




The University of Texas
Rio Grande
Third Annual
Preschool Teacher Conference



**“The Joy and Wonder of the
Preschool Years!”**



Saturday, May 3, 2025
8:30 AM - 3:00 PM
UTRGV College of Education
and P-16 Integration
Edinburg
Auditorium 1.102

SPONSORED BY THE C. B. SLEMP ENDOWMENT CHAIR FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Greetings Everyone! Welcome to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley!

On behalf of the Conference Committee, we welcome you to the Third Annual UTRGV Preschool Teacher Conference, "The Joy and Wonder of the Preschool Years!" The preschool years are a critical period in a child's development laying the foundation for future academic success, emotional well being and social competence. The pressure on preschool teachers to academically prepare students for elementary school is prevalent. Thus, reducing opportunities for play, joy, and fulfilling preschoolers' developmental needs. We hope this conference offers practices that you can use in your own program and classroom to enhance children's joyful learning and wonder!

The purpose of this conference is to share experiences and best practices for effectively meeting the educational needs of preschool children. Planned presentations by a recording artist, university professors, graduate students, and teachers will share the latest and most innovative preschool teaching strategies. The conference topics include using music and movement to enrich language, playful pathways to literacy, STEAM and joyful learning, using culturally responsive children's books, setting classrooms for joy and wonder, and other play-based learning opportunities for preschool children.

We take this opportunity to thank all the conference sponsors, presenters, and volunteers. Without their help, we would not have coordinated this conference. Through the conference, we will increase public awareness and advocacy for developmentally appropriate practices that support the joy and wonder of the preschool years in the Rio Grande Valley.

Once again, we welcome you to the conference and hope you enjoy it!

Sincerely,

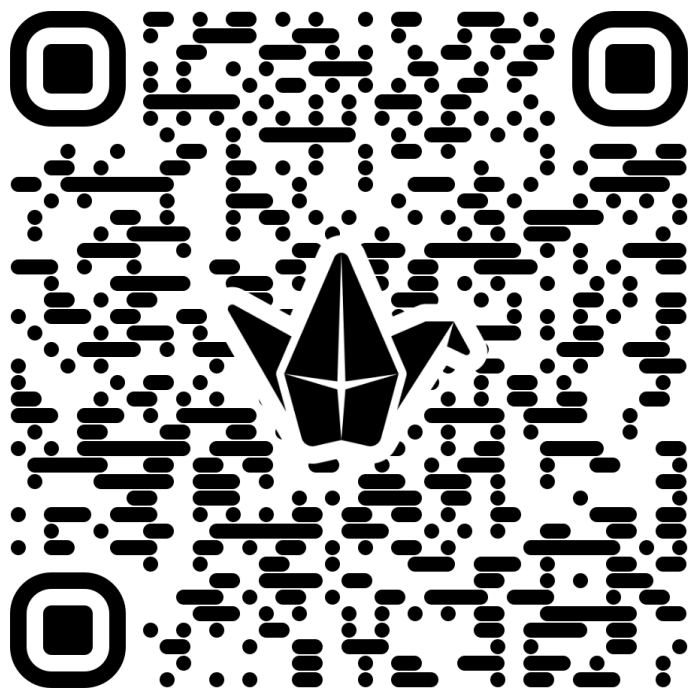
Dr. Julia G. Cuevas Guerra
Dr. Hilda Medrano
Dr. Irasema Salinas-González

Human Development & School Services

EDUC 1302
1201 West University Drive
Edinburg, Texas 78539-2999
(956) 665-3466

utrgv.edu

Share Your Pictures and What You are Learning





Schedule At a Glance



8:30am - 9:00am

Sign-in, Breakfast, Greetings

9:00am - 9:15am

Welcome by **Dr. Alma Rodríguez, Dean**

College of Education and P-16 Integration

9:15am - 10:15am

Opening Keynote Speaker: **José-Luis Orozco,**

Bilingual Educator, Children's Author, Recording Artist

10:25am - 11:25am

Breakout Sessions

11:35am - 12:35pm

Lunch

Student Project Galleria

Mobile Literacy Unit - Book Distribution

Exploration Centers

12:45 pm - 1:45pm

Breakout Sessions

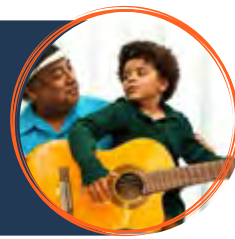
2:00pm - 3:00 pm

Closure by Dr. Steve Chamberlain, HDSS Chair

Conference Committee

Evaluations, Lakeshore Door Prizes, Certificates

Opening Keynote Speaker: *José-Luis Orozco*



TITLE OF SESSION:

Bilingual Children Songs, Rhymes, Rhythms and Games for the Preschool Classroom!

DESCRIPTION:

This interactive musical presentation showcases traditional and contemporary preschool teaching tools. These tools enhance children's motor skills, language, literacy, social skills, cognition, and development, while fostering cultural awareness and self-esteem. Participants will learn how to use music to develop phonemic awareness and vocabulary that leads to language fluency.



Scan for more information.



Conference Committee:



**Dr. Hilda
Medrano**



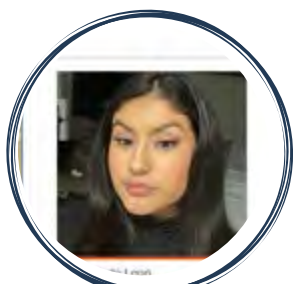
**Dr. Irasema
Salinas-González**



**Dr. Julia G.
Cuevas Guerra**



**Dr. Steve
Chamebrlain**



Julissa De Leon



Maritza Fuentes



Gabriela Ramos



Juan De La Rosa

Conference Volunteers: U.T.C.A.R.E.S. and ECED Graduate Students



Luz Castro

UTCARES Officers:

President	Aaliyah Myhand
Vice President	Trinity Garcia
Parliamentarian	Jaslyn Garza
Treasurer	Ruby Gomez
Secretary	Gaby Ramos
Public Relations	Alexandria Landa

Facilitators:

UTCARES Advisors
UTCARES Officers
UTCARES Members

ECED Graduate Students:

Alana Guerra	Karina Izaguirre
Ginnik Cuevas	Katzin Garcia
Jaclyn Sanchez	Maria Mercado Rosales
Jasmin Velasquez	Mariana Gomez
Joanne Lopez	Michelle Esparza
Jomoke Onasanya	Yasmin de la Cruz



Featured Breakout Session

9:15 am - 10:15 am



José-Luis Orozco

Bilingual Educator, Children's Author, Recording Artist

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.102

TITLE OF SESSION:

Music: A Magical and Friendly Tool for Teaching Basic Skills and Beyond

DESCRIPTION:

This hands-on workshop will show you how music and movement, using numbers, letters, colors, body parts, animal sounds, and dances, can help preschoolers build confidence and learn through two languages.



Breakout Sessions

10:25am - 11:25am

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.502

TITLE OF SESSION: Playful Pathways to Literacy: Games that Spark Joy, Wonder, and Language in the Preschool Years

PRESENTERS:

Dr. Fernando Hernandez, Associate Professor, A&M Kingsville

Araceli Mireles, Graduate Student, A&M Kingsville

Veronica Ortiz, Graduate Student, A&M Kingsville

DESCRIPTION: The preschool years are a magical time filled with curiosity, movement, and endless opportunities for joyful discovery. This engaging session invites educators to harness the natural energy of the outside world to foster young children's early literacy development. Discover how to turn swings, slides, chalk, and climbing spaces into rich environments for storytelling, rhyming, and language learning for all while honoring the wonder and joy of childhood, using hands-on demonstrations and practical strategies.



Breakout Sessions

10:25am - 11:25am

**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.534

TITLE OF SESSION: Brainy Beginnings: How Play Shapes Preschool Development

PRESENTER: Dr. Vejoya Viren, Professor, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: This presentation shows how play significantly contributes to the cognitive, emotional, and social development of preschool children by shaping their brain development. The strategies shown will effectively use meaningful play to enhance early learning and development.

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.404

**REPEATED
SESSION**

TITLE OF SESSION: The Joy and Wonder of STEAM in Preschool!

PRESENTER: Dr. Julia G. Cuevas Guerra, Assistant Professor, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: In this session, participants will explore play-based activities for fostering children's curiosity and developing Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematic (STEAM) concepts using the 21st century skills.



Breakout Sessions

10:25am - 11:25am

**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 2.234

TITLE OF SESSION: Equitable and Joyful Learning in Preschool

PRESENTER: Dr. Iliana Alanis, Professor, UTSA

DESCRIPTION: NAEYC emphasizes the need to promote each child's development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning (NAEYC, 2020). In this session, I share examples of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate practices that include children's funds of knowledge through the use of family and community artifacts, objects, and photographs.



**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 2.224

TITLE OF SESSION: Using Culturally Responsive Books, Props and Extension Activities to Bring Joy to Reading

PRESENTERS:

Michelle Esparza, Graduate Student, UTRVG
Jumoke Onasanya, Graduate Student, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: This session will explore the use of culturally responsive and multicultural children's literature along with props and extension activities during reading aloud to foster engagement, expand language development and increase story comprehension.

Breakout Sessions

10:25am - 11:25am

**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 2.222

TITLE OF SESSION: Words that Grow: Cultivating Early Language & Literacy Success

PRESENTER: Anna Marie Gonzalez, CEO of LeveragED Learning, LLC.

DESCRIPTION: This engaging and interactive session, educators will explore research-based strategies to nurture strong language skills and early literacy in young learners. We will discuss key developmental milestones, the power of read-alouds, and playful, hands-on activities that make phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension come alive. Participants will leave with practical tools to create a language-rich environment, foster a love for reading, and partner with families to support literacy at home. Together, let's grow young minds—one word at a time!



**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 2.502

TITLE OF SESSION: Moving to the Beat: Using Music and Movement to Enrich Language Learning in Early Childhood

PRESENTER: Yasmin de la Cruz, Graduate Student, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: This session explores the influence of music and movement in fostering language skills among young children. Participants will engage in hands-on activities and walk away with practical strategies and resources they can immediately use in their classrooms.

Breakout Sessions

10:25am - 11:25am

**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.406

TITLE OF SESSION: Creating Play-Based Learning Environments That Foster Joy and Wonder

PRESENTER: Dr. Irasema Salinas-González, Associate Professor, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: This session will demonstrate how educators of preschool children create equitable and joyful learning opportunities through a play-based environment. Play-based learning environments encourage preschool children to become active learners as they construct knowledge from the materials provided by the teacher, and the experiences of working with other children during free-choice learning centers. Through interactive hands-on and minds-on learning, participants will actively engage in effective and practical play-based strategies that positively impact preschool children!



**REPEATED
SESSION**

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.530

TITLE OF SESSION: Exploring the Four Functions of Children's Behavior

PRESENTERS:

Joanne Lopez, Graduate Student, UTRGV
Katzin Garcia, Graduate Student, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION: This session will explore the four functions of children's behavior, such as attention, escape, access, and sensory. Participants will learn how to use ABC data and the Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) to increase positive actions while reducing challenging behaviors in the classroom.

11:35am - 12:35pm



**Pick your lunch box in the
EEDUC 2.102 & 2.102C.**



Explore the following:

- **Student Project Galleria (1st floor)**
- **Mobile Literacy Unit – One free book per participant – 2nd floor outside elevators**
- **Exploration Centers (1st floor)**

12:45pm - 1:45pm

Visit the Demonstration Classroom During Your Break!

Take a tour of our UTRGV preschool demonstration classroom in ECED 1.410 connected to 1.406.

Explore a play-based classroom for preschoolers and interact with the many activities created by our EC-3 students!

Samantha Bazan	Tzipporah Campbell	Anna Castillo	Nallely Espinoza
Leslie Flores	Omar Flores	Marcelina Nava	Jacqueline Villarreal
Maripaz Olivares	Paloma Samaniego	Daisy Soliz	Gabriela Martinez

See conference guides for directions

Student Project Galleria

1st Floor

The Student Project Galleria

The Student Project Galleria is modeled after the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) research poster session. It is designed to highlight special projects completed by students in the Early Care and Early Childhood Studies Program to share their ideas with conference participants.

The Galleria is designed to display work completed in alignment to the NAEYC position statements:

- Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
- Professional Standards and Competencies.



Student Project Galleria

1st Floor

Students in the ECED 4391: Foundations of Early Childhood Education class are exhibiting their **Games and Activities**.

Jennifer Alcaraz-Lopez	Maya Carrizalez	Bibiana Casanova	Frida Cordero-Galvan
Leisly L Elizalde Padron	Cassie Flores	Yajaira M. Gamez	Stephanie Gonzalez
Sherylyn K. Hinojosa	Alexandria Landa	Marisol Montoya	Nallely Moreno
Edna Pena	Lorena Perez	Destiny Picasso	Jozlynn Pruneda-martinez,
Gaby Ramos	Jasmine Reyes	Dailyn I. Ricalday	Ashley Rodriguez
Elisa Rodriguez	Erykah Rodriguez	Kimberly Rofriguez	Leslie Sanchez
Hailey Torres	Kayla Vargas	Kayla Vazquez	Gabriela Zarate

Student Project Galleria

1st Floor

Students in the ECED 4394: Curriculum Design in Early Childhood Education are exhibiting their **Thematic Unit Projects**.

Dairin Adame	Sahiry Alanis	Jocelyn Ambriz-Hernandez	Sara Barbosa
Abigail Cabrera	Emily Cardenas	Amanda Espinoza	Elizabeth Flores
Jazmin Garcia	Karissa Garcia	Trinity Garcia	Ruby Gomez
Dalina Gonzalez	Faith Gonzalez	Samantha Luna	Carissa Mercado
Aaliyah Myhand	Vianey Quintanilla	Jessica Ramirez	Krystina Rangel
Tracy Rhods	Zaida Salinas	Elizabeth San Martin	Tanya Cavazos
Jennifer Salinas	Arleen Camacho	Christnah Cruz	Camila Fernandez
Eunisce Gonzalez	Brytania Hernandez	Martha Ortega	Stephanie Perez
Idolina Rivera	Jazmine Rodriguez		

Student Project Galleria

1st Floor

Students in the ECED 4314: Dynamics of Play & Play Environments are exhibiting their **Dramatic Play Prop Box**.

Samantha Bazan	Tzipporah Campbell	Anna Castillo	Nallely Espinoza
Leslie Flores	Omar Flores	Brissa Garcia	Marcelina Nava
Maripaz Olivares	Paloma Samaniego	Daisy Soliz	Jacqueline Villarreal
Gabriela Martinez			

Breakout Sessions

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Veronica Ortiz, Graduate Student, A&M Kingsville

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Breakout Sessions

12:45pm - 1:45pm

ROOM #: EEDUC 1.502

TITLE OF SESSION: Implementing Effective Read-Alouds Strategies that Enhance Children's Development

PRESENTER:

Perla Olivares, M.Ed., Early Childhood Mentor Coach, UTRGV

DESCRIPTION:

This session will explore the profound impact of reading on children's brain development, highlighting its role in strengthening neural pathways, cognitive abilities, and language acquisition. Participants will engage in strategies that encourage children to build connections to their personal experiences and daily life through images and emotions.



Mobile Literacy Unit: Serving the Community



Promoting Literacy in the Community

The Mobile Literacy Unit is a community outreach vehicle designed to travel across the Rio Grande Valley to provide low-income children with equitable literacy opportunities.

The overarching purpose of the Mobile Literacy Unit is to promote literacy and reading achievement by taking university resources into the local community, particularly targeting areas that have been historically underserved.

For more information, email:
irasema.gonzalez@utrgv.edu



Conference Evaluation

Your opinion matters to us.

Please evaluate the conference by responding to the questions on the survey.

Scan the QR Code below.



Thank you for attending the conference.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

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