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Department of French and Italian

Spring 2011

ITAL/EDS 190: How We Learn

In the Spring of 2011 I will teach my ITAL/EDS 190 *How We Learn* class to a new group of students. *How We Learn* compares Italian and American educational systems with the aim of facilitating community-engaged learning and inspiring a lifelong commitment to education. *How We Learn* has evolved from a conversation about Italian Education and the pedagogy of Montessori and Reggio Emilia Schools in Italy into a dialogue about the American public education system and how it can be improved using discussions of foreign educational models as a jumping off point. Over the past three years, my classes have established relationships with a variety of educators in Atlanta. Every semester student interests revolve around similar themes—access to resources, methods teachers use to motivate students, and community support. Next year present and past students will work towards strong partnerships with community schools and their families, offering workshops on nutrition and exercise, community outreach, cooking, study skills, living powerfully, sustainable living, college preparation and applications, and social justice. We plan to model our approach of community-building on a community-centered pedagogy developed in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy.

Italy's Reggio approach was established after the Second World War to create community and a safe place for children to learn and explore their world. I have established strong partnerships with local Reggio-inspired schools, where my ITAL/EDS 190 students participate in an extensive documentation project that benefits both students and partner schools. In the past we have documented children's interests, the image of the child, the rights of the child, and democracy in the classroom. Next year we are going to engage our partners in the topic of green living and sustainability. How do our partners involve their preschoolers in sustainability efforts? A central theme of ITAL/EDS 190 *How We Learn* is that education in low-wealth communities can only improve when schools reach out to the communities themselves, involving parents, mentors, family, and friends in the work of educating youth. Maria Montessori started a school in a housing project in Rome called the Children's House and she became widely recognized for the work she did to improve living conditions in the neighborhood through her educational reform. Loris Malaguzzi created a community-centered school in Reggio Emilia that helped to insert confidence and trust into fragmented post-war communities in Italy. The Reggio schools we work with provide a model for facilitating community and dialogue in schools. Throughout our partnerships with Reggio schools, my ITAL/EDS 190 students will take what they learn about creating community, fostering healthy living, and encouraging sustainability and create sustainability workshops or outreach projects for the parents and children at three local schools that are not Reggio-based. In this way, students will be experiencing first-hand real-world applications they learned from the

Reggio schools they studied in my class, creating a model they may choose to replicate in the future.

Before I participated in the Piedmont Project I had planned to explore already established sustainability projects at only one Reggio school and then create workshops for a second non-Reggio school based on what we learned from the first. However, after the workshop I realized we could bring two other Reggio partners into the process by creating a sustainability challenge for them to follow that we could document and help nurture. It is a much larger project than I had initially imagined but the effects will be more far-reaching. The revised project includes the communities associated with three preschools, two elementary schools and a high school. A few of my past students are already talking about challenging local schools to provide better, more sustainable lunches.

Over the Summer I will be talking with all of our partner schools to iron out the details and next Fall I will hold a number of brainstorming meetings with past students and partner schools to continue this process. Former students and I intend to hold a State of Education conference at the end of Spring semester at Emory, where we plan to discuss the outcome of our sustainability partnerships in one of the conference sessions.

Freshman Seminar syllabus:

ITAL 190: *How We Learn*
Tu, Th _____:

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Content:

Let's take a walk back in time to one of your most enjoyable experiences. What was going on? Why do you remember it? How can you recreate the conditions of this memorable moment in order to promote meaningful and effective learning in the future?

This class will examine learning on a very personal level to find out what makes you tick as a learner. What is your learning style? How do you learn best? How can you empower yourself during your educational journey to help you learn in an active and engaged manner throughout your lifetime? It is my hope you will take from the course knowledge on how to be active and empowered learners so as you become an integral part of various learning communities in the future, you will have a positive and effective impact on others as a result of the knowledge you have gained about your own learning.

The lens with which we will be discussing our own learning is through an examination of the educational practices and theories developed in the town of Reggio Emilia in Italy

and adopted here in the United States, as well as a look at Montessori, Waldorf, and public education here in the United States.

In order to learn how to effect change and become active participants in learning communities, we will work to integrate and explore sustainability in partnerships with five local schools. Italy's Reggio approach, which was developed in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy after the Second World War to create community and a safe place for children to learn and explore their world, is the lens with which we will discuss local schools and education. We will visit and work with three Reggio-inspired preschools to explore how all three of our Reggio partners have fostered and nourished a growing interest on the part of their children in sustainability issues. Current projects at local Reggio schools involve the following: composting, building a butterfly garden, using natural materials in the classroom, recycling, cooking with organic materials, planting and growing food, establishing community gardens, creating awareness of issues surrounding global warming; designing energy-saving projects; fighting for animal rights. We will explore how these efforts originated from preschool student interests and how student ideas are supported by their communities. After this exploration, we will visit other local partners in the area to facilitate further discussion, conduct workshops, and initiate sustainability efforts. Students at Drew Charter Elementary School, Fernbank Elementary School, Booker T. Washington High School, and Emory University will all have the opportunity to participate in discussions on sustainability. We will use the efforts at local Reggio schools as a jumping-off-point for these discussions.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS & MATERIALS:

- 1) *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia* by Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, Louise Cadwell, and Charles Schwall
- 2) *Beautiful Stuff, Learning with Found Materials* by Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini
- 3) *The Diary of Laura: Perspectives on the Reggio Emilia Diary* by Carolyn P. Edwards and Carlina Rinaldi
- 4) *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them* by Freedom Writers by the Freedom Writers, Zlata Filipovic, and Erin Gruwell
- 5) *Teach With Your Heart* by Erin Gruwel
- 6) *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* by Paul Tough
- 7) *Sustainability on campus: stories and strategies for change* by Peggy F. Bartlett and Geoffrey W. Chase
- 8) *The Green Book: The Everyday Guide to Saving the Planet One Simple Step at a Time* by Elizabeth Rogers, Thomas M. Kostigen, Cameron Diaz, and William McDonough

- 9) *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDun
 - 10) A three-ring binder for selected readings
 - 11) Journal: Please create or choose a colorful journal or medium in which you can share your thoughts over the course of the semester.
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TESTING AND GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS:

PERSONAL BLOG	15%
CLASS PARTICIPATION	15%
HOMEWORK (Assigned via Learnlink)	15%
REGGIO DOCUMENTATION PROJECT	15%
INT. BACCHELAUREATE WEB RESOURCE LIST	5%
SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOPS	20%
THIS I BELIEVE DIGITAL STORY	15%

PERSONAL BLOG:

You will be required to create a personal blog to write about and document the readings assigned for class. This blog should not only constitute brief summaries of what you read and your impressions, but I also encourage creative, wide-ranging approaches to the texts we cover. I would like you to incorporate pictures, audio, articles videos, etc.. to enhance the visual quality of the blog. Ideally the blog will facilitate dialogue: I will actively respond to your blog, and envisage an ongoing exchange of ideas that will help generate your own personal educational vision. Please keep a record of how the concepts we discuss infuse your sensibility. Use this blog to intensify your reading process and to prepare for class.

Your blog should include three elements: the first element should be associated with class readings and anything you wish to talk about that relates to class topics; the second should involve responses to links that you and fellow classmates post to our Learnlink conference; the third involves the topic of sustainability as you make a daily sustainability goal and discuss your efforts to accomplish it. **Your blog will be checked often, and graded on January 27, March 3, and April 17.**

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:

Participation and attendance grades carry equal weight. Your attendance grade is 7.5% of your total grade. In order to receive full points for your attendance portion of the grade, it is imperative that you come to class regularly. ITALIAN STUDIES HAS A "0" ABSENCE POLICY. Given that there are planned and unplanned events that come up during the semester (sports or debate team events, family events, religious holidays), I will not take off for the first two absences. Absences in excess of two, whatever the circumstance, will entail a drop in the final attendance grade (5 points subtracted from 100 for each absence after four, counting 7.5% of the total grade). Please remember, if

you choose to miss a class, email your homework sometime before the hour our class meets.

Since participation is also worth 7.5% of your grade, it is important that you read all materials assigned for the class meeting and arrive ready to discuss what you have read. Above all I seek evidence in class of an ongoing, active engagement with the texts and issues at hand.

HOMEWORK:

You will be asked to turn in a number of short projects, which will be assigned to you weekly via Learnlink. Part of your homework grade will also involve posting to your blog once a week a link to an article relating to the topics we are covering in class.

Also, for one week out of the semester, you will be the class pedagogista. During this week, you will be required to meet with me on the Monday before our class to discuss the interests of the class and possible future directions to help us explore student interests at a deeper level.

REGGIO SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

You and three other students from our class will sign up to serve as pedagogisti in one of five classrooms. Initially you will be asked to meet with the two teachers from your classroom to discuss their beliefs and practices associated with sustainability. You will then be required to observe and find evidence of sustainability in the preschool community that you visit. You should each observe and document what you see in the classroom for a total of six hours (through photographs, descriptions, and children's artwork) and after each visit you must meet with the other four students in your group to discuss your documentation and observations. Your group will donate your documentation project (a visible documentation that they can put on the wall) to the Reggio teachers at the end of the semester to enhance documentation in their classrooms. Throughout the semester you will be required to discuss your documentation with the Reggio teachers, administrators, and parents of our partner schools. **Your final documentation projects will be due on the last day of class.**

INTERNATIONAL BACCHELAUREATE WEB RESOURCE LIST:

You will be given a topic that the Fernbank Elementary School will be teaching this year in its IB classes relating to sustainability issues. Based on the ideas of emergent curriculum and social constructivism, conduct a thorough web research and find **six** websites that could help the students at an elementary age research this topic; find **four** resources that would aid teachers in teaching this topic; and find at least **two** places in Atlanta that would supply teachers with guest speakers or field trip possibilities relating to the topic. Along with your list, please write a page showing how your links relate to the concepts of emergent curriculum and social constructivism that we have discussed. **Your list and discussion is due on April 5.**

WORKSHOPS ON SUSTAINABILITY AT LOCAL SCHOOLS:

You and your group will come up with and present to local schools and their communities sustainability projects. These can take the form of workshops for parents and children, sustainability initiatives involving the school communities, or activist efforts to promote change within school systems. **We will focus on these projects during weeks 12 & 13 of the semester but will be working towards them all semester.**

THIS I BELIEVE DIGITAL STORY

You will be asked to write a 500-word “This I Believe Statement” for NPR. You don’t have to actually send it in (although you can!), but you must follow the guidelines listed on the website: <http://thisibelieve.org/agree.html>. Your paper must touch upon your core beliefs on childhood, democracy, education, sustainability, or social justice. As a final project, you will transform your statement into a digital story, complete with music and images. **Your digital story is due in on the final day of class, the 5th of May.**

HONOR CODE:

Your conduct in Italian 190 is governed by the Emory University Honor Code. The Honor Code applies to all papers, oral presentations, and daily assignments. Please be aware that you are bound by the Emory College Honor Code. Any perceived violation will be reported to the Honor Council. For a description of Emory College’s Honor Code policy, please see the following website:

<http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/students/honor.html>.

DATES TO REMEMBER

January 13	First day of class
January 20	Last day to change schedule without penalty
January 27	First blog installment due
March 3	Second blog installment due
March 7-11	Spring Break
April 5	Int. Baccalaureate website resource list due
April 17	Third blog installment due
April 12-21	Sustainability projects at local schools
April 22	Last day of class; Reggio documentation due
May 4	This I believe statements due

TOPICS:

Week #1 (1/13):	Personal Learning voyages: Discussion: When did you feel valued in a classroom? When did you feel part of something important?
Week #2 (1/18 & 1/20):	Post WWII: The origin of Reggio Emilia Schools in Italy; Social justice; democracy and citizenship in the classroom

History of Infant/Toddler Care in the U.S. and in Italy

- Week #3 (1/25 & 1/27): The Image of the Child: The Clifton School
- Week #4 (2/1 & 2/3): The hundred Languages of children: Sustainability as language
- Week #5 (2/8 & 2/10): Documentation & Community building: The history of Grant Park Cooperative Preschool
- Week #6 (2/15 & 2/17): The environment as teacher: The Atlanta Progressive Preschool
- Week #7 (2/22 & 2/24): Montessori education: Maria Montessori & the Children's House
- Week #8 (3/1 & 3/3): Baby College: Geoffrey Canada
- Week #9 (3/15 & 3/17): Making Changes in Education: The Freedom Writers Diary
- Week #10 (3/22 & 3/24): Sustainability projects at Emory
- Week #11 (3/29 & 3/31): Introducing sustainability into our community: History of Drew Charter School, Fernbank Elementary, and Booker T. Washington High School
- Week #12 (4/5 & 4/7): Creation of sustainability projects for/with local schools
- Week #13 (4/12 & 4/14): Implementation of sustainability projects at local schools
- Week #14 (4/19 & 4/21): On Strike! (film); This I believe digital stories; Lifelong learning & commitment to education; Reggio documentation—final discussions
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