

Celebrating 10 Years of SEIT

by Judith S. Bloch

Variety Child Learning Center (VCLC)¹ is a non-profit center located in Syosset, NY, that provides a full array of special programs and services to thousands of children, birth to 8 years of age, along with support services for their families. In 1993, the New York State Education Department issued regulations with a public funding source that added SEIT² (Special Education Itinerant Teacher) to the continuum of special education services. At that time, VCLC established a SEIT program based on a collaborative relationship between the SEIT teacher, parent and nursery school. During the past decade, VCLC has sent our special education teachers to 182 nursery schools, child care and community sites and to children's homes to serve more than 560 preschoolers with disabilities who do not require a center based program. Our SEIT program has proven to be a highly valued experience for the classified preschooler, the other children in the class, classroom teachers, parents and directors.

Today, the issue for educators is not whether to include a preschooler with a disability, but instead, who to include and how to best do the work. How is the teacher to manage an inclusionary class with limited resources, training, or experience? Can an effective curriculum and increased teacher skills transform, or at least modify and improve life in the classroom?

SEIT gives a classified child an opportunity to learn and benefit from placement in a typical setting. Young children learn best through their interactions with people in their natural environment and

exposure to ongoing appropriate activities. The classified child can share experiences with the typical child who is usually more socially competent. Each child's IEP (Individual Education Program) specifies the number of hours the SEIT teacher is present, ranging from 2 to 15 hours or more per week. Additional time is scheduled to meet with the parent, classroom teacher and/or director.

SEIT also promotes the development of the typical children in the class, especially the increasing number of unclassified children with social-emotional and learning problems who are struggling to achieve and maintain the qualities required for age-appropriate behavior. These children, too, may be at risk for later cognitive, social, and behavioral difficulties. They, too, will benefit from the presence of SEIT services when they are provided in a particular way.

SEIT is most effective when the SEIT teacher, the parent and the preschool classroom teacher become collaborators, building a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Ideally, and together, they identify and focus on priorities and functional instructional objectives for the classified child. They blend their efforts, designing interventions to satisfy the classified child's IEP. This collaboration works best when the SEIT teacher sees herself as a guest in the classroom, respects the nursery school's philosophy, and does not presume to be the expert brought in to fix a failing situation. She must control any tendencies to act out the rescue fantasy. Instead, she blends in as another teacher in the classroom, working



within the natural setting as she provides remediation to meet the child's IEP. She is not seen tutoring the classified child in an isolated corner of the classroom, and the child is not missing out because he/she and the itinerant (SEIT) teacher are away for a private lesson. Her interventions are potent because they are, for the most part, embedded within everyday classroom activities.

For the host settings, the SEIT teacher can become a major resource to the nursery school:

- Providing additional time and help that enhances the staff's understanding of young children with disabilities
- Assisting in the creation of activities and an approach that will benefit all of the children
- Helping all students while focusing on the target child
- Designing and modeling specific interventions
- Providing consultation and feedback to the classroom teacher

VCLC's user evaluation questionnaires, distributed to classroom teachers, program directors, parents and SEIT teachers³ ask for their experiences with and comments about the program. The following are some typical responses:

The SEITs have provided good support and encouragement to the children who needed it. They have shown me a variety of techniques to deal with problematic children and how to encourage youngsters to communicate appropriately and in complete sentences. Their involvement with parents was very helpful. ...*Classroom Teacher*

The SEIT teacher is highly professional, and has been a tremendous help to me and my assistant. She gives us ideas and techniques to assist us with the student she comes to see. We are grateful for her insight and knowledge. She does this without making us feel displaced. ...*Classroom Teacher*

The success of the services provided was directly correlated to the way the SEIT teacher integrated herself into our program. The staff felt she was part of their team and the children in the class trusted her as one of their teachers. ...*Nursery School Director*

We worked well together and always made decisions that were in the best inter-

est of the child...We always discussed any suggestions made by either the teacher or myself. If we disagreed, we would usually come up with a compromise. ...*SEIT Teacher*

When SEIT is implemented successfully, it can include and promote the development of the preschooler with a disability within a typical program, help other children in the class, and help the regular education teacher acquire new skills.

VCLC works closely with the early childhood community, providing fall and spring seminar series that train early childhood personnel in Issues of Inclusion. Workshops are given at VCLC with opportunities to observe children in the classrooms. VCLC can provide workshops and/or consultation in your setting. For more information, contact Janice Fried-

man, Director of Research and Training at (516) 921-7171, Ext. 2126 or by email at jfriedman@vclc.org.

Judith S. Bloch is the Founder/CEO of the Variety Child Learning Center

Footnotes

¹ Formerly Variety Pre-Schooler's Workshop, founded in 1966 by Judith S. Bloch

² SEIT means An approved program provided by a certified special education teacher on an itinerant basis in accordance with the regulations of the [State Education Department] commissioner, at a site determined by the board, including but not limited to an approved licensed pre-kindergarten or Head Start program; the child's home; a hospital; a state facility; or a child care location...@ (New York State Consolidated Laws, September 2000, p. 36).

³ In 2002, 62 classroom teachers, 30 program directors, 56 parents and 28 SEIT teachers completed questionnaires.

Children's Program Administrator Credential Award

The Credential Review Panel is very pleased to announce that NYSAEYC has awarded the Children's Program Administrator Credential to the individuals listed below.

Our goal is to continue to improve the quality of life and education for children and their families. By attaining the Children's Program Administrator Credential of New York State, these individuals have moved us all forward in that direction. We wish them every success as they continue in their careers.

Laura Scouris
Marietta, New York

Laura holds an A.S. degree in Human Services, and has been in the early childhood field for 20 years. She is currently the director of Learn As You Grow, Inc., in Solvay, NY.

Mary Rolick
Little Valley, New York

Mary holds a M.S. degree in Education from the State University College at Buffalo, and has been working with children since 1984. She is currently a Private Practice Provider of Speech-Language Pathology and Sign Language in Little Valley.

Michele Holzman
Yonkers, New York

Michele holds a B.S. degree in Early Childhood from Empire State College, and is presently the director of Toddler's Park Head Start/Day Care in Mount Vernon. She has been working in the field of early education for over 20 years.