



Media Contact:

Nora Maroulis
Director of Development & Marketing
(413) 658-1111 / nora@picturebookart.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WESTERN MASS TO HOST 3-DAY CONFERENCE ON INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Conference participants traveling from across the country to learn about the creative methods developed by schools in Reggio Emilia and Pistoia, Italy and imported to the U.S. in the early 1980s

Amherst, Mass. (May 3, 2004) – The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art together with Smith College, the University of Vermont, and Five Colleges, Inc. will co-host a 3-day conference (Friday, May 7 – Sunday, May 9, 2004) dedicated to exploring the early childhood education model known as the Reggio Emilia Approach. *Childhood: Possibilities, Potentials, and Contexts, Voices from Pistoia, Reggio Emilia and New England* will offer 200 participants the chance to learn from leaders in the field about the history and practice of the approach as developed in Italy and now employed around the world. Lella Gandini, Adjunct Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts and Liaison for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the United States notes enthusiastically, “We have been happily overwhelmed with interest in the conference, which quickly sold out in the first days of registration. We are thrilled that so many practitioners are committed to incorporating aspects of this highly successful method of early childhood education into their curriculums.”

Key features of the Reggio Emilia Approach, which was developed in post-war Italy by working parents interested in providing their young children with experiences that would foster critical thinking and collaboration, include creating environments that spur child-led discovery and creativity; using the interests and questions of the child in response to his/her environment as a means to further the learning experience; exploring the non-verbal languages of children; and documenting the children’s ideas and discoveries as tools for assessment and advocacy. In addition, great emphasis is placed on the teacher’s role as both facilitator and researcher, and on the importance of building strong connections between home, school, and community.

The conference, which will hold sessions at The Eric Carle Museum and at Smith College, will be opened Friday by author and illustrator Eric Carle, and will include presentations and workshops led by leaders of the approach in Italy, as well as educators here in New England such as Jeanne Goldhaber, Associate Professor in the Early Childhood Teacher Prep at the University of Vermont and Susan Etheredge, Assistant Professor of Education and Child Study at Smith College. Attendees will also have the opportunity to visit several local centers that have embraced the Reggio Emilia Approach, including the Hampshire College Children’s Center.