

Katie and Heidi –Neighboring Teachers

Bates elementary school is located in a suburban middle-to-upper income area and houses two of the school districts’ pre-kindergarten (PK) programs and two of the early childhood special education (ECSE) programs. Katie is the teacher in one of the PK rooms at Bates. There are 18 children, mostly young five-year-olds, enrolled in her a.m. and p.m. sessions. Heidi is the teacher in one of the ECSE rooms at Bates. There are 12 three-to-five-year old children enrolled in her a.m. and p.m. sessions. Heidi’s a.m. session is younger children, while her p.m. session is older children in the 3-5 age range. Katie and Heidi are both “young” teachers; each has been teaching for about 6 years.

Katie and Heidi are in neighboring classrooms in the building, with an adjoining door between them. They have been teaching as neighbors for three years, and see this as a key to what they feel is a successful collaboration. Both Katie and Heidi mentioned the “push” from IDEA (and to demonstrate meeting state indicators) to create more opportunities for children with disabilities to receive services in natural environments, to spend time with typical peers. They also both mentioned that they enjoy working together and they feel they have similar styles. Both teachers experienced some form of early childhood & early childhood special education collaboration in their undergraduate programs as well as early in their teaching, previous to their collaboration with one another of the last three years.

Katie and Heidi plan together weekly and have the same or complimentary activities going on in their classrooms. Katie sits in on IEP’s frequently for children in Heidi’s program to add her perspective of children’s interactions in the PK room, as well as to learn more about children’s goals. Katie and Heidi both mentioned that the main roadblock for them is their asynchronous schedules (below), partly due to bus schedules for the children enrolled in the ECSE program. It feels frustrating that what seems like such a small roadblock causes lots of headaches. But they also feel fortunate to have adjoining classrooms, because the other ECSE teacher has to travel out to the PK room in the portable in order for their children to interact. Some of the children in this classroom are in wheelchairs, and it is very difficult for them to get out there.

ECSE Classroom	PK Classroom	ECSE Classroom	PK Classroom
<i>AM</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>PM</i>	<i>PM</i>
<i>9:00 Arrival</i>	<i>8:45 Welcome</i>	<i>12:45 Arrival</i>	<i>12:15 Welcome</i>
<i>9:15 Circle Time</i>	<i>9:00 Circle Time</i>	<i>1:00 Circle Time</i>	<i>12:30 Circle Time</i>
<i>9:30 Choice Time</i>	<i>9:15 Choice Time</i>	<i>1:15 Choice Time</i>	<i>12:45 Choice Time</i>
<i>10:30 Work Time</i>	<i>10:10 Circle Time</i>	<i>2:00 Work Time</i>	<i>1:40 Circle Time</i>
<i>10:55 Music/Movement</i>	<i>10:45 Snack</i>	<i>2:30 Music/Movement</i>	<i>2:15 Snack/Small Group</i>
<i>11:10 Snack</i>	<i>11:00 Story</i>	<i>2:55 Snack</i>	<i>2:30 Story</i>
<i>11:25 Story</i>	<i>11:10 Home</i>	<i>3:10 Story</i>	<i>2:40 Home</i>
<i>11:30 Home</i>		<i>3:15 Home</i>	

Although their daily schedules are not aligned, Katie and Heidi have found some ways of ensuring that children from their classrooms can interact. Some of Heidi’s “higher functioning” children join Katie’s circle time and small group activity each day. During the 45-60 minutes of center/choice time, the door between their classrooms is opened. Six PK children at a time can move to the ECSE room, using 6 tags hanging by the door. Any number of the ECSE children can move to the PK room. Katie typically stays in the PK room and Heidi typically stays in the ECSE room, but they also move from room to room occasionally, assisting a child, touching base with one another or with one of the therapists who may be working with the children.

In addition to the children and teachers moving between rooms, parents of children in both rooms receive a weekly newsletter which lets them know what kinds of activities and special materials are being used in each room. Lisa, a parent, feels that her son Sam, who has autism, has benefitted from being in this particular ECSE classroom. He looks forward to the time of day when the “wall opens up” and he can go to either classroom. Lisa said that at first it was a little overwhelming for Sam to move to another classroom. Everything was new, and he didn’t know any of the children’s names. But once he learned the routine, he was comfortable. Lisa also commented that the newsletter was a very important tool she used to communicate with her son Sam about school activities. She can ask him specific questions. For example, “Did you go to Katie’s room today? Did you use the magnets that were at the science table?”

Lisa also spoke of liking the inclusion between the rooms because “All kids need role models....Sam learns more how to be social, and his meltdowns have decreased.... but Sam is also a model – he is very high academically like in math and music... so he is a model too” . When asked if she specifically requested that Sam be in an “inclusive” program, Lisa said,

No, just chance. When Project Find recommended ECSE, we started with a Parent-Tot group. Then he got into Heidi’s room. So that’s just what we’ve known. But I guess I understand better now that all special ed programs don’t do that – even the other one in the building. I feel lucky that we ended up with Heidi and Katie. Everyone sees everything- like reports and assessments from other agencies. Our goal is for next year in kindergarten is that he spend at least ½ of his time in the general education class.

Discussion Questions:

What policy decisions would better enable the PK and ECSE programs to collaborate? At what level are these decisions made? District level? School level?

What factors do you think have influenced what Katie and Heidi feel to be a successful collaboration?

What kinds of experiences do you feel early childhood teachers and special education teachers need to have in their teacher education programs in order to be able to collaborate?

What parent awareness/information or parent education activities do you see a need for based on Lisa’s comments?