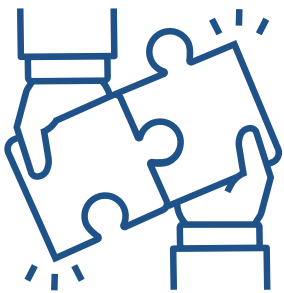




Building Collaboration in Early Childhood Teacher and Paraprofessional Relationships

In many early childhood classrooms, teachers and assistant teachers and/or paraprofessionals must strive to build a collaborative relationship. This is not always an easy task. Relationships in the classroom setting work best when there is trust and mutual understanding of a shared goal. In this case the goal is to ensure that all children have the support and resources for a successful educational journey.



What is collaboration?

As educators we all feel we collaborate, by talking with colleagues or sending correspondence home to families. However, the definition of collaboration from Friend and Cook, 1992, "Interpersonal collaboration is a style of direct interaction between **at least two co-equal parties**, voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5), requiring educators to address equality, understanding of a goal, and reaching decisions together.

This type of collaboration may be challenging in early childhood education settings when they are "Lead Teachers" and "Assistant Teachers" and how to share the tasks in the classroom environment. The teacher and paraprofessional relationship impact the child in your care. It is important that the building blocks of successful collaboration are seen in your classroom. The key is to build on the strengths of each educator.

Get to know each other

- Create a teacher partner inventory that addresses skill sets, teaching styles experiences, how you handle discipline.
- Find time throughout the day, week, or evening to discuss classroom goals.
- Find time to debrief on student goals and student challenges.
- Find time to have open and honest conversation and reflections.

Use equitable phrases such as

- We are a team.
- We plan together.
- We share ideas together.
- We reflect on the day, week, or month of student learning activities together.



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Find time before or after the day to

- Debrief on the successes or challenges of the day.
- Jointly plan a new lesson or mini lesson together.
- Share ideas on curriculum, students, roles or policies.
- Clarify any uncertainties that may arise between teacher partners.

Set expectations about classroom discipline

- Create a plan to jointly handle challenging behaviors.
- Develop a clear understanding of student behaviors.
- Determine how to address differences in discipline techniques.
- Determine which educator will contact caregivers when concerns arise.

Remember collaboration is based on the following characteristics:

- ✓ It is voluntary.
- ✓ It is based on parity.
- ✓ It requires a shared goal.
- ✓ It includes shared responsibility for key decisions.
- ✓ It includes shared accountability for outcomes.

It is important to understand that all co-teaching and collaborative relationships take time to evolve, and nurturing them requires self-reflection, and constant communication. Children thrive in environments where all educators have shared the goal of creating warm, and nurturing environments—this starts with educators who understand the value of collaborative relationships.

AUTHOR

Brandy James, PhD
Director, Community Outreach and Education
UArizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities

CONTACT

Brandy James
bjames2@arizona.edu