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GSU's Family Development Center Sponsors Reggio Emilia Seminar

University Park, March 27, 2006 - The Family Development Center at Governors State University is sponsoring a two-day seminar to hear the stories, learn the strategies, and gain insight into the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. "Sharing New Possibilities for Teaching and Learning" will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on May 1 and 2 at Governors State University, University Park.

"We want to share this unique and highly effective method of understanding how children learn, how they can be taught, and how educators can help them learn even more," explained Karen Haigh, Director of the Family Development Center. "The Reggio Emilia approach is not widely used in this area, but it is an effective method that we are using extensively in our preschool program at the Family Development Center."

The approach is named after the northern Italian town in which it was developed. Education experts consider the ideas and curriculum developed in Reggio Emilia to be extraordinarily effective. Haigh has experience in implementing these methods at the Family Development Center and in her previous work in the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Commons. In addition to Haigh, presenters at the seminar include two experts in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy: Amelia Gambetti and Lella Gandini.

"Our purpose is to offer educators the opportunity to learn from people who know and understand how effective the Reggio Emilia approach can be. When young children of different backgrounds, who begin the learning process at different levels, grow and learn at such a tremendous rate, we know we have a great program to share. This seminar will give educators the knowledge and tools to bring aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach back to their schools to help their students," said Haigh.

At a Reggio Emilia inspired school, such as the Family Development Center, according to Haigh, curriculum is based on children's interests and curiosities. Young learners gain information and build understanding from experiences, and sharing feelings and ideas.

"Great attention must be paid to the learning environment. The best learning happens in small groups so it is important to set up an environment that engages and challenges children so learning continues even as the teacher is working with another small group."

Every classroom at the Family Development Center has undergone this transformation. Learning centers that encourage children to explore and learn from new experiences are set up throughout the classroom. Even the hallways and common areas of the school are beginning to fill with materials designed to foster learning opportunities.

"Besides learning about the Reggio Emilia approach and touring our facility," according to Haigh, "the seminar will also give educators an opportunity to think, reflect, and collaborate. There is little time for teachers to talk about learning and teaching. The seminar gives them the space and time to talk about their work, to discuss learning, and how to challenge and support kids."

For more information about the seminar and to register, call (708) 235-7314.