

• Childhood education center given a name; to be 'inspired' by innovative Italian schools

By Frances K. Foster

Staff reporter

Hand-In-Hand — the early childhood education center being planned by the Sheridan Economic and Educational Development Authority Joint Powers Board — will be “inspired” by innovative facilities in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and other programs based on the discovery and inquiry approach to learning, stated Sheridan College education instructor Lissanna Follari.

The SEEDA board is composed of representatives from the city of Sheridan, Sheridan County School District 2, and Sheridan College. Follari is helping them design the center for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

The board’s request-for-proposals description for architectural and engineering services for the center states in part:

“We ... expect our physical space to encourage small- and large-group interaction, exploration, and also individual reflection time while allowing for seamless integration of inside and outside learning environments.

“We ... also want to integrate cozy spaces into the open plan to allow for quiet, focused work, play, and interactions.”

The Reggio philosophy encourages preschoolers up to age 5 to use many types of learning, especially those that include movement and tactile activities (e.g., dramatic play, drawing, dance) to provide “opportunities for all ways of thinking,” Follari said.



Lissanna Follari
SC Education Instructor

Learning is “project-oriented” as children choose the subjects they

want to learn about and teachers “share learning with them,” she added.

The project approach to learning “aligns well with Reggio because it is based on discovery and inquiry. Students are actively involved with guiding the learning by generating their own questions on topics and investigating them,” she said.

The primary sources for student investigations come from field observations and community experts on the topic, she said.

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Hand-In-Hand

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For example, a student who wants to learn about bridges could visit several types of bridges in Sheridan, make observations, and record the observations in various ways, such as drawing, videotaping, or tape-recording, Follari explained.

Then guests from the community with knowledge about bridges would be invited to meet with students and answer their questions.

Preschool children are capable of participating in these projects when given the resources and teacher guidance that a Reggio-inspired facility offers, she said.

The “state-of-the-art teaching and learning center” will “incorporate inquiry-based project learning in an aesthetically beautiful, collaborative space” that will invite “the community to share resources and space,” according to the request for proposals.

These innovative models are “designed to engage

thinkers and problem-solvers,” providing children with the knowledge base (counting, letter and color recognition) they need upon entering kindergarten, Follari said.

In addition, Sheridan College students majoring in elementary and early childhood education will use the center as a lab, mostly for observation, she said.

The Wyoming Business Council has awarded two \$1.5 million grants for planning and construction of the center. According to the grant application, objectives for the center include:

- Provide high-quality child care for Sheridan-area parents;
- Assure that the child care is available and affordable for any parent who needs to maintain a job; and
- Provide a training component for Sheridan College students studying child development.

The center is to be “substantially complete prior to January 31, 2009, or well-reasoned alternate completion date,” according to the RFP.