

Connections & Reflections

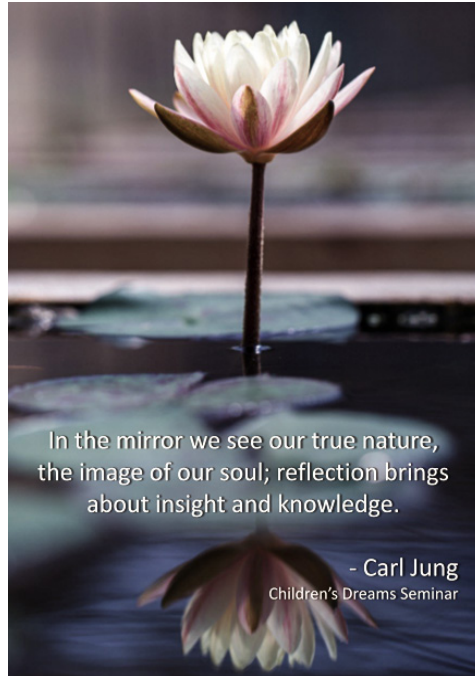
by Jennifer Whited

Lead Project Coordinator
ECU Early Educator Support Office

In a season full of new beginnings, we invited Jenn Whited, the new Project Coordinator for Early Educator Support at ECU to contribute. While she began her new role in August 2021, she has worked with EES since 2017, first as a mentor/evaluator, then as regional lead before serving one year in the Interim QA position. Prior to coming to EES, Jenn was the play facilitator on the Craven County Transdisciplinary Play Based Assessment Team. She has also taught integrated preschool and Kindergarten in a public school setting, both in NC and Ohio. Jenn started her career as a teacher at the Ohio University Child Development Center, working with infants and toddlers. She has degrees in Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Intervention Specialist. Jenn discovered her love for working with adult learners during adjunct teaching experiences at Ohio University and Pitt Community College. She is excited to be part of a team with such a strong commitment to professional growth and a dedication for improving the field of ECE. Jenn looks forward to working with Amanda and the UNC Charlotte team to continue developing new ways to collaborate and work as a team-stronger together!

When I was a little girl, my mom told me that a broken mirror means seven years bad luck. I'm sure many of you have heard some version of this superstition, but have you ever thought about where it comes from? It is tied to a belief that our soul projects from our body and is reflected in the mirror, so breaking the mirror equates to breaking our soul. I don't know that I really buy into this idea, but I do agree that mirrors have power. For some reason, whenever I feel sad, looking into the mirror makes me cry. It feels like staring back at my own reflection allows me to see the feelings that I'm trying to suppress, and they just come pouring out. Leading this program feels a little bit like staring into my own soul every day- I can see the reflections of my actions, intentions, feelings, and the very core of who I am projected into my work. I now

must pause to think about what I am doing, why I am doing it, and how I am doing it, because these actions can impact our entire program. Realizing this has probably been the biggest surprise of this year for me.



While taking the position of project lead for EES at ECU is technically a step forward into the future, it has required a step backwards, a level of introspection and awareness of myself that I don't know if I had mentally prepared myself for. Everyday, I make decisions that draw upon past experiences, and this also requires trusting those past experiences to guide me into the future. I see things in these reflections that let me know how my past has shaped me- for example, I was a shy child who sometimes felt invisible in group situations. I feel myself always looking for the person who may feel invisible. My first job was in a Reggio inspired, project- based lab school classroom. I know this experience instilled a deep appreciation for the capabilities of

young children, but also causes my struggle with teachers who have not yet discovered their respect for children as both learners and human beings. I know that my years as an exceptional children's teacher help me see everyone on our team as individuals and has left me with a strong ability to interpret the needs of others. However, I am working to let those around me lead with their strengths rather than their needs. Finally, I see reflected everything that EES has given me over the past five years. I have developed a deeper sense of who I am as an educator and a sense of awe for what can really happen when it all comes together in a beautiful way for a teacher. I can only hope that I find a way to give back even a little of what I've gained through this work. I feel excited for the potential we have for changing the lives of children and teachers. That is what motivates me, the feeling of being in a position where I not only have the freedom, but the expectation, to make a difference in the lives of others. As this year winds down, I will keep reflecting and using the lessons of my past to open the door for my future. I want to be someone who is good to the people around her. I want to be someone who believes in others enough to make them believe in themselves. I want to be someone who is willing to grow and change without bending enough for the mirror to crack. When I look into the mirror every morning, I want to feel good about the leader I see. If I can do that, there will be only smiles on the reflection staring back.