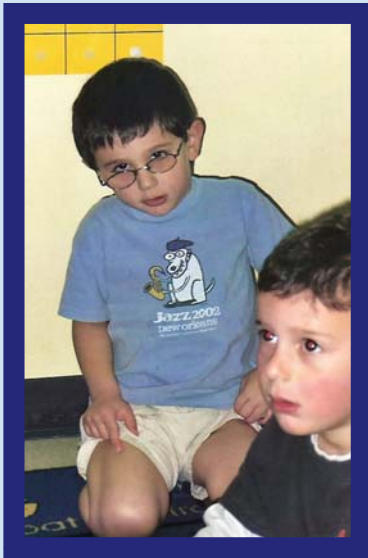


Preschool Teacher Training Pilot Program

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The Daron and Ron Barness Family Foundation



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Council For Jews With Special Needs Preschool Teacher Training Pilot Program

Reasons for Expanding Inclusion Consulting to Preschools

For many years, the Council For Jews With Special Needs employed an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher as an Inclusion Consultant for the fourteen (14) Jewish preschools in metropolitan Phoenix. Synagogue and Jewish Community preschools contacted the Council to request an observation of a child and make recommendations. The Inclusion Consultant typically observed the child on two separate occasions. She then met with the parents to share her observations and provide the teacher with suggestions to help the child. The Inclusion Consultant did not provide an evaluation or diagnosis; parents were directed to see their child's pediatrician for that.

The Council received positive feedback about this service but the teachers rarely followed through with the recommended strategies on a consistent basis. The reason given for this poor follow-up included the teacher's lack of confidence, inability to understand the principles behind the recommended strategies and inadequate administrative and/or staff support in implementing the techniques.

The approach being used was deemed to be ineffective because the Inclusion Consultant did not remain in one place long enough to focus on the specific and general issues in each class and then provide direct training in using valuable techniques. To address this problem, the Council designed a Pilot Project in summer 2005 to see if a different approach would lead to long-term, consistent and more effective teaching methods to manage challenging behaviors in preschool classes. A grant proposal was written requesting \$10,000 to subsidize the increased staff hours. The Daron and Ron Barness Family Foundation in Phoenix, Arizona generously funded the entire grant request.

Preschool Teacher Training Pilot Project Goals

The primary goal of this project was to enhance the preschool experience by giving the teachers the benefit of extended training directly inside their classrooms. The Inclusion Consultant would spend four days each week for up to four weeks per school working directly with the teachers and children. The expectation was that the teachers would learn the teaching strategies better if they saw them applied within their classroom rather than given a brief consultation or a one-time group training that is often more theoretical than practical.

It was anticipated that the primary focus would be on training teachers to employ Positive Reinforcement techniques to build children's self-esteem and to reverse the tendency to focus on "the naughty child" behavior. This would be achieved by showing teachers ways to "catch the child being good" and praising the child, offering more structure for those children who cannot handle a less structured environment, developing visual supports such as schedules, problem solving kits and photo/pictorial cues around the room. In addition, teachers would be given strategies to make circle time a daily opportunity for more "teacher to child" interaction and the expansion of teaching multiple skills within a single setting.

Implementation of the Teacher Training Pilot Project

The Pilot Project consisted of visits to five Jewish community preschools in metropolitan Phoenix during the first year (fall 2005 to spring 2006). During the first few days, the Inclusion Consultant observed the class and discussed the concerns for this particular classroom with the teacher and director. After observation was concluded, the teacher, director and Inclusion Consultant met to discuss recommended strategies. This team determined the timeline and which strategies to implement. The Inclusion Consultant co-taught with the classroom staff for four mornings a week during the four weeks of that preschool's program. (One morning per week was reserved to continue providing "emergency observations" in other Jewish during the year.) The team met formally and informally to discuss progress throughout the stay at each preschool and to make changes as needed. An evaluation was given to the preschool directors at the end of the four week session.

In addition to the classroom intervention, the Inclusion Consultant offered a number of other optional components to the preschool directors. The Inclusion Consultant spoke at staff meetings to explain the purpose of the program and discuss the strategies used in the classroom. The Inclusion Consultant also spoke at parent meetings as part of panel discussions with pediatricians and psychologists.

Challenging behaviors by preschool children were the primary concern of most teachers. Others concerns included environmental set-ups, classroom schedules, circle time activities, transitions and communication between staff members as well as between staff and parents.

Samples of Specific Strategies Most Commonly Implemented

The following are some examples of recommended strategies that were implemented.

Follow Through Procedure: *This should be used generally with all students. The time for processing is especially important for children with language delays or developmental disorders that affect language such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, Learning Disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder.*

1) When any adult directs a child to do something, it should be phrased in the form of a directive and not as a question. All adults need to be consistent and follow through on directives that they give children, whether or not the child tantrums.

Step 1: Adult gains child's attention (as defined by getting down on child's level, eye contact, body orientation, etc.)

Step 2: Adult directs child to do something (e.g. "sit down", "stand up", "clean up", etc.)

Step 3: Wait approximately three seconds for child to process the language you've just used.

Step 4: If child has not followed the directive, repeat steps 1-3 (get child's attention, give the directive, and wait for processing).

Step 5: If child has not followed the directive, the adult must follow through and prompt the child to do what he has been told to do. Prompting can take the form of gentle physical guidance, gestural cues such as pointing or verbal prompts that the child repeats. Prompting should be done in a neutral manner, with a neutral facial expression and tone of voice.

2) The teacher will institute a classroom token system in order to increase teacher attention to positive behavior and decrease teacher attention to challenging behavior. It was observed that students demonstrating challenging behaviors received more teacher attention than students demonstrating positive behaviors.

Token System Procedures: *Token systems are appropriate for any classroom of children ages three years and older. It is particularly helpful in classrooms where there are a few children seeking attention through challenging or disruptive behavior. By putting in place a system that rewards appropriate behavior, the children learn to seek attention without exhibiting challenging behavior.*

- Attention from the teacher is a form a positive reinforcement. The Inclusion Consultant noted that the students were often fighting for the teacher’s attention.
- By giving out tokens for positive behavior, the teacher is giving attention (positively reinforcing) positive behavior. This will cause positive behaviors to increase.
- To decrease challenging behavior, that behavior needs to be ignored as much as possible. If the only way to get the coveted teacher attention is to behave positively, then students will choose to behave in a way that earns teacher attention (as well as tokens).
- They are usually in the form of a large amount of poker chips. The teacher introduces the poker chips as “mitzvah money” to the class. The students are told that when they do a “mitzvah,” they get to put a poker chip into the jar. When the jar is full to a certain point (marked clearly on the jar with marker or tape), the class will earn a special treat (e.g. ice cream party, popcorn party, movie, etc.). The class will then define what constitutes a “mitzvah.”
A mitzvah is defined as:
 - Listening to teachers: following directions immediately, transitioning smoothly between activities, cleaning up, using a quiet voice, keeping hands to self, answering questions during circle, etc.
 - Being a good friend: sharing toys, taking turns, getting a teacher when a friend needs help, students praising other students.

Things to keep in mind:

- When giving out tokens, teachers will hand the student the poker chip and say, “I like the way you ___(behavior)____. You did a mitzvah! You can go put this in the ‘mitzvah money’ jar.”
- Teachers will draw attention to the “mitzvah money” jar at least once a day (it is easiest to do this during the circle routine) to remind the class of their goal (special treat).

- When first implementing the new token system, it is best for the class to earn the special prize rather quickly, perhaps at the end of the first or second school day. The requirement can then be increased so that it takes them longer to earn the special prize.
- It is helpful to think of this as a true contract between teacher and students. The teachers must hold up their end of the bargain and provide the special prize when duly earned as well as remember to constantly give out tokens.
- Teachers should try to give out at least two tokens for every direction they give and/or disciplinary statements they give. For example, every time a teacher says, “stop, don’t do that,” she should find two positive behaviors to praise and reward with tokens. If teacher attention is linked primarily with positive behaviors and challenging behaviors are ignored, then positive behaviors will increase.
- When students are misbehaving and the challenging behavior can be safely ignored, teachers should praise and give tokens to the other students who are behaving positively. The students who are misbehaving will notice that they missed an opportunity to get a token and will change their behavior.

Visual Schedule: *A Visual Schedule is a must for any early childhood classroom. It is especially helpful for children who have difficulty transitioning. It also teaches sequencing, linking pictures to meaning to words and gives children ownership over their day.*

3) The staff should alter the current classroom schedule to become an interactive way for the students to participate in transitions.

- The current schedule will be adapted so that each piece can be added and removed by using Velcro.
- At each transition between activities throughout the day, the teacher will call the students over to “check the schedule.”
- One student will be asked to remove the current activity’s picture from the schedule. The teacher will say, “We are finished with (activity).” The picture of the removed activity will be put in a “finished” or “all done” envelope or bucket placed near the schedule.
- The teacher will then ask the student to indicate the next activity on the schedule, e.g., “We are finished with (activity). Now its time for (activity),” while pointing at the activities with the student filling in the blanks.
- The teacher will then direct the children to transition to the next activity (e.g., line up to go outside, sit at the tables for snack, sit on the carpet for circle, etc.)
- This method will be repeated for every activity transition throughout the day.



- **Schedule modifications:** It is important for classroom management to regulate the children's energy level. One way to do this is to alternate activities that are sedentary (which require focus and attention to a person or task) with active, unstructured free-play times inside or outside.

The teacher who is featured in the photo devised another use for the schedule. At the end of the day before children go home or go to aftercare, the class stands around the blank schedule and the teacher puts up the day's cards. The class reviews together what happened that day. This activity reinforces the development of memory and helps children understand the concepts of "past, present and future".

Sign in/Sign out System: *This system places structure on "free play," an otherwise unstructured part of the day. It is not necessary for every classroom to institute this system. It is most beneficial in classrooms that are small and crowded. If a teacher finds that the children are all attracted to one area of the room during free play, and the large number of children in a small area causes fighting over toys, this system is extremely helpful.*

4) Free play will be structured in a visual way. Each play area of the classroom accommodates only a certain number of children at one time. Therefore, limits must be imposed. Children will "sign in" in some way to each area and "sign out" when they leave. To encourage certain children play in less preferred areas and facilitate social interaction, those children may be scheduled for (directed to) those areas.

Examples of "Sign in/out" systems:

- Each play area will have a big (8 ½ x 11) label. Attached to the side of the label will be a certain number of clothespins (each area will have a different color clothespin). When children enter an area, they will clip the clothespin on their shirt and replace it on the area label when they leave.
- Photos will be taken of the children's faces. The faces on the photos will be cut out and laminated and have Velcro attached to the back. Each play area will have a big (8 ½ x 11) label with a certain number of pieces of Velcro on it. At the beginning of free play, children will get their photo with velcro on the back and place it on the label of the area in which they want to play. When they leave the area, they take their laminated photo with them and attach it to the label of the next play area. Each area can have a sign in sheet or white board. When the child leaves, they either cross off their name or erase it from the white board.





The teacher who implemented this strategy has used it in some creative ways. When it is time to clean up at the end of free play, she invites all of the children to come sit in the circle time area. The teacher then takes the “faces” and randomly places them in different areas. The children then find their “face” and clean just that area. If the teachers discover someone has not been doing their part to clean up, the children are called back to circle time area and the child who has done his job has to clean up by him or herself. When the classroom created a quiet reading space with only a single chair, they included a sign up sheet that is limited to only one child’s face.

Feedback from Preschools on Preschool Teacher Training Pilot Project

The majority of the preschool directors and teachers felt they benefited from the Pilot Project. The teachers saw changes in the children’s behavior and became comfortable using the strategies independently. They had time over four weeks to observe the Inclusion Consultant model the strategies, ask questions about those strategies, learn the theory behind the strategies and practice using them. Parents of children in those classes also communicated their satisfaction with the program.

It is essential that the preschool director be part of the team in order to observe and be fully aware of what is happening in the classroom during the program. This emphasis on communication will help future programs be successful in individualizing to what each classroom and preschool needs. The teachers need to have “buy in” and desire to receive training in the form of co-teaching. Without the teacher’s commitment to make changes, the program will not be successful.

The preschools have requested additional trainings before the new school year starts on the strategies that were implemented during the program. With those early trainings, the teachers would be able to use the behavioral strategies from the onset and have balanced schedules, visual cues and a beneficial environmental set-up before the children even walk in the door.

As expected in any new program, there were challenges along the way. It quickly became clear that the Inclusion Consultant needed to attend a staff meeting before or at the very beginning of the four week period to introduce herself, explain how the program was going to work and the necessity of getting permission to observe specific children in their classes (sample “Permission to Observe Form” attached). In addition, parents must be informed in a letter before the Inclusion Consultant begins so that the parents are aware of her presence and influence on the classroom.

Positive Aspects of the Program

- Those preschools that welcomed the project quickly became acquainted with the new Inclusion Consultant and made an effort to learn new strategies and classroom systems.
- Children in the preschools that needed individualized attention were seen quickly after parents signed permission to observe consent forms.
- Teachers “generalized” the beneficial strategies through replication in classrooms outside the target classroom, including the preschool’s aftercare program.
- In one classroom where one of the teachers left after the program ended, the remaining teacher trained the new staff in the strategies used in the program.
- Preschool staff reported that they felt comfortable trying these strategies in summer camp classes, and brought the Inclusion Consultant in to discuss strategies at the staff meeting before camp started.
- Preschools felt more comfortable with and prepared to accept children with disabilities into their summer camps.

Recommended Modifications to the Program

- This program is best suited for classrooms that serve children 3 years old and above. The strategies are not age-appropriate for younger children, and many parents of younger children are uncomfortable with placing structure in younger classrooms.
- The introduction of this project should be offered to preschools in the beginning of the school year but no later than mid-March. Making any significant changes in a classroom any later in the school year provides very little benefit and may confuse the children and staff.
- Parents of preschool children need to fully understand why they are seeing changes in the classroom and in the teacher’s interaction with the children. A parent education component should be designed to precede the project’s introduction into the classroom.

Conclusion

Offering this kind of long-term, focused training in individual classrooms benefited the staff and children at the preschools that were open to making substantive changes. The success of the project requires an Inclusion Consultant who has a background in Early Childhood and Special Education as well as experience in classrooms that include children with special needs. All parties involved (preschool administrators, teaching staff, classroom assistants, and parents) must be willing to try new approaches to providing programs for preschool children. If those criteria are met, this project offers exciting new opportunities for addressing the unique needs of young children.

Remarks From Participating Preschool Staff

“Fabulous ideas, very easy to implement...looking forward to continuing in other classes.”

“The Inclusion Consultant helped with a class divided between typical and diagnosed kids with our new schedule. It is working beautifully.”

“It’s amazing how the visual aids help in the process.”

“Overall this has been the single most effective program implemented in all my years of education. We are so thankful for the Council and its resources.”

“Our children are moving more easily from task to task and are recognizing times of transition better.”

“I have already seen a big difference in behavior with a few children for making small behavior and speech modifications on my part.”

“Her constructive ideas have led to happier children and less stress in the classroom. Thank you!”

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For more information on this project, contact Becca Hornstein, Executive Director, Council For Jews With Special Needs at Becca@cjsn.org or (480) 629-5343