

Earlier this month (October 10-12, 2019), the Early Childhood Special Education Program of COESS hosted two important events in collaboration with Crossroads for Learning, an organization formed to inspire, support, connect and challenge early childhood educators as they seek to understand and apply principles and practices of the Reggio Emilia Approach in their contexts. Dr. Juana Reyes, Assistant Professor in the Early Childhood and Special Education Program is a founding member of Crossroads. The first a conference, *What Can We Learn from the Role of the Pedagogista? A Seminar on the Role of the Pedagogista*, lead by Tiziana Filippini, former pedagogista from the world-renown schools of Reggio, Emilia Italy. These municipal schools for young children were first recognized by Newsweek as being some of the best in the world, in 1991. Since then, educators across the world have gone to visit the schools and bring back possibilities for their own settings.

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This conference was developed out of a void of professional development opportunities for those who lead learning in early childhood programs including principals, mentor teachers, and education coordinators. These individuals support teachers in thinking about what they do with children and why. There are many resources for educators who lead learning to sharpen their management skills or to implement a new assessment tool. However, there is a serious need in the field for this level of educators to consider how to support teachers in the classroom to offer, challenge, and extend the learning and development of young children. Filippini shared insight into what the Italian educators call *progettazione*—a way of documenting, interpreting, and designing learning experiences for children. In the 3-day seminar, participants were invited to explore the beautiful campus of Lewis University to look for possibilities to work with children on a project with nature. The overarching question: How can we see that we are part of an ecological system?

As they walked along the beautiful Burnham Trail to find something to pursue with children to consider this question, a few participants found a leaf with an interesting growth on it. Some possible questions for children could be: *How did these things get on this leaf? Did the leaf produce this? or Did something else put it there?* {Insert Image 7490} Since we know young children weave fantasy with reality, the possible outcomes for this investigation could also include aspects of fantasy. As young children build knowledge and understanding within their context, they might consider the *family* of the leaf, or they may make a connection with the leaf to a familiar storybook. This seminar challenged educators to recognize the multidisciplinary way of knowing instinctive to young children. Too often learning experiences are fragmented for children as teachers rely on a specific curriculum developed apart from the context the children. The Reggio schools acknowledge and foster the ecology of relationships that include places, times, and conditions that are appropriate for young children and adults.

The conference drew early educators from various settings including the Child Parent Center of Tucson, Arizona, Webster University, Radcliffe Child Care Center of Harvard, Hanna Fenichel Center of Child Development of UC San Diego, Worcester Public Schools of Massachusetts, and the Chicago Public Schools.

Teachers from the greater Chicago area attended the second event, *Sharing a Study of the Border Wall in Arizona and Sharing Experiences with Line, Shape, Color, and Space* held on Saturday, October 12, 2019. Terry Acevedo, Executive Director of the Tucson Children's Project and former Director of Education for the Child Parent Center Inc., a Head Start Grantee of Southwest Arizona for more than 30 years presented with artist Albert Kogel, from Tucson, Arizona. Acevedo presented the experiences of Head Start children and families from Douglas, Arizona and their study (long-term project) of the border wall between Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico and Douglas. Children's ideas and work were shared with the participants. Kogel invited participants to use various materials to explore line, shape, color, and space. {Insert image 7554 & 7552} These elements were explored to consider the possible classroom applications for children to express, build understanding, and construct ideas. Participants were also able to consider how these specialized materials can be used to make connections to academics. The objectives of this day-long workshop included the following:

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1. Identify key components that support children's in-depth study.
2. Analyze and discuss the role of documentation within an in-depth study.
3. Discuss the value of in-depth studies led by the child and teacher.
4. Reflect upon the study's connection with the community.
5. Realize children's capabilities through the in-depth study.
6. Realize one's own capabilities when experimenting with line, shape, color, and space.
7. Note how academics and learning are supported when studying line, shape, color, and space.
6. Identify application process when planning to explore line, shape, color and space with children.

After the seminar, educators asked about future opportunities for professional learning. Stay tuned for future happenings in the Early Childhood Special Education Program. For more information, contact Dr. Juana Reyes, Assistant Professor, COESS, Early Childhood Special Education Program.