

What inspired Tiziana's visit...

A popular presenter at AREA conferences, Tiziana Filippini had visited South Africa twice. What prompted her third visit?



Tiziana Filippini visiting Pinkie Motlanyane's classroom in Orange Farm on 29 August 2017

Tiziana first presented at our 2015 Joburg conference – to much applause and acclaim – and returned in 2016 to present at our Joburg and Cape Town conferences. It was on this second visit that she met Pinkie Motlanyane from Lesedi la Krete in Orange Farm, who was presenting on how the children in her class of 60 investigated the school environment and the fish pond. Tiziana was so humbled and inspired by Pinkie's example – since Pinkie had continued to look for openings and opportunities to shift her teaching practice closer to the Reggio philosophy, despite the incredible constraints she

was under – that she promised to volunteer some of her time mentoring teachers in Orange Farm. It was in this context that AREA began engaging with Tiziana and local schools about the possibility of a 2017 visit. During her week-long visit in 2017, Tiziana volunteered two days of her time for mentoring at one inner-city and two township schools. The remaining time was spent working with six private schools, some parents, and Gauteng provincial officials. Thanks to the generosity of the Albert Wessels Trust, AREA was able to cover her flights, accommodation and meals.

Day #1

Given the genesis of her visit, it was apt that Tiziana began her third trip to South Africa in Orange Farm, meeting with Pinkie Motlanyane and teachers from Lesedi la Kreste.

The product of a partnership between the Anglican Church and local government, Lesedi la Kreste Anglican Primary School has grown from 17 children in 1991 to 1634 today. The majority of children are on the government feeding scheme, and many parents are unemployed. Classes can include 50 children or more, and at least eight different home languages.

Tiziana spoke warmly of how these teachers, even in the most challenging of circumstances, are drawing inspiration from the essence of the Reggio approach – going beyond what the approach looks like, and rather focusing on the difference teachers can make in how they engage with children, what they recognise or celebrate, how they behave and think and act.

Late morning was spent with Audrey Mazibuko and teachers in the foundation phase of Masibambane College. While Masibambane – “holding hands” – is also an Anglican school in Orange Farm, its circumstances are quite different. A private school initiated and supported by



Lesedi la Kreste and Masibambane teachers gathered for a workshop with Tiziana

St John's College and Education Africa, Masibambane receives additional support from the City of Vienna. This support, together with the money that comes from higher school fees, means that there are fewer children per classroom, more opportunities for professional development and exchange, a greener and more spacious school environment, and children come from more resourced families.

Teachers from both schools gathered for an afternoon workshop with Tiziana at Masibambane. Much of this discussion was on how to embrace the philosophy within the constraints of the curriculum, and on what steps teachers can take as part of their own professional development journeys – even when there isn't much money to be spent on training.

Day #2

Tiziana's second day was spent on a paid mentorship at the Reddam Waterfall Early Learning School at Waterfall Estate.

This affluent private school in northern Johannesburg is headed up by Bev Evangelides, a board member of the Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance, and was custom built with the Reggio philosophy in mind. There are approximately 570 children in the early learning school, aged from 1-6 years, and for every two classrooms there is one shared mini atelier, as well

as one main atelier for the school overall. Working within such a well-resourced setting does not mean embracing the philosophy is without its challenges, however – and Tiziana and the teachers spent their time reviewing and reflecting on examples of documentation they'd sent her before the visit, and how they might take children's investigations deeper.

Day #3

Next was a visit to Nova Pioneer Ormonde, and a paid mentorship with several staff from Nova Pioneer campuses across Johannesburg.

Nova Pioneer is part of an education group that aims to deliver quality private schooling at more affordable rates using the American charter school model, and has ambitions to found schools across the continent. Des Hugo, one of the founding

members of AREA, is the academic director of this group of schools, and the focus of this visit was on documentation – how to observe, how to listen more deeply and carefully, and when to document.

“Thank you once again for everything you did. I'm more than grateful ... Our school is so grateful because we are encouraged to put more effort in what we did before. [This visit was] a great inspiration and we would like to learn more so as to keep the approach working for us. We will continue sharing ideas as teachers and continue to encourage our learners to work together.”

Pinkie Motlanyane



Day #4

Friday morning was spent with representatives of the Gauteng departments of education, health and social development.



Teachers from four schools gathered for an afternoon workshop at Small World on 1 September 2017

This meeting was prompted by Gauteng Premier David Makhura's desire to pilot the approach in ECD centres in the province and to develop a close working relationship between AREA, Reggio Children, the Reggio Emilia municipality, and Gauteng government structures. As a direct result of this meeting, Paola Strozzi from Reggio Children joined a delegation of Reggio Emilia municipal and business representatives on a visit to Gauteng in October 2017, and participated in two days' professional development on the Reggio approach at a government-run ECD summit.

Friday afternoon was spent at Small World, an independent playgroup and preschool in Roosevelt Park. Lindi Bell, the school's founder and director, opened up the time with Tiziana to three other schools (Mimosa, Kairos School of Enquiry and Sacred Heart) and some parents. Together they workshopped metacognition, modern neuroscience and ecological thinking in the Reggio approach, and the challenges of embracing the Reggio Emilia philosophy in a curriculum-bound primary school context.

Day #5

Saturday morning was spent leading a professional development workshop on documentation for around 40 people – the majority of them regular facilitators at AREA workshops.

Workshop participants explored different kinds and strategies of documentation, the connection between documentation and progettazione, and some of the challenges and questions they face in developing their own documentation.

After lunch, Tiziana was taken on an impromptu tour of inner-city Joburg with Sifiso Thobakale from the Zakheni Early Learning Centre in Protea Glen, Theresa Giorza from the Wits' School of Education and Catherine Collingwood from Small World.

Day #6

After a restful Sunday exploring Pilanesberg Game Reserve, Tiziana spent her final day in South Africa at Mathapelo Mathibela's school, Mother Goose Corner Daycare in Germiston, Ekurhuleni.

Mathapelo caught the Reggio vision at a 2013 AREA conference, and since then has been looking at ways to embed the philosophy in her school. Her efforts were recognised with the inaugural Loris Malaguzzi Centre Foundation Award, which took her to Reggio Emilia for an international study tour in April 2015. Started in 2000, Mother Goose caters for over 200 children aged from 3 months to 6 years, who might arrive as early as 6 in the morning, and leave as late as 6 in the evening. Children are drawn from surrounding areas of Germiston, informal settlements and local townships like Katlehong, Vosloorus and Thokoza.

It was an apt end to an inspiring visit, as Tiziana came away feeling uplifted at what's possible with vision and a sense of purpose, even when resources are limited.



Mother Goose teachers gathered for feedback and professional development

FEEDBACK

What did people have to say about her visit?

“When Tiziana visited our [atelier] she noted that the atelierista's day must be so boring because she repeated the same lesson over and over again to various age groups of children with slight adjustments made according to age groups. The atelierista had a print of Van Gogh's blue irises which she discussed in depth with the children viz. tone, shape, etc. We have now changed the atelierista's tight timetable. In the past she was seeing every class every week for limited time slots. She is now collaborating with each stage by attending their weekly meetings and inspiring them with new ideas and spending time more effectively and influencing the Hundred Languages in a profound way. The atelierista commented that she feels she has more time and freedom now to collaborate, to share and to influence provocations in a meaningful way. This is just one change of a number of changes.”

Bev Evangelides

“I finally understood that I have to just start. All other aspects of learning with the children will only become real when I join the children in their investigations by recording their process and thinking about them. Light tables, pieces of wood, clay are all just distractions for now. Their place as teachers will only become apparent in the course of

a real project – a project that I will trust the children to drive because I am part of it and I am documenting the process.”

Heather Barclay

“The workshop triggered a new understanding for me, related mainly to two facets:

1. That we have to think long and hard and very deeply about the questions that we pose for children, either as initial invitations/provocations and/or as relaunch questions after some initial exploration has begun, or after something happens in class to trigger off thoughts and ideas. The video about making a rainbow is one I refer back to constantly in my mind because it was so cleverly thought through, and the daisy one comes a close second ...

2. The absolute bottom-line need for teacher collaboration so as to open our minds collectively to possibilities that initial explorations with children present, and to garner and share different ideas in this regard ...

I know that if my questions are not thought through properly and thoroughly, and if I miss out on the opportunity to talk to other teachers about it, I will really struggle to find a way forward with the children in a way that is meaningful to all of us!”

Marion Drew

“I found the workshop with Tiziana to be extremely helpful in both clarifying as well as stretching my understanding of the purpose and the process of documentation. I really appreciated the fact that Tiziana called up specific case studies in response to particular questions from the participants, to provide practical illustrations of the principles being covered. It felt like she was really listening to the context. Tiziana's interactive style of posing questions to small groups facilitated interesting dialogue amongst us. I enjoyed experiencing her approach to 'teaching' practitioners as this provided me with rich observations and ideas for my own facilitation practice. Thank you to AREA for this wonderful professional development opportunity to learn from the source!”

Catherine Collingwood

“You really made my Saturday. I'm on another level now.”

Mathapelo Mathibela



An outdoors lesson at Masibambane on 29 August

More about Tiziana

Tiziana Filippini has worked as pedagoga for the municipality of Reggio Emilia since 1978, and is a member of the pedagogical co-ordinating team of the Istituzione - preschools and infant toddler centres of the municipality of Reggio Emilia. She co-ordinates the professional development activities for teachers and atelieristas of the infant-toddler centres and preschools of the municipality of Reggio Emilia, and has been the pedagogical supervisor of Officina Educativa, the department of the municipality of Reggio Emilia that oversees the compulsory schooling of 6-to-14-year-olds, since 2011.

Tiziana was a consultant for the exhibition The hundred languages of children and is one of the curators of the new version of the exhibition The wonder of learning: the hundred languages of children. She was also part of the collaborative research project between Reggio Children and Harvard University, Making Learning Visible - which later resulted in the well-known publication of the same name. She regularly travels to Cambridge, Boston, where she continues to be involved in the provision of professional development initiatives connected to Harvard University and Wheelock College.