

Atelier Facilitator Biographies

Get To Know Your Facilitators



Erin Braznell is an Associate Director for First Baptist Day School in Greenville, South Carolina. She has 13 years of experience working in Reggio-inspired preschools in Waterville, Ohio, and Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. She was thrilled to participate in her first study tour in Reggio Emilia, where she joined her colleagues from Project Infinity. Erin took part in multiple Project Infinity New Teacher Experiences and professional development opportunities. She is eager to share her perspectives in the conference *ateliers*.



Kym Cook is a studio educator at Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool in Atlanta, Georgia, and is in her 18th year with Project Infinity. She has been working in the early childhood education field for over 26 years. She studied art and education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the University of Montana. The experiences of motherhood and teaching have kept her world full of color and three study tours in Reggio Emilia raised that to technicolor.



Candace Dupree is a Georgia native, parent, and the executive director of Grant Park Cooperative Preschool. She serves as a *pedagogista* and director within Project Infinity. She has been learning and practicing in the field of early childhood education for nearly 20 years, with these last 15 years inspired and provoked by the influence of the Reggio Emilia Approach. She looks forward to your participation and exchange, as we encounter aspects and inspirations from Reggio Children's *Bordercrossings: Encounters with Living Things/Digital Landscapes* exhibition and *atelier*.



Julie Fayssoux is the director of First Baptist Day School in Greenville, South Carolina, and a member of Project Infinity. She has been in the field of education for the past 18 years, with the last 13 at First Baptist Day School. She became an admirer of the Reggio Emilia Approach while her own daughter attended preschool at First Baptist Day School. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, relaxing at the beach, and curling up with a good book.



Gabriela Garcia is a strong advocate for the rights of young children and is passionate about the Reggio Emilia Approach. She is a founding member of Project Infinity and the founding director of the Grant Park Cooperative Preschool where she worked as executive director and *pedagogista* for 20 years. Originally from Mendoza, Argentina, she is fluent in Spanish and English. She is currently a program associate at NAREA, supporting professional development partnerships and other NAREA projects and initiatives.



Calista Hixenbaugh currently works with 3–6 year-olds in the studio at Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool. She is part of a thriving studio team that works daily with children and adults and is a member of Project Infinity and NAREA. Before her role at Peachtree, she gained experience as a classroom teacher and curriculum administrator, and earned her Master of Arts in Education from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She recently participated in a Project Infinity study group in Reggio Emilia where she was able to continue to learn, grow, and deepen her knowledge.



April MacLane currently works with 2-year-olds in a 5-day classroom at Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool. She has taught for many years, serving as mentor teacher, *atelier* facilitator, and valued colleague. She is part of a flourishing collaboration between educators of Project Infinity. She is a member of NAREA and has attended multiple conferences where she continues to grow in her understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Recently, she participated in a Project Infinity study group in Reggio Emilia. With an affinity towards nature, she brings a creative and natural perspective to life.



Belinda Parra is the *atelierista* at Grant Park Cooperative Preschool in Atlanta, Georgia. She helps create and support art as a powerful means of communication and a tool that facilitates divergent and holistic thinking. She enjoys finding new ways to view the world. She participates in ongoing professional formation. Recently she attended the Project Infinity Study Tour in Reggio Emilia and is a frequent NAREA conference attendee. She brings a strong and varied artistic viewpoint to her work with children and adults.



Becky Saylor currently works with 2-year-olds in a 3-day classroom at Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool. She is part of a co-teaching team that often includes an inclusion specialist. She is an active collaborator with educators of Project Infinity and the local community. She is a member of NAREA and has attended multiple webinars, special events, and conferences. Recently, she participated in a Project Infinity study group in Reggio Emilia. In addition to teaching, she is a member of the Cobb County School Board where she offers her unique perspective as a foster parent.



Gigi Schroeder Yu is the spring and summer issue editor and peer review associate editor of NAREA's publication *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange*. She is an assistant professor in art education at the University of New Mexico. The early learning programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and their deep respect for children's artistic languages inspire her creative work and research. Her study of the Reggio Emilia Approach began in 1999 while working as a studio art coordinator for Chicago Commons. In 2014, she was the project manager for *The Wonder of Learning* exhibition in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



Nora Thompson has worked in the field of early childhood education in both general and special education public school settings in Michigan. She has been a classroom teacher, a director of a municipal child care center, and lead teacher/director in an inclusive early childhood center based on the Reggio Emilia Approach. She was a teacher educator at Michigan State University and is now a program associate at the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance. She is also a grandmother who loves to explore nature with her four grandchildren.



Jessica Vailes has been an educator at Peachtree Presbyterian Preschool since 2001. She first fell in love with the Reggio Emilia Approach to learning when she participated in a Reggio-inspired professional development initiative at one of the original collaborative schools of Project Infinity in 2003. She then became an integral part of the process of Peachtree's study and transition to a Reggio-inspired preschool. She has participated in NAREA conferences in Tulsa, New York, and Washington, DC, and two study groups in Reggio Emilia.



Katie Yarrow is an educator at First Baptist Day School in Greenville, South Carolina, has been teaching in a 2-year-old/3-year-old looping class for 9 years and served as a pedagogical support for teachers this past school year. She has a master's degree in early childhood education and is dedicated to the image of the child as competent and capable. She is a member of Project Infinity. When not working with children, families, and fellow teachers, she enjoys spending time with family, caring for her garden, and being outdoors.