years, and supporting the human capital development internally at the Center. Kitty's current work in scaling Early Learning, builds on her expansive background in oral language development, literacy and teacher leader development.

## **Dr. Stuart Brown, Founder of the National Institute for Play**

Trained in general and internal medicine, psychiatry and clinical research, Dr. Stuart Brown first recognized the importance of play by discovering its absence in the life stories of murders and felony drunken drivers. His years of clinical practice and review of over 6000 personal play histories affirmed the importance and need for healthy play throughout the human life cycle. His independent scholarship and exploration of the evolution and neuroscience of human and animal play have led to the establishment of the National Institute for Play. The Mission of the National Institute for Play (NIFP) is to bring the unrealized knowledge, practices and benefits of play into public life. Dr. Brown was the instigator and Executive Producer of the three-part PBS series, "The Promise of Play," and coproduced the BBC-PBS series "Soul of the Universe." His experience as a medical administrator, producer, and scientific consultant or creator to numerous other productions on Joseph Campbell, Cosmology, Animal Play, and Stress, plus his scientific and popular writings have identified him as the foremost "practical champion of

the knowledge of play.” Dr. Brown’s book: Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul has been translated into eight languages. He co-teaches From Play to Innovation at the Hasso Plattner School of Design at Stanford University, and enjoys international corporate and academic consulting on play and its many contributions to overall human well-being.

### **The Honorable Kevin McCarty, California State Assembly**

Assemblymember McCarty was elected to the California State Assembly in November, 2014 to represent Assembly District 7, which includes the cities of Sacramento, West Sacramento, and parts of unincorporated Sacramento. As Chair of the Assembly Budget Sub-Committee on Education Finance, McCarty worked to steer significant investments in funding for early childhood, K-12, and higher education. In 2015, McCarty helped craft an on time state budget which included the largest education investments in history and increased access for early learning programs and community college, California State University, and University of California systems.

In his first year, McCarty jointly authored AB 1461, California's Motor Voter Law, which will increase voting participation and successfully pushed for a new Earned Income Tax Credit to benefit millions of low income Californians. Also, he wrote AB 876, a new law requiring local governments to steer organic waste from landfills to recycling facilities. For his commitment and dedication to California's youngest learners, McCarty received the 2015 Early Learning Champion Award by Early Edge California.

Prior to being elected to the State Assembly, McCarty served on the Sacramento City Council from 2004 to 2014. As a Councilmember focusing on youth, neighborhoods, sustainability and good government, McCarty wrote common-sense laws to regulate guns and ammunition and authored effective ordinances related to sub-standard rental housing, second-hand smoke and clean air. He also led the effort to create a City Whistleblower Hotline program and create an Independent Auditor department.

A lifelong Sacramentan, McCarty went to local public schools, attended American River College, and earned a B.A. in Political Science from CSU Long Beach and an M.A. in Public Policy and Administration from CSU Sacramento. He lives in the Elmhurst neighborhood of Sacramento with his wife Leticia and their twin daughters, Victoria and Barbara.

### **Cecelia Fisher-Dahms, Administrator of the Quality Improvement Office in the Early Education and Support Division of the California Department of Education**

Cecelia is responsible for California’s early learning foundations, quality improvement activities described in the state’s Child Care and Development Fund State Plan, Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant, and State Preschool and Infant/Toddler Quality Rating and Improvement System Block Grants. Since her appointment in September 2008, Ms. Fisher-Dahms has worked to create a cohesive early childhood education (ECE) professional development system and an updated child observational (Desired Results Developmental Profile) assessment system. Previously, she was a child development consultant in the Division’s Policy Office for eight years. Prior to entering state service, Ms. Fisher-Dahms was involved in education for more than 25 years, administering ECE programs for 18 years and teaching ECE courses at the community college level and mathematics at the middle school level. She has an MBA, a Community College Credential for Early Childhood Education, and Teaching Credential, with a BA in Mathematics.

# Workshop Presenter Biographies

## Intentional Play for Critical Learning

### **Betsy Fox, New Teacher Center**

Betsy works with the New Teacher Center supporting Early Learning leadership in several districts. She has been a teacher and learner for the past 35 years, working in preschools as well as elementary schools. After earning degrees in Early Childhood Education and Educational Administration and Supervision, Betsy has worked in various roles (preschool-grade 4 teacher, instructional coach, preschool director and principal) in NJ, Texas, and California.

Betsy has been a national trainer in many areas of curriculum, specializing in social-emotional learning, early learning, and literacy. She has developed Early Learning workforce development and quality improvement programs designed to provide high-quality experiences for young children. In addition to working directly with teachers through training and coaching, she has worked for over 10 years with leaders to enhance their knowledge and skills. She believes strongly that the combination of strong teaching and visionary leading help create the best possible learning opportunities for young children.

### **Robin Pence, Lynwood Elementary, Novato Unified School District**

Robin has taught 17 years, holds a Multiple Teaching Credential from Dominican University, and has completed extensive ECE coursework. Robin began her teaching career at Marin Head Start then was offered the opportunity to create a preschool program at Novato's Lynwood Elementary where she has been an actively involved staff member. This program provides quality learning opportunities for predominately dual-language, lower socioeconomic children and prepares them for the rigors of kindergarten through joyful play-based activities and high-interest projects. Robin has also served as a Mentor Teacher, guiding early childhood student teachers from local colleges for the past decade. She has presented at various conferences and served on numerous county-wide education committees. In addition to teaching and mentoring, Robin consults with local preschools and the Center for Childhood Creativity based at the Bay Area Discovery Museum. She resides on a gardened acre in Penngrove with her husband and 11-year-old son.

## Teaching Numeracy through Centers and Play

### **Barbara Chisholm, San Francisco Unified School District**

Barbara is an early childhood educator with over 25 years of experience. Currently, she is working in San Francisco Unified School District as an instructional coach, supporting PK/TK teachers, and is also a math program specialist in the Early Education Department. Barbara and a team of PK teachers have developed a PK math Core Curriculum that aligns with the TK-12 math core curriculum.

Barbara has developed a series of math workshops based on the PK Core Curriculum, providing trainings for SFUSD teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals. She has presented at the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics in San Francisco 2016, as well as California Mathematics Council in Asilomar 2016 and Palm Springs in 2015.

Her future work includes PK/TK math conversations, engaging families in PK/TK math, embedding powerful math into Project Based Learning, and supporting the TK team as they develop their math Core Curriculum.

### **Lauren Boyles, Starr King Elementary, San Francisco Unified School District**

Lauren has been working in early childhood education for eight years. She began her work with young children doing language and memory research with bilingual preschoolers, and went on to teach a Head Start classroom in Half Moon Bay, CA with primarily Spanish-speaking students and families. Five years ago, she began working in the San Francisco Unified School District as a preschool teacher at Starr King Elementary School.

She helped to write, develop, and implement a Pre-K Math Common Core-aligned curriculum, and serves on the Math Leadership Team at her school, working to align Pre-K instruction with K-5 instruction. Lauren will begin her work as the Dual Language and Literacy Coach for the Early Education Department of the SFUSD this summer, where she will continue her work to provide linguistically and developmentally appropriate math instruction that is engaging and accessible to all our students.

### **Nicole Zanutelli, Dr. Charles Drew Elementary, San Francisco Unified School District**

Nicole began her work as an early childhood educator 8 years ago, beginning at the Institute for Human and Social Development in East Palo Alto. She later transferred to San Francisco Head Start. Currently, she is working at San Francisco Unified School District as a Pre-Kindergarten teacher.

Nicole was a key contributor to the development of the SFUSD PK Math Core Curriculum. She went on to become a Math Teacher Leader at Drew Elementary where she has been leading math trainings and supporting teachers across grade levels.

In the future, Nicole will continue her work towards aligning PK-2 math and deepening the math curriculum with examples of developmentally appropriate practice for all children.

## **Using Powerful Interactions with Children to Support their Thinking, Knowledge, and Language**

### **John Gunnarson, Early Care and Education Consultant**

John teaches early childhood education at the College of Marin and is an independent consultant, providing training and technical assistance to early childhood programs throughout the United States and internationally.

His areas of specialization include classroom environments, early literacy, CLASS, project work, emergent curriculum, Reggio Emilia-inspired practices, and working with dual language learners. He has over 25 years of experience in early care and education as a teacher, director, and consultant.

Mr. Gunnarson is a National Head Start consultant, an endorsed High/Scope trainer, and former President of the Board of Trustees for the Lagunitas School District.

## **Developing Comprehension and Language Skills through Interactive Read Alouds**

### **Kristin Tripathy, New Teacher Center**

Kristin received her undergraduate degree in Early Childhood education from the University of Wisconsin, Stout. She has experience teaching Pre-K through 3rd grade and coaching in the areas of literacy and early learning best practices for the past 15 years. Kristin continued her journey of being a lifelong learner and pursued her Master's in Elementary Education and her Specialist Degree in Administration with a Principal Licensure. These degrees led her to the roles of Assistant Principal and Literacy Coordinator in her previous school district. She is currently working for the New Teacher Center as an Associate Program Director. She enjoys serving various districts in their Early Learning professional development efforts by coaching teachers and principals with a special emphasis on access and equitable opportunities for all children.

### **Kaytie Smith, New Teacher Center**

Kaytie is an Associate Program Consultant with New Teacher Center, coaching and delivering PD to Pre-K teachers in the Ravenswood School District. For over 12 years she worked as a Preschool teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as in administration in the early childhood field. She attended Mills College in Oakland with a double major in Child Development & Latin American Studies & Literature. Her passion for language, literacy, and equity are the driving forces behind the work she does today with teachers and students.

## **Emergent Writing in the TK Classroom**

### **Drew Giles, Oakland Unified School District**

Drew is an author, educator and leader for early childhood education. In 2014, Giles collaborated with Dr. Jean Feldman as they co-authored the ebook, "Teacher Survival Guide: What They Didn't Teach You in College," to assist teachers with proven powerful tips, tricks and strategies to help any early childhood educator. As a 2012 Colorado Teacher of the Year finalist, Drew demonstrated to be a resourceful, reflective and motivated kindergarten teacher.

Drew attended the University of Colorado-Boulder prior to teaching at a private preschool near Seoul, South Korea. Upon his return to the States, he attended graduate school at the University of Colorado-Denver, where he received a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education. While teaching in the US, Drew had experiences as a substitute teacher, early childhood special educator, bi-lingual and English-speaking kindergarten teacher. Currently, Mr. Giles serves as Director of Quality, Enhancement and Professional Development for Early Learning in Oakland Unified School District.

### **Nicole Nelson, New Teacher Center**

Nicole is an Associate Program Director at the New Teacher Center, a national non-profit dedicated to improving learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers and school leaders. Nicole completed her undergraduate work in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, and later obtained her teaching credential at San Francisco State. She went on to complete a Masters in Education focused on Early Literacy and a second Masters in Education focused on School Leadership, both at Bank

Street University. Nicole has taught at public schools in low-income communities throughout her teaching career. She co-founded a K-8 gifted and talented public school in New York City, where she was the Assistant Principal for 5 years.

## **Rituals and Routines that Build Social Emotional and Literacy Skills**

### **Janis Arnerich, New Teacher Center**

As a member of the NTC Early Learning Team, Janis coaches pre-K teachers in Oakland, California. Her passion for early childhood education is fueled by her belief that all children are entitled to caring and engaging environments led by knowledgeable and enthusiastic educators. Janis holds a BA from San Francisco State University, and Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education and Administrative Leadership from St. Mary's College. Janis has been an educator for 35 years as a Montessori teacher, Child Development Center teacher, thirteen years as a kindergarten teacher and a Teacher on Special Assignment. After completing her Educational Leadership degree, Janis transitioned to school site leadership for 14 years. As a principal she championed her teacher's work with Readers and Writers Workshop, the Bay Area Science Education's BaySci Project and Social Emotional Learning. In 2012, she worked with teachers at her site to launch the district's first Transitional Kindergarten program.

### **Esmeralda Fuentes, New Teacher Center**

Esmeralda joined New Teacher Center in the fall of 2015 after teaching Head Start in San Antonio, TX and Transitional Kindergarten in San Francisco, California. She participates in a Dual Language Summer Institute where she teaches first graders with an audience of teachers and coaches in best practices for dual language learners. She currently coaches pre-kindergarten teachers in Oakland, CA.

## **Organizing a Classroom for Optimal Learning**

### **Bee Medders, New Teacher Center**

Bee is a New Teacher Center Program Consultant with 26 years experience in education as a primary teacher, literacy coordinator, instructional coach, and mentor. She contributed to the development of the Standards and Continuum of Early Learning Teaching Practice. As a member of the NTC Oral Language Action Research team, she helped create the Oral Language Assessment Toolkit, the Language Readers Series, the NTC Oral Language website, and the Foundations in Language and Literacy (FILL) Professional Development Series. Bee received her teaching credential and BA in Liberal Studies with an option in Early Childhood at Cal State Hayward (now East Bay). She also received training in developmentally appropriate practice from Educator Consultation and Resources (ECR). She has lived in the Philippines, Guam, New York, and resides in Castro Valley, CA.

### **Elia García, New Teacher Center**

Elia García serves as an Associate Program Director supporting teachers and administrators within the Alum Rock and Franklin-McKinley School districts. Prior to joining NTC, Elia served as the TK specialist at the Santa Clara County Office of Education where she supported the implementation of TK programs in 26 school districts, several of which became TK demonstration sites and one a model TK program.

Elia began her career in education as a kindergarten dual immersion teacher with the Pajaro USD and taught kindergarten and first grade in several northern California districts. Additionally, for many years, she taught summer school and served as a literacy coach with the Migrant Education program. Elia then went on to serve as a high school vice principal, summer school principal, district level multilingual specialist, and district director of English learner programs. Elia earned her B.A., teaching credential, and M.A. from UC Santa Cruz, and her administrative credential from Saint Mary's College.

## **Supporting Effective TK Instruction: Setting the stage for Common Core**

### **Lisa Mount, New Teacher Center**

Lisa is the Senior Director of Product Development at the New Teacher Center, a national nonprofit dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers. Her role includes leading a team to develop professional learning for the early learning audience as well as other classroom teachers and leaders. In addition to mentoring teachers, her 25 years of classroom education experience includes six years as a kindergarten teacher, seven years as an elementary literacy specialist, and National Board Certification as an Early Childhood Generalist.

### **Jenna Wachtel, New Teacher Center**

Jenna is the Program Director of the Early Learning Initiative at the New Teacher Center. Jenna is passionate about ensuring high quality, developmentally appropriate early learning experiences for all children. Throughout her career, Jenna has taught at regular public and charter schools in both high- and low-income communities. She has earned National Board Certification in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy, completed Reading Recovery Certification, and was named one of Splashlife's 30 Under 30 Innovative Educators.

Jenna leads the fieldwork of New Teacher Center's Early Learning Initiative – an initiative to ensure high levels of school success for our youngest learners through the support of teachers of 3, 4 and 5 year olds. Her work has focused primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area supporting PreK and TK coaches as well as in East Palo Alto working directly with Early Childhood teachers.

## **Leading for Quality Early Learning: TK Administrator PLC**

### **Emily Grossberg, New Teacher Center**

Ms. Grossberg works for the New Teacher Center training Instructional Coaches and Early Education administrators in and around San Francisco. She joined the teaching force as a Teach for America corps member because she was inspired to help address the inequities our education system faces. She taught in grades PK-5 in three urban Bay Area districts. Ms. Grossberg has been training teachers since 2005 and has been a coach since 2007. She earned her MA at Columbia's Teachers College in Organization and Leadership and then became a PK-5 school administrator in San Francisco Unified School District. Aside from her role at NTC, she is an adjunct professor through Loyola Marymount University. Outside of work, Ms. Grossberg is a mom to a 2.5 year-old girl and a 5 month-old boy.

## **Jenna Wachtel, New Teacher Center**

See above.

## **The Power of Our Voice - Advocating for TK**

### **Araceli Sandoval-Gonzalez, Early Edge California**

Araceli has over a decade experience successfully engaging policymakers to build awareness about the importance of investing in quality early learning programs. As field director for Early Edge California, she tracks emerging birth to five practices and partners with local education agencies to implement programs such as transitional kindergarten, expanded TK, Birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade initiatives and preschool expansion, amongst others. Prior to joining Early Edge California, she served as the policy and public affairs director for the former Los Angeles Unified School District Board President, where she developed policy and managed funds allocations to school enrichment and capital improvement projects. Araceli is passionate about enhancing opportunities for children and presently serves on the executive board of directors for the East LA Community Corporation, a housing agency that advocates for economic and social justice in Los Angeles County, and was appointed to LAUSD's Early Childhood and Family Engagement Committee, where she advises the school board.

### **Ana Moreno, Associate Program Director at New Teacher Center**

Ana is an Associate Program Director with the Early Learning Team at the New Teacher Center. Ana is passionate about supporting early learning teachers to enhance their practice in order to provide developmentally appropriate instruction in a culturally responsive environment. The passion that drives her work is a commitment to equity and interrupting the school to prison pipeline starting in the Early Learning context.

Ana holds a BA from Pomona College and completed her graduate work in education at Teachers College Columbia University where she received a Masters Degree in Bilingual Bicultural Education. Ana has 15 years of classroom teaching experience in both public and independent schools. She has taught in South Texas, New York City, Oakland and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Ana joined the New Teacher Center in 2014 as a literacy coach in East Palo Alto. In her current role, she coaches pre-school teachers in Oakland Unified School District. In addition, she designs and delivers professional development and holds the advocacy and policy initiative for the Early Learning Team.