



Summer 2007

Greetings!

Welcome to the latest edition of your Gateways to Opportunity quarterly e-newsletter. The focus of this issue is Collaboration.

As you explore the articles, many collaboration memories—personal experiences both old and new—will surface. My experience was in remembering 15 years ago, when working as a director of a Head Start program, the Executive Director and I had a meeting with the Superintendent of the local school district. The purpose was introductory in nature—introducing the town's first Head Start program. The meeting may have been scheduled in the name of collaboration—but the spirit of the meeting was competition. Bottom-line, the same children were NEEDED by both programs to maintain funding.

Thankfully, the landscape of early care and education has changed enormously over the last 20 years! From what is considered developmentally appropriate to how programs are financed and/or funded—great strides have been made from then to now. Collaborations between Head Start, Pre-K and Child Care are now a reality. The best interests of children are of primary focus. Today, through assistance from the Illinois Head Start Collaboration office, many statewide programs receive support as they blend private and public funding sources to meet the needs of the children in their communities. Three such programs are highlighted in this issue of Inside Gateways. We are excited to have you join us in exploring new approaches to collaboration.

You will also find in this edition Dr. Lilian Katz' reflection on Developmental Curriculum Principles. Dr. Katz shares her insight with us—one that provoked her to think about what to look for in curriculum when visiting early childhood classrooms. Join us in learning about one of her five basic principles shared in detail.

We thank you for all that you do for children and families...Enjoy!

Paula Steffen and Your
Gateways to Opportunity
Professional Development Team

Head Start, Child Care, and PreK Collaborations in Illinois

Illinois Head Start Collaboration Office

Collaboration—working jointly with others—is not a new concept for Head Start. Since 1965, Head Start has had a mandate to work with community partners, according to Gina Ruther, Illinois Head Start Collaboration Director. The big push for early care and education collaboration began with the passage of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare legislation in 1996. Low-income families needed more full-day/full-year services to meet the work requirements of TANF. Because Head Start offered mainly part-day child care programs, the federal Head Start

and Child Care Bureaus got together to encourage more full-day services for the families that Head Start served. Very quickly, collaboration with child care programs became not only desirable but essential in order for Head Start to adequately serve children and families.

In addition to addressing six other federal priority areas around the state, the Illinois Head Start Collaboration office (opened in 1997) offers training, technical assistance, and resources to facilitate new collaborations and to support existing collaborations among Head Start, child care, and state-funded PreK programs. Gina Ruther and her collaboration colleagues at the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE, which oversees state-funded PreK programs) and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS, which oversees child care programs) developed joint training sessions to address frequently asked questions and common barriers to collaboration between their agencies. In 2006, the Illinois Early Childhood Collaboration Web site [<http://www.ilearlychildhoodcollab.org/>] was developed to provide technical assistance resources and detailed profiles of Illinois early care and education program and community collaborations.

Growth in collaboration among early care and education programs in Illinois has been steady in recent years. The earliest early care and education collaborations in the state probably date from the mid-1980s. Now, almost all Head Start agencies and many child care and PreK providers have some type of collaborative relationship. Because collaboration grows out of a local need to serve children and families, no standard collaboration model exists in Illinois. Some models “braid” (or blend) Head Start and PreK services. Some braid Head Start or PreK and child care. Some braid all three. The different program eligibility requirements and funding mechanisms of Head Start, IDHS, and ISBE can present logistical and administrative challenges to collaboration. At the same time, the unique mission of each agency—IDHS Bureau of Child Care and Development to provide safe environments for children while their parents are in school or training, ISBE PreK to educate preschool children, and Head Start to offer comprehensive services to children within the context of the family and community—provide opportunities to offer enhanced services to children and families.

Recent expansion of state-funded PreK in Illinois will continue to fuel the interest in Head Start, child care, and PreK collaboration in the state. We are fortunate to have state-level support for collaboration (a reality not enjoyed by all states). The collaboration stories included in this issue of Inside Gateways illustrate three different approaches to collaboration. The profiles detailed on the Illinois Early Childhood Collaboration Web site [<http://www.ilearlychildhoodcollab.org/>] offer additional examples of what can be done when programs work together to improve services for children and families in their communities.

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City of Rockford Head Start

Head Start and PreK collaboration has a long history in Rockford. For at least two decades, the Head Start program, administered by the City of Rockford, and the school district’s state-funded PreK program have worked together to provide a single point of entry and single assessment tool for eligible children and families. This close working relationship facilitated additional collaborations with community child care programs beginning in 1998. This past year, the Head Start/PreK collaboration included Preschool for All funds, which paid for two additional PreK teachers as supplemental staff in the Head Start program.

The collaborations have benefited all of the stakeholders in Rockford. Parents have greater choices in programs and services. If a family is eligible for Head Start, the family is also given the option of utilizing the state-funded PreK program or the community child care program. An ample supply of income-eligible families in Rockford eliminates any concern about competition for enrollment.

Teachers benefit from the joint training and networking with other professionals that are part of the collaboration, as well as from the additional staff that the collaboration agreement pays for. The collaboration enhances and stretches the budgets of the school district, Head Start, and child care programs in two ways. First, by working in partnership, the school district, Head Start, and community child care programs were successful in securing a \$900,000 18-month Early Learning Opportunities federal grant to provide a variety of resources and community events focused on early literacy. Second, by pooling their resources, Head Start, PreK, and child care programs have been better positioned to weather uncertain budget cycles.

Despite a long history of working collaboratively and communicating openly, Head Start, PreK, and child care collaborations in Rockford have faced challenges. The challenges—reconciling different eligibility requirements, program hours, assessment methods, and transportation requirements—are not unique to Rockford, however. The collaboration process in other parts of the state could be facilitated if these administrative issues were reconciled at the state and federal levels.

Not every collaboration that Head Start has attempted has been successful in Rockford. Some partners and potential partners find it difficult to incorporate Head Start's curriculum, home visiting, and outcome reporting requirements.

The resources provided by the Illinois Head Start Collaboration Office, Illinois Head Start Association, and the Office of Head Start in Washington have helped the Rockford community expand its approaches to collaborations so that they can continue to stretch their early childhood dollars to benefit the greatest number of children and families in Rockford.

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Champaign County Regional Planning Commission Head Start

The Regional Planning Commission Head Start Program in Champaign County has been serving families since 1994. The program received its first ISBE PreK collaboration grant in 2003 to provide enhanced services for 40 children at risk for academic failure. A Preschool for All (PFA) grant in August of 2006 allowed them to serve an additional 160 children, which included classrooms in two community child care centers in Champaign County.

The collaboration partner administrators are aware of the different requirements of their respective programs, but the children in the classrooms do not experience these differences. For example, a child funded through Head Start is not distinguished from a child whose services are paid through state-supported PreK. The children and their families experience concrete benefits from the collaboration. The collaboration grant pays for early childhood mentors in the two community child care centers. The mentors are resource specialists who supplement the early childhood programs by helping with curriculum planning, facilitating group time activities, arranging for field trips, and providing teaching resources. The mentor is an additional staff person who improves the adult-to-child ratio and increases the amount of supervision and individualization that can occur in the early childhood classrooms. The mentor also shares in administrative classroom responsibilities, such as conducting home visits, assisting with developmental screenings, and preparing program reports. Children and families at the collaboration sites receive services, resources, and equipment that often could not be provided on a child care program's limited budget. As a result of the collaboration grant, the number of preschool transitions is greatly reduced for children who can now receive full-day services in one program location instead of traveling between various part-day programs in the community. Teachers in the collaboration benefit from the additional professional development training funds that help pay for teachers' continuing education throughout the year.

Blending Head Start, PreK, and community child care resources has clear benefits for children, families, and teachers. The collaboration also presents some challenges. Keeping up with the administrative requirements of each program (e.g., recording attendance, providing meals, documenting parent participation, and providing developmental screenings), in addition to preparing classroom lesson plans and parent newsletters, conducting home visits, and arranging parent-teacher conferences, can be overwhelming for staff, particularly for new teachers. Co-teaching and sharing responsibilities can also sometimes result in disagreements and misunderstandings. To address these challenges, biweekly classroom meetings are held with teachers and site directors to keep communication open and to develop creative solutions to classroom and administrative concerns.

A requirement of the PFA grant is to have a Type 04 certified teacher in each classroom. Many of the teachers hired as a result of the Champaign County collaboration grant were new to teaching. The difficulty in meeting the additional administrative and program requirements of the collaboration is compounded for new teachers who are also learning to be effective teachers and to build strong relationships with families. Orientation at the start of the year and professional development throughout the year are designed to fit the needs of new teachers to help them adjust to their classroom responsibilities. To help new teachers build relationships with families, monthly parent meetings are held to discuss topics of interest identified by parents (e.g., addressing common health concerns and responding to challenging behaviors in children).

Another challenge is the effect of a union contract that governs the teachers in the collaboration. All Type 04 certified and Head Start teachers are part of the AFCSME union. Since AFCSME is a laborer's union and not a teacher's union, the union is not familiar with preschool classroom operations. No union represents staff in community child care programs. Reconciling differences in employee workday hours stipulated by the union with scheduling for non-union employees presents real challenges to effective collaboration that must be addressed by the union negotiation process.

The benefits to children, families, and teachers from the Champaign County Head Start collaboration have been great and the challenges surmountable. Plans are already in the works for improved services for the next year's collaboration.

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Southern Seven Health Department Head Start

The Southern Seven Head Start grant is run through the Health Department in Pulaski County. Angie Messmer has worked in the Southern Seven county region of Head Start for 15 years. The region comprises Massac, Pulaski, Alexander, Union, Johnson, Pope, and Hardin counties. As the preschool child population declined and PreK services expanded in the Southern Seven region of the state, some Head Start programs had difficulty filling their slots while other communities with eligible children had no local Head Start services available at all.

In December 2004, Head Start Region V staff and the superintendents of 17 school districts represented in the Southern Seven counties met to discuss various options for Head Start and state-funded PreK collaboration. Since that first meeting, Head Start has expanded from 8 to 14 locations, 8 of which are situated within public schools. In addition to more services, the Head Start/PreK collaborations have resulted in more comprehensive and efficient services for children and families in the Southern Seven county region of Illinois.

Annual screenings to determine eligibility for services are now done collaboratively among Head Start, PreK and child care. Families go to one Child Find location for screenings each April and complete one eligibility application form to help determine whether they will go to a Head Start, PreK, or child care program. Once the children have been assessed, the teachers from those programs sit down together and assign children to programs that best meet the needs of the children and families. By working together, Head Start, PreK, and child care programs ensure that eligible families have access to a full range of services and that their programs are fully utilized.

In addition to joint screenings, collaborations have resulted in a wider distribution of Head Start services. Pope County, for example, did not have a Head Start program before 2004. Children in Pope County who were eligible for Head Start had to travel 20 miles each way to reach another county's Head Start program. The opportunity to collaborate with the PreK program resulted in a Head Start classroom in Pope County in the 2005-06 school year, eliminating the long bus rides for children and the costly transportation expenses for Head Start. The revenue from Head Start provides much-needed income that enhances the services provided for children funded through Head Start and state-funded PreK in the Pope County school district.

The collaboration process sometimes requires flexibility in service delivery. In areas with full-day PreK, but no child care, for example, Head Start offers a late afternoon class from 2:30–5:30 to provide full-day services for families.

Services for all are enhanced and maximized when collaboration occurs. Next year, for the first time, a Head Start program in Union County will be located in a building with early childhood PreK and early childhood special education, allowing the programs to share the costs of an inclusion teacher—a resource that benefits children in all three programs. Parent education and support groups provided by Head Start and PreK can be implemented jointly when families are served in the same building. As a result, schools get to know the families of all the children who they will eventually enroll before the children arrive for kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten is also eased for children. Kindergarten teachers assist with Head Start activities so children become familiar with their new teachers in advance of starting kindergarten. Head Start and kindergarten teachers also meet regularly to discuss joint expectations between their programs.

Collaboration is not an easy process. Angie Messmer found that building relationships was critical to successful collaboration. Working initially with superintendents (as opposed to working with PreK teachers) and remaining flexible about service delivery are also central to successful collaborations. Class scheduling, school menus, screening tools, and eligibility application forms had to be adjusted in many cases to make collaboration work between PreK and Head Start in their Seven County region.

Change can be difficult for teachers and program administrators. Relationship building needs to occur among program staff as well. Angie spends a lot of time with staff at all levels in each of the seven counties listening to staff concerns, clarifying questions, and brainstorming solutions. Most importantly, regular communication enables Angie to help staff remain focused on the reason for collaboration—to better serve children and families in their Southern Seven county region so that children are better prepared to start school.

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***Editor's note:** This issue of Inside Gateways discusses collaborations between Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten, and community child care programs in Illinois. Despite their varying missions (Head Start offers comprehensive services to children within the context of the family and community; ISBE's prekindergarten programs educate preschool children; and IDHS community child care programs provide safe environments for children while their parents are in school or training), the early care and education professionals in the programs profiled in this issue collaborate to offer more enhanced services than any one program alone could offer. Lilian Katz has visited many Head Start, private, and publicly funded early childhood classrooms, and she has often spoken about the five developmental principles that should form the basis for the curriculum in all of these settings. In this article, Lilian focuses on the first developmental principle related to early childhood curriculum. (A discussion of all the developmental principles will appear in the summer issue of the magazine Gifted Child Today.)*

Lilian Katz: Reflections

Developmental Curriculum Principles

It has been my privilege to visit early childhood programs all over the United States and some 50 other countries. Such visits have always been instructive, but I had not thought about what exactly I should look for with respect to a program's curriculum until several years ago, when I made a presentation at an early childhood education conference in one of the tropical countries in West Africa. Following the presentation, a kindergarten teacher came up to me to express her appreciation, and with great enthusiasm said, "You must come and visit my classroom. It's not far away and I want you to see what my kids are doing and to give me some suggestions about where to go next." Needless to say, I welcomed this special opportunity to visit a kindergarten classroom in tropical Africa.

The kindergarten classroom seemed entirely suitable in terms of the kinds of space and the variety of materials, furnishings, and equipment available, and the children seemed to be reasonably content with the activities in which they were engaged. But as I looked around, particularly at the children's work mounted on the walls and displayed on tables, it occurred to me that on the basis of what was visible, this classroom could have been almost anywhere. I said to the teacher, "Looking around at the children's work that I see here, there's no way that I can tell that I'm not in Minneapolis!"

Needless to say, the teacher was puzzled by this unexpected observation. I then shared with her my surprise that none of the children's work reflected the rich and colorful tropical environment right outside the classroom door and clearly visible through the classroom windows. On the contrary, the décor of the classroom included pictures of a number of Disney characters with banal and amusing messages, a table with more than a dozen play dough sculptures of dinosaurs, and other "art" work with titles such as "My favorite color." In other words, the work of the children was such that it could have been undertaken in just about any classroom anywhere in the world. This incident provoked me to think about what to look for in terms of curriculum when visiting classes for young children.

Basic Developmental Principles

The question of what to look for with respect to early childhood curriculum can be addressed on the basis of a set of fundamental developmental principles applicable to all kinds of settings. The term principle is used here to refer to a proposition that is sufficiently reliable that it is worthy of consideration when making important decisions and choices from among alternative possible courses of action. A principle is considered developmental when it addresses changes according to the ages and experiences likely to be associated with the age of those to be served by its application. When visiting classrooms, I look for evidence that the five developmental principles listed below are addressed by the curriculum being implemented:

Principle #1: The younger the children, the more important it is that the curriculum strengthens and deepens their understanding of their own experience.

Principle #2: The younger the children, the more they learn from direct, firsthand experience.

Principle #3: The younger the children, the more they learn through interactive rather than passive processes.

Principle #4: The younger the children, the more important it is that what they are learning has horizontal versus vertical relevance.

Principle #5: Children's dispositions to seek in-depth understanding of experience and events are strengthened by undertaking extended in-depth investigations.

The first principle is discussed in some detail below.

Principle #1: The younger the children, the more important it is that the curriculum strengthens and deepens their understanding of their own experience.

This first principle implies that curriculum planning in the early years should emphasize deepening children's awareness, knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and close observation of their own environments and experiences. This principle is developmental because it takes into account how what children learn should change with increasing age and gain more and more varied experiences and abilities. Thus, later on, perhaps by the age of 7 or 8 years, the curriculum should include plans for helping the children to be aware of and to know, understand, and appreciate other peoples' environments and experiences—those that are far away in both time and place. However, during the early years, it is developmentally appropriate for children to be examining, studying, and observing closely and systematically their own natural as well as humanly created surroundings. In this way, the children's knowledge and understanding of things that influence their own experiences increase in both depth and accuracy.

It has been noted throughout the ages that children are born with a powerful disposition to investigate—although it may be stronger in some children than in others. Young children are natural anthropologists, social scientists, and scientists. They spontaneously put enormous amounts of time and energy into investigating whatever environments they arrive in—prying and poking around, trying to figure out what people mean, why they do what they do, what things are used for, where things come from, and so forth. Children frequently test the limits and boundaries of their environments—all in an effort to make the best sense they can of their own experience.

Similarly, it is often said of young children that play is their natural way of learning. However, as already suggested, it is a good idea to keep in mind that it is just as natural for young children to learn through observation and investigation. In fact, anyone who spends time with a toddler is aware of how often this disposition to pry and poke around, if unsupervised, could lead to serious injury! Throughout the early years, the curriculum should capitalize on this disposition by involving children in extended in-depth research on phenomena around them worthy of their understanding. I use the term "worthy" here to suggest that not all objects or experiences are equally worth spending time and energy on.

I encountered a kindergarten class whose teacher encouraged the children to study their teddy bears. Almost all children brought at least one to the class, and they were measured, weighed, drawn, and painted. No harm was done, but spending substantial amounts of time and energy on investigating a nearby supermarket or post office, for example, can involve children in a variety of subtopics and opportunities to apply a wide range of early literacy and numeracy skills as well (see Katz & Chard, 2000).

Conclusion

In sum, when a classroom for young children takes into account the basic principles of young children's development, especially their intellectual development, one could expect to see evidence that they are studying their own environments and experiences—whether a rich and colorful tropical environment or an urban landscape—and that their involvement in this work extends over more than several days, ideally several weeks.

Reference

Katz, Lilian G., & Chard, Sylvia C. (2000). Engaging children's minds: The project approach (2nd ed.). Stamford, CT: Ablex.

Gateways to Opportunity Resources on Collaborations in Early Care and Education

A sampling of the research and policy reports and early childhood initiatives related to collaboration in early care and education programs is listed below.

Better Outcomes for All: Promoting Partnerships between Head Start and State Pre-K
http://www.clasp.org/publications/better_outcomes.pdf

Head Start and PreK Collaboration
<http://www.preknow.org/policy/headstart.cfm>

Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map
<http://iecam.crc.uiuc.edu/>

Illinois Early Childhood Collaboration Web Site
<http://www.ilearlychildhoodcollab.org/>

Illinois Early Childhood Program Matrix
<http://ilheadstart.org/birth25table.html>

Illinois State Board of Education: Collaborative Support Teams Initiative
http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/html/collaborative_team.htm

National Head Start Association Position Paper: A Vision for Head Start and State Collaboration
<http://www.nhsa.org/download/research/StateCollaboration.pdf>

Quality in Linking Together Early Education (QUILT) Partnerships Project
<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/quilt/index.html>