“Informal Science Learning: Activating and Supporting Life-long Engagement with STEM”

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Abstract
My research is focused on understanding and supporting learning as it happens in out-of-school settings. In this talk, I review lines of research that pursue three fundamental and interacting questions: 1) How can children’s everyday STEM interests be cultivated into “islands of expertise” that connect children to a life-long learning pathway? 2) What are the social, material, and cultural resources that support successful engagement in out-of-school learning? 3) How can we best connect STEM engagement over place and time as part of a broader learning ecology that supports life-long learning pathways? I will conclude by considering the current state of the learning sciences field and its connection to out-of-school learning, and the potential of research-and-practice collaboration to transform how we think about science education.

Biographical Note
Kevin Crowley is a professor of Learning Sciences and Policy at the University of Pittsburgh, where he also directs the University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning in Out-of-School Environments (UPCLOSE). He works in partnership with museums, community organizations, and other informal educators to develop innovative out-of-school learning environments. Crowley’s group conducts basic learning sciences research in informal settings and develops new theories of how people learn about science, technology, engineering, and art. Current projects include the Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE), the Learning Activation Lab, and the Climate and Urban Systems Partnership, as well as ongoing partnerships with the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Crowley has a Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology from Carnegie Mellon University and a BA in psychology from Swarthmore College.