

## Voices from the Field: Ruth Gallucci



### Q1: Why is it important that general early childhood teachers are full members of children's teams?

As states and school districts support an increasing number of young children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood programs, it is critical to include the general early childhood teachers as full members of the education teams. As children learn best when instruction is distributed throughout the school day and as the general early childhood teacher frequently spends considerable time with the child, it is important that he or she participate fully in all educational discussions. Through a collaborative process, the special educator, family and general early childhood teacher are able to work together to plan ways to address Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and identify specific practices that allow the child to fully participate in all aspects of the general early childhood curriculum. It is only through this planned and thoughtful collaboration that the general early childhood teacher is able to embed instructional practices within the everyday classroom activities and routines.

### Q2: What practices facilitate collaboration between the special educators, family, and general early childhood teacher?

A positive relationship begins by recognizing individual expertise and sharing a mutual respect. Frequently the special educator has knowledge regarding specific disabilities and promising interventions, the general early childhood teacher has a solid understanding of child development and the classroom curriculum and the family knows their child the best. Beginning with a conversation which allows all parties to express their mutual respect and acknowledge each other's strengths and expertise is a critical first step.

Once this initial discussion has taken place, it is important to ensure that everyone is clear about their individual role as related to supporting the individual child. It is not uncommon for a general educator to feel alone and unprepared to support a child with more significant needs. It is therefore important that the special educator is clear about her role relative to identifying the interventions, supporting the general educator in the implementation and in monitoring progress. Likewise, it is important that the general educator recognize her role in partnering with the special educator to identify appropriate opportunities to embed the interventions and in carrying out the instruction throughout the week.

These roles may seem quite foreign to both educators so initially there may need to be an open acceptance of the new roles and possibly a "role release" with former job responsibilities or beliefs. Finally, it is imperative that the two educators and the family plan for routine and scheduled meetings to ensure ongoing collaboration. Such

meetings allow an opportunity for the general early childhood teacher, the special educator, and the family to determine together the necessary environmental modifications, potential IEP goals and interventions, how and when the interventions can be embedded into the everyday routines, and the progress monitoring strategies. These collaborative

meetings can occur at any interval deemed appropriate for the individual needs of the child. It is important that they are identified in the child's IEP, ensuring that they are adhered to and valued as much as the direct instruction provided by the special educator. It is only through strong collaboration that young children are able to reach the early learning milestones that are so important to their continued and ongoing success in school and beyond!