



INDIGO
CULTURAL CENTER

COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION INSTITUTE

Summary Report

2017-2018

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Introduction

“Evidence from research is just beginning to uncover the complex interplay of factors that change providers’ practices and how it affects the quality of care children receive. For young children in early childhood settings, interactions with teachers/caregivers are the ‘primary mechanism’ through which experiences affect the child.”¹

Professional development opportunities that help early child educators navigate this complex interplay of factors have shown a positive correlation with improved outcomes for children’s learning and development. The Collaborative Educators Institute (CEI), sponsored by the First Things First Phoenix North Regional Council and the College Center for Early Childhood Education at Paradise Valley Community College, is one example of a progressive professional development model that offers early child educators in North Phoenix, Arizona a unique opportunity to experience and explore the many factors that impact their interactions with the young children in their care.

These factors go beyond the educators’ knowledge, skills, and observable behaviors to include his or her mental models, attitudes and dispositions – about children, parents and families, colleagues, and community. Inspired by the philosophy and principles of the Reggio Emilia Schools in Italy, the Collaborative Educators Institute program is designed to help educators:

1. Examine and expand their views of children, themselves as professionals, and the teaching profession
2. Engage in experiential learning activities that motivate them to promote similar types of experiences in their classroom settings
3. Document and reflect on changes in their views and teaching approaches within a caring supportive community of colleagues.

¹ Pianta, R.C. (2006). *Standardized observation and professional development: A focus on individualized implementation and practices*. Retrieved from https://www.childcarelink.gov.sg/ccls/uploads/CPD_Guide_5_FA.pdf

Overview of Reggio Emilia Inspired School

In a Reggio Emilia inspired early child care center or preschool, teaching is seen as an ever-evolving journey of exploration, learning, deepened understanding, and creative application. Collaborative relationships (between teachers and children, among children, between teachers and parents, and among one another) are at the core of the Reggio Emilia approach. Teaching is not a linear transmission of knowledge but rather a co-constructive effort of teachers and children – both in relationship with the environment. Curriculum is process driven and emerges out of the children’s verbalized and demonstrated interests. The teacher’s role is to frame additional experiences that expand these interests, deepen children’s understanding, and instill a lifelong love of learning.

Loris Malaguzzi, founder and director the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, understood in the mid-1940s what cognitive science later verified in studies of the developing brain. “Young children have powerful learning mechanisms that allow them to spontaneously revise, reshape and re-structure their knowledge. They know and learn more about the world than we ever imagined. They think, draw conclusions, make predictions, look for explanations, and even do experiments.”² In short young children are little scientists that need adults to support and expand their scientific thinking – not teach them science concepts.



The Reggio Emilia approach challenges adults to re-discover the ‘scientist’ and ‘artist’ within themselves – that often dormant sense of wonder, curiosity, experimentation, and discovery – so they can expand children’s evolving learning capacities in new and engaging ways.

The Reggio Emilia approach introduces teachers to a philosophy and set of carefully woven principles that re-define the traditional early childhood education setting and the teachers’ role. For the purposes of this

study, the principles are collapsed in to five main constructs, including:

² Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N., & Kuhl, P. K. (2001), *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About The Mind*. New York, Harper Perennial. Retrieved from <https://www.harpercollins.com/9780688177881/the-scientist-in-the-crib/>

Overview of Reggio Emilia Inspired School

Construct 1: *Image of the Child* – The image of a child is the anchor of the Reggio approach and provides the reference point for everything else.³ The child is seen as rich in potential, strong, competent, and inherent meaning makers and problem solvers. Inspired by their own interests, children are the main initiators of their own learning. The child’s learning, however, doesn’t occur in isolation but rather in relationship with three primary teachers – the parent, the classroom teacher, and the environment.



Construct 2: *Three Teacher Model* – Recognized as the primary or “first teacher,” parents are considered equal partners and collaborators in their child’s learning and development. The parent is seen as competent, rich in ideas, and interested in engagement with staff and other members of the child’s learning community. Their dreams and aspirations for their children are respected, and they are encouraged to participate in class activities.

³ Scheinfeld, D. R., Haigh, K. M., and Scheinfeld, S. J. P. (2008). *We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching with Reggio Principles in Urban Settings*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Overview of Reggio Emilia Inspired School

As the “second teacher,” the teacher’s image parallels that of the child in that they too are seen as capable, creative and self-directed learners. Too often in standard teacher preparation programs the ‘learner’ aspect is dwarfed by the emphasis on teaching. As teachers are exposed to experiences that allow them to share perspectives, dialogue with peers, reflect, and expand their views, they are motivated to promote similar opportunities in their classrooms. Teachers are seen as partners, guides and mentors in the learning process. They are first and foremost listeners and observers who spot children’s interests and then facilitate further exploration and discovery. Teachers, as collaborators and co-constructors of knowledge, identify learning activities that expand children’s thinking and problem solving skills.

In the Reggio Emilia approach, the classroom and community environment is recognized as a ‘third’ and equally powerful teacher. The environment is seen as a “living organism” – an alive, welcoming place that fosters creative exploration and encourages collaboration and community. Learning environments are designed to engage and inform children beyond what the teacher provides. The environment offers a wide range of spaces, materials, and media that the children use to communicate their interests, discoveries, understandings, and emotions. This communication occurs through words, drawings, paintings, movement, sculptures, buildings, and more – known in Reggio as “The Hundred Languages of Children.”



Overview of Reggio Emilia Inspired School

Construct 3: Emergent Curriculum –The Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes the learning process rather than the product. Teachers do not use published curriculum or plan fixed projects and activities in advance. They observe and document children’s emerging interests and then set up provocations, books and projects that help develop and expand those budding interests. The emergent curriculum is described as “child-originated and teacher-framed.”

Construct 4: Documentation – Documentation, a critical component of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, is the art of making children’s learning and progress visible through photos, pictures, drawings, videos, quotations, etc. Documentation allows for teacher reflection on children’s interests and activities and serves as a guide for subsequent provocations and activities. Documentation also helps parents become more aware of what their child is doing and why it is important.

Construct 5: Collaboration – Emphasizing that learning occurs in community, Reggio Emilia promotes co-teaching, collaboration, and collegiality. Opportunities to come together to reflect, dialogue, critique and brainstorm ideas build skills in reflective practice and empower teachers and staff. Collaboration requires openness to other’s perspectives, flexibility, strong communication and negotiating skills, and a commitment to the process.

What did it involve?

Early child educators, many who have participated in multiple programs sponsored by the PVCC College Center for Early Child Education, met together four weekends between August and May to study and learn. The focus of the 2017-2018 Collaborative Educators Institute was *“Drawing Inspiration from Spaces and Places: A Field Guide to Creating Connected Curriculum.”* Through active engagement with multiple places, spaces, and materials that challenged them to reflect on and represent experiences in new ways, teachers saw how multiple curriculum disciplines – architecture, art, language arts, science, and music – connect in a meaningful way. The goal was to immerse teachers in multi-sensory experiences that stimulate creativity, curiosity and playfulness – experiences that can be replicated and/or adapted to the context of their classrooms. Documentation of their experiences and opportunities to reflect with colleagues helped them identify ways to apply their new learning and insights.

2017-2018 Collaborative Educations Institute Overview



Schedule and Titles of Sessions

Friday, August 25, 2017, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. CEI Introduction: Structure and Overview

Saturday, August 26, 2017, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Drawing from Inspiration.

Friday, October 13, 2017, Daytime Field Trip to Rio Salado Audubon Center

Friday, October 13, 2017 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. Reflection and Documentation

Saturday, October 14, 2017, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Transformation of Life and Colors: Making Connections with the Natural World

Friday, January 26, 2018, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. "In Dialogue with Dr. Lella Gandini"

Saturday, January 27, 2018, 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. "In Dialogue with Places" (Dr. Lella Gandini)

2017-2018 Collaborative Educations Institute Overview

Friday, April 6, 2018, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. Rhythmically Speaking

Saturday, April 7, 2018, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Drawing on the Inspiration of Rhythm

Friday May 4, 2018, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. Reflection on the CEI's yearlong investigations of Spaces and Places

Saturday May 5, 2018, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Early Childhood Educator's Exchange - Exhibits

What happened during the CEI seminars?

1. CEI members, in response to a provocation given ahead of time, shared their work colleagues. Some members were invited to share in-depth stories.
2. CEI members created a research question or questions(s) that they wanted to study that is connected to work in the curriculum area. This could be related to environmental changes, using materials in a certain way, bringing in new materials, connecting experiences to other program studies, or displaying children's work.
3. CEI members studied the application of Reggio Emilia core principles through proscribed reading. Active CEI members received copies of *We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching with Reggio Principles in Urban Settings* by Daniel R. Scheinfeld, Karen M. Haigh and Sandra J.P. Scheinfeld. Portions of the book were discussed during the Friday seminars and through Google doc postings.
4. CEI members created and shared a documentation exhibit of their experience at the May 5th Early Childhood Educator's Exchange.

What happened in between the CEI sessions?

During non-meeting months, CEI members remained connected through discussion forums and the use of Google plus. They were also offered technical assistance support as needed.

2017-2018 Collaborative Educations Institute Overview

What happened during Saturday sessions?

The Saturday following each Friday evening CEI session participants engaged in an interactive exploration of curriculum content, art materials, ideas, and experiences. CEI members received priority registration for these popular Saturday sessions. Participants who attended both Friday and Saturday sessions were provided books and art materials.



Who facilitated the sessions?

Gigi Schroeder Yu, PhD served as the lead facilitator. Dr. Schroeder has been working in the field of Early Childhood Education as an art educator, researcher, professional development provider, parent educator, and higher education instructor for over 20 years. She is currently the Early Childhood Art Resource Teacher within the Albuquerque Public Schools Early Childhood Department. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Illinois and a Master's Degree in Art Education from the University of Arizona. She served as New Mexico's Program Manager for the Wonder of Learning project, a traveling exhibit from the early learning programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Her work focuses on collaborative professional development through the study of children's interests and documentation protocol. She works with organizations to create reflective, collaborative, and job embedded professional development practices.

2017-2018 Collaborative Educations Institute Overview

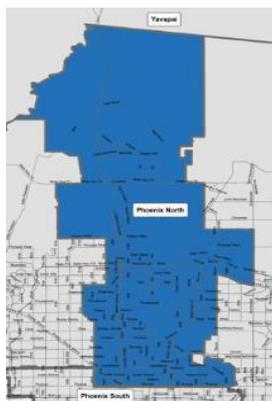
What were the expected outcomes of CEI participation?

The Professional Development for Early Care and Education Professionals strategy is supported by the First Things First Phoenix North Regional Partnership. The goal is to provide high quality professional development to individuals in the Phoenix North Region who work in programs which provide education and care for young children ages birth to 5. The expected results of the implementation of this strategy include:

- Participants' increased knowledge base of early childhood
- Changes in participants' views of children, their teacher role, and parent involvement
- Changes in participants' practices in supporting young children's development and learning
- Participants' ability to receive higher education credit for these learning opportunities – credits that will articulate into a degree or certificate program.

Who was eligible to attend these professional development events?

Early care and education providers, teachers, directors, program owners, and others *working* directly with children birth through age five and their families in the Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council zip codes or who *live* in these zip codes were eligible to attend these professional development events for free.



Geographic Boundaries

The Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council serves the northern portion of the City of Phoenix including zip codes 85013, 85014, 85015, 85016, 85017, 85018, 85019, 85020, 85021, 85022, 85023, 85024, 85027, 85028, 85029, 85032, 85050, 85051, 85053, 85083, 85054, 85085, 85086, 85087, and programs located or individuals working or living in the Phoenix section of 85304 and 85306.¹⁴

⁴ www.firstthingsfirst.org

Evaluation Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to document the process and activities of the 2017-2018 Collaborative Educators Institute; collect information about the participants' background; and gather feedback about changes in perceptions and practices as a result of participating in the "*Drawing Inspiration from Spaces and Places*." series. A multi-perspective approach utilizing qualitative data collection and analysis methodologies was employed to study the process.

Methodologies consisted of a pre and post on-line survey, two focus groups, observations at three of the Friday evening sessions, and a three-hour visit to a Reggio Inspired preschool in the Northwest Phoenix region. An on-line Background Survey consisting of sixteen (16) open-ended questions was sent to all participants (n=20) shortly after the introductory session. The response rate was 90%.

An on-line Feedback Survey (n=17) was sent out immediately after the series ended in May. Seventeen (17) of the questions were open-ended; five (5) were rated on a 5-point likert scale. Ninety-four percent (94%) of participants responded. Separate focus groups were conducted with director/administrator participants and teacher participants toward the end of the series. Focus group participation was low due to late spring scheduling conflicts (n=33%).

Survey and focus group data were analyzed using open and axial coding methodologies.

Background of CEI Participants

Participants in the 2017- 2018 Collaborative Educators Institute reflected a great deal of homogeneity. Nearly all had participated in the previous year CEI program. All but one were female, two thirds were White, and 85% percent spoke only English. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 63 years with a mean age of 43. Seventy-five percent (75%) of participants had earned a Bachelor or Master degree. Nearly three fourths (72.2%) of participants had been early child educators for more than 10 years; one third (33.3%) of that group had been early child educators for more than 20 years.

Two thirds (66.7%) of the children in participants' classrooms were predominantly White. Sixty-one percent of children (61.1%) came from middle to high income families.

Chart 1. Previous CEI Program Participation

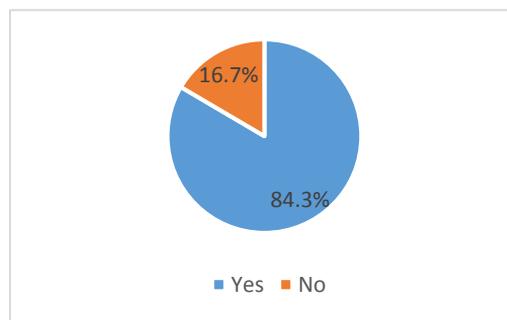
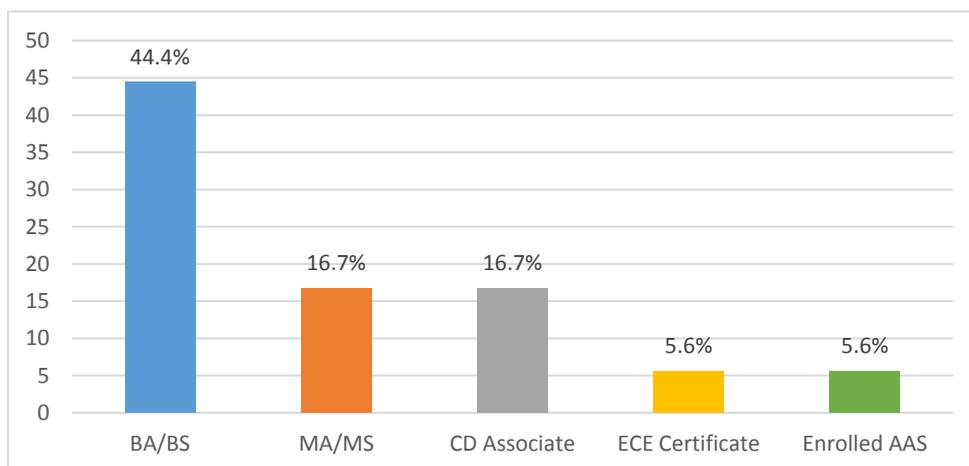


Chart 2. Education Level of CEI Participants



Background of CEI Participants

Chart 3. Race/Ethnicity of CEI Participants

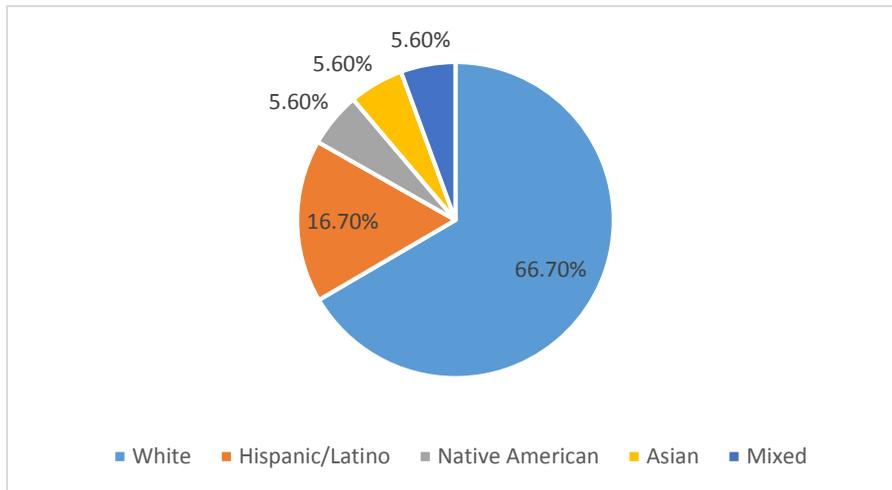
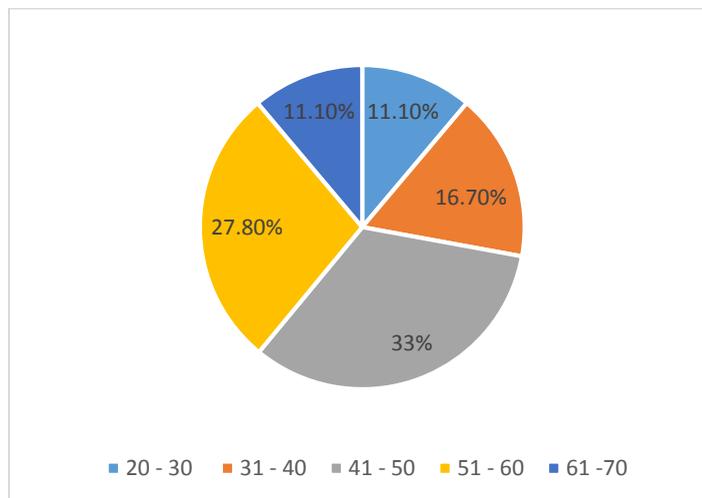


Chart 4. Age of CEI Participants



Background of CEI Participants

Chart 5. Total Years as Early Child Educator

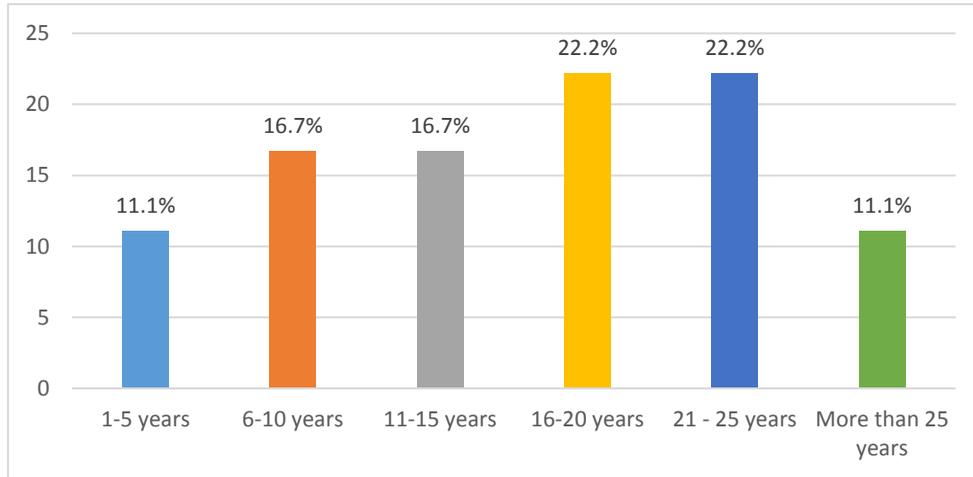
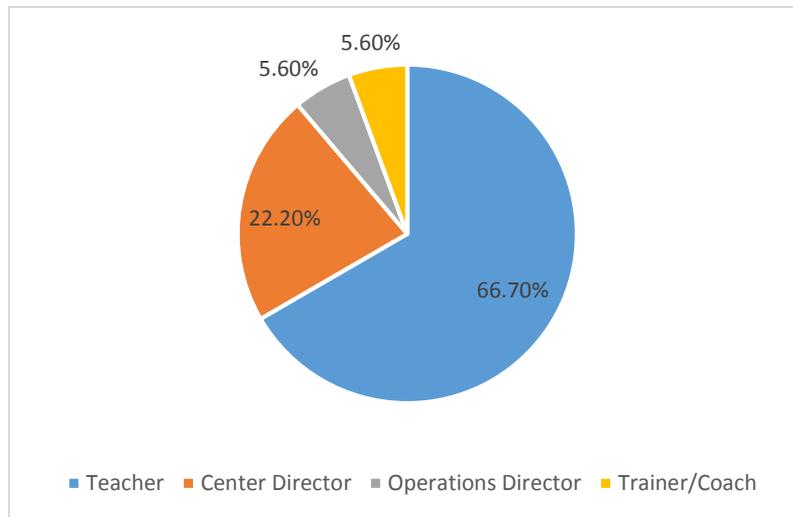


Chart 6. Role at School/Center



Background of CEI Participants

Chart 7. Language of CEI Participant

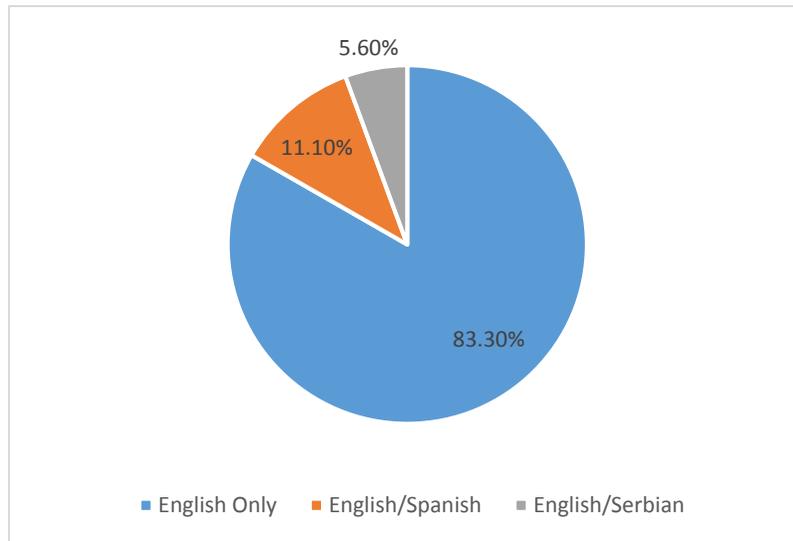


Table 1. Age Range of Children

Age range of children in current classroom	
Infant & Toddler	12.5%
Preschoolers	75%
Infant & Toddler / Preschool (Mixed)	12.5%

Background of CEI Participants

Chart 8. Ethnicity of Children in Classrooms

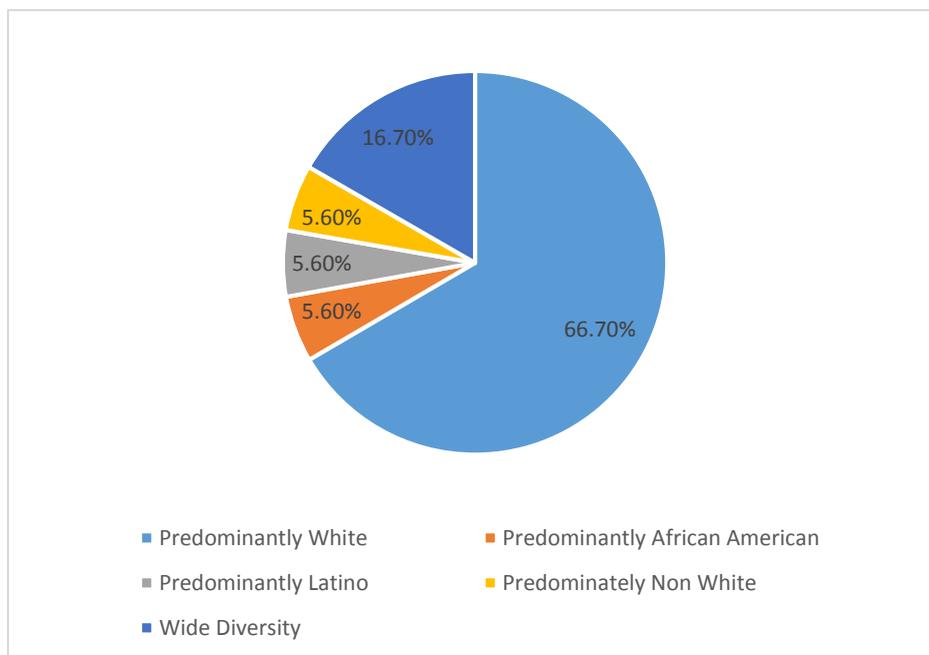


Table 2. Income Level of Children’s Families

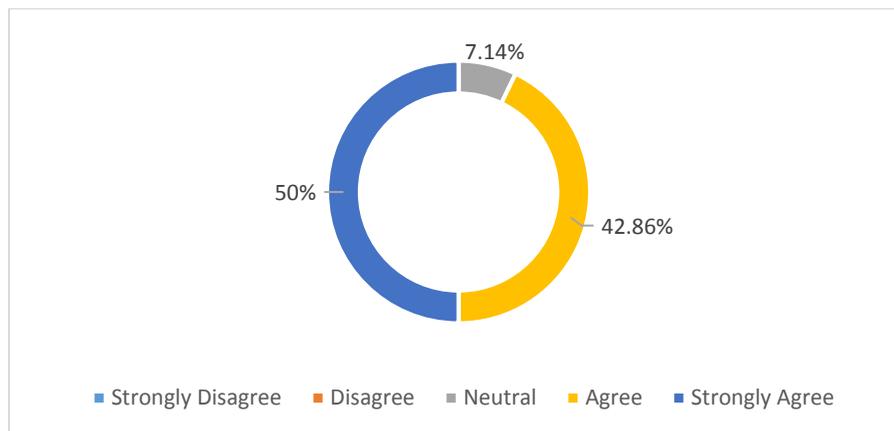
Age range of children in current classroom	
Middle to High	61.0%
Middle Low to Predominantly Low	33.4%
Wide Range	5.6%

Results: Perspectives and Practices

Mental models or maps are the beliefs, ideas, images and verbal descriptions we ascribe to our world. They are vague and incomplete but nevertheless serve to guide our daily thoughts and actions. Students of Reggio Emilia are asked to examine their current maps or viewpoints relative to a set of core images and constructs delineated in the Reggio approach.

These include, in part, their images of the children in their classrooms; their role as teacher; the role of parents and the environment in the learning process; their approach to designing and implementing curriculum; and their experience with collaboration. The current study was conducted to discern how participation in the Collaborative Educators Institute affected directors' and teachers' images and classroom practices relative to these core constructs.

My view of children has changed as a result of participating in CEI?



CEI participants consistently indicated their view of children had evolved as a result of their CEI experience. Many stated that an already existent positive view of children as strong, capable and self-directed had deepened.

"Children are so capable of learning and doing so many things if we just trust them and give them the opportunity to try things themselves."

"I see them as more than capable....so full of possibilities and look for ways to develop that potential."

Results: Perspectives and Practices

When asked if their interactions and work with children had changed over the program year, participants reported they spend more time listening, observing and re-visiting their work before planning. Others spoke of being more intentional, better able to develop different kinds of provocations for the children, and more focused on providing different materials and more support when children are exploring them. One participant shared that she spent more time at eye level observing and documenting so she could discover the children's thinking.

"I am now a more relaxed teacher, more playful and joyful; don't need a regimented practice."



Participants also noted their changing views and actions resulted in observable changes in children's learning and behaviors over the program year. Teachers saw them as more self confident, more willing to express themselves, and more interested in helping each other learn. Children showed more interest in the materials and explored ideas and concepts in more depth.

Results: Perspectives and Practices

"The staff noticed over time that the more children were actively engaged in experiences stemming from their own interests, the fewer the upsets that occurred. In addition, they noticed marked increases in the preschoolers' attention spans."

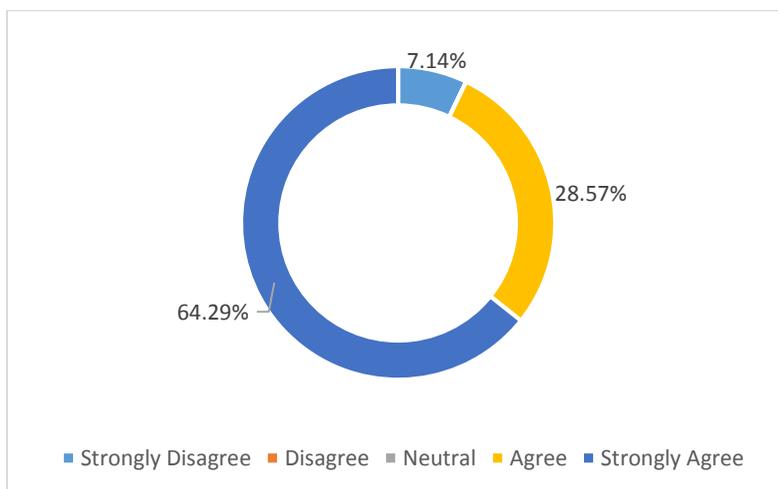
"It's a great joy to find the students in my classroom eagerly arriving at school and right away turning to favorite places or activities, picking up where they left off. They have a connection to learning."



One director noted that child care centers and schools were in diverse communities with differing levels of readiness for incorporating multiple Reggio Emilia principles. Facilitating change in how her teachers viewed the children was her priority focus this initial year – the basic groundwork on which everything else could be built.

Results: Perspectives and Practices

I learn from my colleagues through participation in CEI.



Nearly all participants stated that the Collaborative Educators Institute provided a “learning community” context in which they could comfortably dialogue with one another and exchange ideas. They left sessions feeling inspired and excited to take new ideas back to their classrooms.

“It’s a supportive group in which we can be vulnerable, take risks and be more playful – it’s very freeing.”



Results: Perspectives and Practices

"My view of myself and my role as a teacher has changed as a result of participation in CEI."

Participants acknowledged that how they viewed themselves as teachers and professionals was an important attribute in their work.

".....before we attempt anything else we need to figure out who we are. We need to know what is the image we have of ourselves."

"We haven't learned how to be learners. We've learned how to be teachers, and it is different."⁵

Noting this quote from Reggio Emilia educator Amelia Gambetti, one participant acknowledged *"she had lots of learning (or unlearning) to do."* *"I feel I am as much a student as I am a teacher."*

Some described themselves as feeling more inspired, excited, and open to possibilities as a result of the CEI experience. Other comments were *"I'm a better listener with children and adults,"* and *"I'm becoming a better observer to better meet the needs of individual students."* Gains in confidence in themselves as leaders and as advocates for children and the early child education field were also noted as outcomes.

"CEI helps us internalize a sense of selves as professionals and how we can create change in the profession."

Participation in the CEI program expanded their view of the role of the environment in the learning process. It also helped them realize that the environment extends beyond the immediate classroom to the exterior play space, and to the neighborhood and larger community.

"I keep thinking of the environment as having its own language."

Some participants reported they were challenged to think about whether their current environments reflected the view that children are capable and can be trusted with the same materials adults use (e.g. glass jars and vases, pens, pencils and sharpies, charcoals, etc.).

⁵ Scheinfeld, D. R., Haigh, K. M., and Scheinfeld, S. J. P. (2008). *We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching with Reggio Principles in Urban Settings*. New York: Teachers College Press.

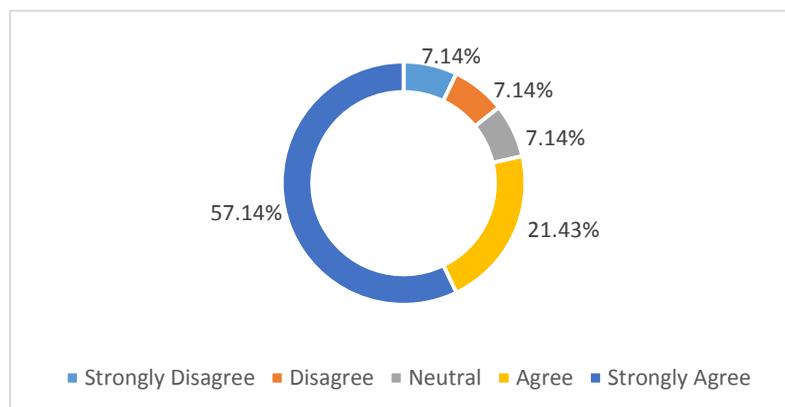
Results: Perspectives and Practices



"Keys aspects in creating such an environment lie in giving children important tasks, expecting each person to be a contributing member of their classroom, as well as developing self advocacy skills, being helpful and responsible. Students need to be taught self help skills and the environment should facilitate the students' ability to solve their own problems."

One participant noted the *"dynamic dance"* of managing the many relationships that impact learning – the children's relationship with their environment and one another, the teacher's relationships with the children and one another, and the teacher's relationship with parents and families.

I develop curriculum based on children's interests.



Results: Perspectives and Practices

In determining where to focus children's attention, nearly 80% of participants indicated they as much as possible used children's interests as a guide. Repeatedly, they noted observing and listening more before planning learning activities. One participant emphasized the need to establish the identity of each child and then come up with projects that best suited their mutual interests. Securing input from parents was also suggested as a good way to better know and understand the children.

Ensuring a variety of materials and open inviting spaces and then observing how children interacted with them was often a starting place. For example, children were drawn to a snake skin their teacher found and brought to the classroom. Expanding on their interest, she engaged them in discussions and activities about attributes and behaviors of snakes including color and pattern striations, movement, length, diet, etc. Throughout the project the children were encouraged to represent or depict a snake through drawing and painting pictures. In a final activity, they created and painted clay models which were kiln-fired and given to them to take home.



Results: Perspectives and Practices

In another example, a pre-school group's interest in cars led to a year-long process of designing and building a go cart out of donated environmentally friendly materials. The project culminated in their each getting a turn riding the car down a slope on the school playground.

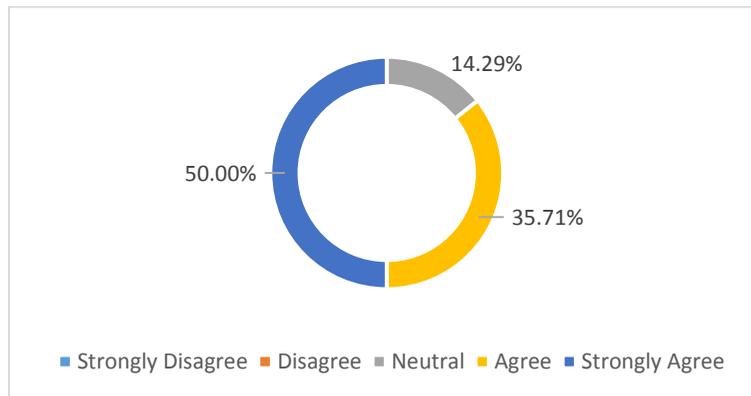


Both of the above projects exemplify how children's interests could be expanded in to projects that incorporated concepts from art, architecture, language arts, math and science – projects that also stimulated critical thinking and problem solving skills.

"It has motivated me to look at my classroom from a different perspective. Many times we become entrenched in the same design or materials. We need to refresh and to think outside the box. You never know what will work until you try your idea. However, we must remember that teachers can make all sorts of plans but ultimately the children will decide what is successful based upon their reactions and choices."

Results: Perspectives and Practices

I document children's interests and work.



A strong majority of participants attempted to document or make visible the children's learning. Methods employed included note-taking, photos, videos, drawings and writings, transcribing conversations, and daily journals. While most understood the importance of documentation, many noted it as one of the greatest challenges in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach. Capturing the product of learning was readily easy; knowing how to capture the steps in the learning process proved more difficult. The following pictures of children experimenting with materials and sounds provide an example of documenting the process of learning.



"Initially the children were exploring the Metal Music materials on top of the cubby....."

Results: Perspectives and Practices



The girls approach to the Metal Music materials



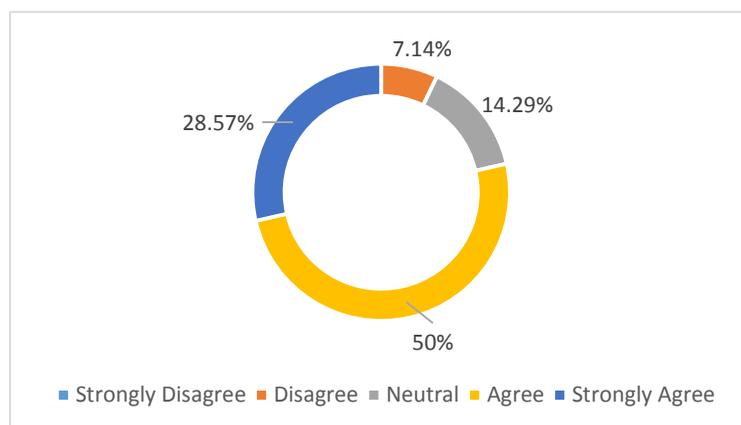
"The boys had a slightly different approach to their Metal Music....'this is a grenade. You ding the top circle, and the slide goes down the spring and makes a noise. Then it goes through the bottom part and the strong sound shoots the grenade out of this pipe.'"

Results: Perspectives and Practices

Teachers also had difficulty reflecting on and gleaning meaning from their documentation. What does this say about what an individual child or group of children know; what should our next steps be? Dialoguing with co-teachers and other colleagues was seen as necessary to this process. Several participants expressed frustration with not having sufficient time to document on a daily basis and/or to elicit the perspectives of their colleagues. Several requested that documentation be a focus of the next CEI program year.

"Reflective practice is important and challenging to do or fit in – you can't plan lessons if you don't understand where children are and where they need to go. Putting all the pieces together is what is difficult for teachers."

I collaborate with my colleagues to develop curriculum based on children's interests.



Even as nearly eighty percent (80%) of participants reported collaborating with colleagues, many of their anecdotal comments suggested opportunities for doing so were minimal. Comments ranged from *"Collaboration underlies everything we do"* to *"little at my center"* to *"teaching staff do not have collaboration meetings....seems we are in our own little world in the classroom."*

An important tenet of Reggio Emilia is that it is not a "one size fits all" approach. Schools and centers adapt the principles to fit within the culture and context of the community or school. The above comments reflect the differing community contexts of the teachers. One preschool in a wealthier community in the Northwest Region tries to incorporate all the principles of the Reggio

Results: Perspectives and Practices

approach, including regularly scheduled weekly collaboration meetings and a monthly book discussion. Schools in the Region with fewer resources and a different parent population find implementing the Reggio principles more difficult. For some co-teaching and time set aside for collaboration is not an option.

Lack of time and little to no system support were cited as common barriers to collaboration with colleagues. Even in the fully Reggio inspired school, teachers lamented insufficient time for the depth of dialogue needed.

"Truly collaborating both mentally and logistically is challenging. It requires models, facilitators, time and support from a group of dedicated people."



Exploring collaboration more broadly, CEI participants were asked how they engaged families in their work. In the Reggio Emilia approach teachers shift from being the expert to collaborating with the parents in support of the child's development. While collaboration or partnership is the ideal, directors and teachers acknowledged the challenge of doing so. Survey responses depicted a variety

Results: Perspectives and Practices

of techniques including sharing documentation photos, videos, drawing, etc.; daily emails or journals; monthly newsletter; and in-person or phone conversations. A few participants indicated they invited parents and family members to engage with their children in the classroom; also asked for their input in developing the curriculum or creating at home learning projects.

Focus group participants provided additional feedback and insights relative to parent engagement. One noted that parents' expectations and involvement was influenced by their socio-economic status. In some settings parents were focused on insuring their children were prepared for kindergarten (alphabet, numbers, colors, etc.). For other parents, the primary concern was a safe environment, not the child's development. A common thread for many parents was difficulty understanding how a play-based or emerging curriculum approach related to school readiness.

To address parent expectations, one preschool holds a Parent Welcome night to familiarize parents with Reggio practices and tools before the children enter the program. Subsequent activities included portfolio nights and daily journals linked to Arizona Early Child Education standards so parents can see how their child is developing.

"As we do with children, we have to start where the parents are."

"We try to shift the conversation to help them link what the child is doing and what they're learning as they play – how their play is linked to Arizona Early Child Education Standards."

Conclusion

Participants in the 2017-2018 Collaborative Educators Institute (CEI) were highly positive about their experiences in the *"Drawing Inspiration from Spaces and Places"* sessions. Average ratings related to changes in beliefs and practices consistently hovered between "strongly agree" and "agree." Qualitative feedback from focus groups and open-ended survey questions added depth to the objective ratings. Several themes emerged from the findings.

1. The Collaborative Educators Institute is a unique and enriching professional development opportunity that should be replicated and expanded. Participants valued the opportunity to engage with highly qualified facilitators, challenging content, and quality instruction.

"This program is so valuable and very useable – there is nothing else like this out there. We're fortunate that FTF provides the funding and hope they continue to do so."

2. The "hands-on" opportunity to explore new settings and create with a variety of materials stimulated "out of the box" thinking and creative ideas to take back to the classroom.

"I am more inspired and excited when coming home after CEI. I bring that back to my classroom." "My work feels as a living thing."

3. Participants overwhelmingly noted positive changes on key indicators of professional and personal growth.

"I've become more of a leader with my teacher group." "I'm a better listener – hearing different perspectives from children helped me shift how I work with other grown-ups."

"I'm much more open to possibilities – my reflective thinking and question-asking skills are becoming more refined."

4. Incorporating or weaving together Reggio Emilia principles in the classroom is complex and challenging. Participants especially struggled with time for documentation and collaboration. Engaging families in meaningful ways was also problematic for some.

"I struggle with making children's learning visible – a documentation focus could be a great next step for many of us in the coming year."

"I need more time for reflection and discussions with colleagues to examine documentation."

Recommendations

Three key recommendations emerge from participants' feedback.

Recommendation 1: Participants struggle with making children's learning visible. They also yearn for more opportunities and time to collaborate with peers when documenting learning. In the next iteration of the Collaborative Educators Institute, provide opportunities and activities that enhance participants' understanding and skill in documenting children's step-by-step learning process. Also assist them with strategizing ways to advocate for and carve out collaboration time in their individual school or center systems.

Recommendation 2: Some CEI participants' schools serve families with lower levels of education and income. Belief and structural systems in these child care schools and centers tend to provide less support for introducing Reggio Emilia principles. In addition, there is the risk that participants joining CEI for the first time may feel overwhelmed by the complexity as well as the advanced understanding demonstrated by longer term members. Continue to explore a) strategies for attracting more directors and teachers from a broad range of programs in the Phoenix North Region and b) strategies and methodologies for meeting their varied learning needs. For example, consider matching more experienced CEI members with those who are at an entry level learning stage or in school systems with less support for integrating Reggio principles. This could help new learners catch up more quickly while providing an opportunity for others to develop mentoring and leadership skills.

Recommendation 3: Engaging parents and families in a meaningful way was a third issue identified by many participants. Therefore, consider an intentional focus on helping participants identify ways to facilitate parents' acceptance of, and engagement with the Reggio Emilia approach, most especially with their view of their children and the value of play-based learning relative to school readiness.

