

JAMES & MAGGIE

"Maggie, come on! It's circle time!" call the group of 10 toddlers to their classmate. Maggie says, "Just a minute, I have to finish with James. James is another toddler who has cerebral palsy and is sitting in a bright yellow plastic 'banana chair' to support his torso. Maggie hands James a 1"x1" wooden block, which James struggles to place on top of a stack of two already-stacked blocks. While James concentrates to keep control of his hand, Maggie, says, "You can do it!" James aims the block but knocks the other two over in the process. Maggie tells him, "That's ok – we try next day." A huge smile fills James' face, and some drool slips down his chin. Maggie says matter-of-factly, "Karla, James has some drool" and skips over to the circle of toddlers who are singing, "Open, Shut Them". Karla, the paraprofessional, wipes James' chin and rolls his chair over to the edge of the circle. James nods his head to the beat of the music. Sue, the early childhood teacher and Kate, a student teacher from a near-by college are singing with the children before they read a story.

James and Maggie attend a toddler program that meets 2 hours twice a week. Of the 12 children enrolled in the group, currently 3 children have been identified with disabilities and are receiving services in the toddler program setting. The three children with Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP's) in place are James, Roland (developmental delays) and Jenna (a feeding tube and eating difficulties related to oral muscle reflexes and control). The toddlers and their teachers pack many activities into this 2 -hour time frame:

- 9:00 Arrival – outdoors or indoor large motor room
- 9:20 Circle time (songs, stories)
- 9:35 Wash hands, snack (during snack children and teachers talk about what choices and new materials are in the room, what centers they would like to play in)
- 9:45 Center time /free choice of several areas, including block area (large cardboard & wooden blocks, trucks, cars, animals), house area (kitchen appliances, dishes, dress-up clothes), art area (paper, crayons, glue, easle and varying other materials), book center (bean bags and books) and manipulatives (puzzles, beads, small blocks, etc.)
- 10:45 Clean up, parent arrival, departure

Maggie, who is nearing three years old at the end of this school year, took a while to warm up to James. Back in the late fall, when James came into the program, Maggie was intrigued by James, his chair, and some of the interesting sounds he made. While Karla worked one-on-one with James (to stack blocks, pick up items off the tray attached to his chair, or to hold his spoon and get it to his mouth), Maggie circled widely around, watching rather wide-eyed. Over time, Maggie moved in closer and occasionally smiled at James, who grunted and smiled widely back at her. Always when Maggie was watching, Karla said, "Hi Maggie" and told her whatever James was working on. One day Karla asked Maggie if she would hand James the next block while she went to check on another toddler in the bathroom. Maggie got over next to James, and watched him intently while he placed the first block on his tray. She handed him another block, but his hand had a spasm and knocked the first block off the tray. Maggie laughed, and told him, "No Silly, like this!" and put both blocks on the tray. James made sounds and moved his head. Karla returned and Maggie said, "I think he is laughing". Karla said, "Yes, I think you are right". Maggie said, "Bye, James" and went over to play with her friend Nicole in the house area.

Maggie continued daily to check in on James and Karla, until it became routine for her to ask Karla, "What are we working on today?" and spend 5-10 minutes working with James, whose vocalizations and movements increased when Maggie approached.

Karla jokes, "I think I am being phased-out of my job - James works harder for Maggie than for me, and enjoys it more!" From observing Maggie and James, Karla and Sue have decided that it makes more sense for James to always be in the

play areas during free choice time, instead of over to the side of the room working one-on-one with an adult. Kate, the student teacher, suggested that he could help put small objects on a plate as food with the other children in the house area and really get the same “practice” as with the 1” cubes on his own tray. Over time, because of James’ closer proximity, the other children develop their own way of interpreting James’ vocalizations.

Maggie’s mom and James’ mom have, at various times, watched the interactions between James and Maggie from the observation booth adjacent to the classroom. While they know each other as “one of the toddler moms”, and they engage in the typical small talk, they have not had any extended conversations. James exits to the back parking lot, which has a better set up for getting his wheelchair into his mom’s van. The other toddlers exit to the front parking lot, which has more room for all the families’ vehicles. Karla and Sue fill in another part of the *‘James and Maggie Story’*. On different occasions, both moms have been in tears – Happy Tears – about their children.

Maggie’s mom said, “You know you always think of your toddler as so self-centered. The terrible twos and the terrible threes, you know. But when I watch Maggie with James I see a child trying to see the world from someone else’s eyes. It’s really made me see my child in a different light.”

James’ mom said, “I know it sounds terrible to say about your own child, but the worst part of James’ disability for me was that he would never have any friends. You can handle the physical stuff – you kind of get that down and just do it every day. But my heart hurt to think that he might always be avoided by the other kids. Watching him here gives me hope. I think I was avoiding having him be close because I was afraid he would get hurt. Or maybe I was afraid that I would get hurt.

Discussion Questions:

Policy: What systems or structures seem to be in place in this program?

Pedagogy: What can you tell about the roles of the teachers?

Curriculum: In what ways does the routine/curriculum contribute to or inhibit interactions between all children in the setting?

Learners: In what ways are children and adults learning in this setting? What are they learning?

Additional Actions:

- In what ways could this program be enhanced to meet the goal of serving young children with disabilities in natural environments?
- In what ways could this program be enhanced to further meet the needs of families?