

A Message from the Editor

Meredith Lewis, Editor
Center for UPK

Universal Pre-K at Bank Street

Consider for a moment the word, "universal." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "universal" is defined as "including or covering all or a whole collectively or distributively without limit or exception." In New York City, we have adopted this word to represent our

approach to Universal Pre-K. We work with more and more children each year, engaging them in this "universal" ideology for a pre-kinder-



garten experience. Now, in our fifth year of implementation, we have 42,876 children enrolled in local community-based organizations, Head Start Centers, public school programs, and with day care providers, where they all receive the daily benefits of high quality, developmentally appropriate instruction, thereby paving a road to school readiness through UPK.

Now, please look at the word, "universal" through a different lens, and consider what this term means within the classroom setting. Here, it has a different connotation: we are discussing access to equal opportunities within the children's daily learning environment—all children, engaged in experiences that enrich their discoveries and encourage active learning, regardless of individual levels of ability.

More than ever, it is essential that we continue to work together with a common voice as the economic downturn threatens to stifle the growth of Universal Pre-K, and prevent it from becoming truly universal, available without limit or exception to all children. Children only know what we give them. If we do not provide them with opportunity, we limit their ability.

In this issue, we will focus on working with children with special needs. People from the field share strategies for adapting the classroom environment to meet these needs, information for understanding the referral process for children with suspected special needs, and resources for teachers and families. I hope you will be able to use some of the ideas in this issue to enhance the Universal Pre-K experience for all children.

Meredith



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From the Center for Universal Pre-K Director's Desk

María Beneján, Director
Center for UPK

Recent reports show that nationally less than 2% of children receive early intervention services during their first three years of life, and less than 5% during the preschool years. However, 5.5 million children are identified as having a disability that interferes with their ability to learn in school and that requires special education services. I've been told that peak enrollment of children to receive such special education services occurs around the age of 10. This is why this issue of *NewsFlash* is devoted to bringing you information on working with children with special needs. We need to be concerned about the development and well being of ALL children. Every child must be viewed as an individual with his or her unique styles of learning and developmental growth.

Enrollment in a preschool program is a wonderful learning opportunity for all stakeholders: adults, children with special needs, and children with typical needs. Concerns about a child's growth and development often surface for the first time in preschool. Therefore, preschool teachers need to be able to identify and articulate concerns, partner with parents to gather more information, and figure out the next steps for the child with special needs and his or her family, while continuing to work with the child in the classroom. Yet, many of the teachers I work with express uncertainty about their ability to do this. This is why I am so glad and appreciative that Meredith Lewis, our editor, is focusing on this area.

It is my hope that this edition of *NewsFlash* will give you the information and support you need—whether you are a teacher, administrator, or parent—to provide more positive experiences for yourselves and for the children you work and/or live with.

All my warmest wishes to you for a wonderful new year!

Remember: our children are our future.



Upcoming events

February 10

*Bank Street College Early
Childhood Teacher Award
applications due (Post-marked
NO LATER THAN this date)*

March 27—30

*New York State AEYC
Conference, Saratoga
Springs, New York
www.naeyc.org*

April 6—12

Week of the Young Child

April 13—16

*Association for Children
Education International
(ACEI) Annual Conference,
Bridging the Gap: Educating
Hearts and Minds of Our
Future, Phoenix, AZ*

May 13—16

*World Forum on Early Care
and Education, Acapulco,
Mexico, organized by Child
Care Information Exchange*

June 15—18

*Twelfth Annual National
Institute for Early Childhood
Professional Development,
Portland, Oregon*

The Center for Universal Pre-K at Bank Street College of Education

The Mission of Bank Street's Center for Universal Pre-Kindergarten is to help early care and education programs strengthen their services to young children and their families. We provide a variety of services and resources at *NO* cost, for teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, policy makers, advocacy groups and researchers that promote quality Universal Pre-K programming.

Early Childhood Mentoring Program

The Early Childhood Mentoring Program offers experienced early childhood teachers the opportunity to become trained mentors and pass on their expertise and guidance to beginning teachers. For more information, contact Tracey-Lee Lucas, 212.961.3411 or tldlucas@bnkst.edu

Universal Pre-K Fellows Program

The Universal Pre-K Fellows Program is a short-format, one-credit professional development program that strives to strengthen teachers' and assistant teachers' understanding of developmentally appropriate practice through monthly seminars, mentoring, networking, resources and career development. For more information, contact Meredith Lewis, 212.961.3412 or mlewis@bnkst.edu

Quality New York

Quality New York provides support to more than 40 early childhood programs throughout New York City that are seeking accreditation through NAEYC. This program is a collaboration with Bank Street College's Center for UPK, Child Care, Inc. and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. If you would like more information about the Quality New York accreditation facilitation project, or about the process itself, please contact Wanda Frankel, Associate Director for the Center for UPK at 212.961.3413 or wfrankel@bnkst.edu

Community of Learners Project

The Community of Learners Project brings together Bank Street College and Community School District 10 in the Bronx to provide professional development services to Universal Pre-K programs. For more information, contact Leslie Jimpson, 212.961.3421 or ljimpson@bnkst.edu

Individualized training and technical assistance for programs

The Center for Universal Pre-K works with individual preschool programs, by contract, throughout New York City to provide specialized professional development workshops and targeted on-site support. For more information, contact María Beneján, 212.961.3410 or mbenejan@bnkst.edu.

A Sensory Child in UPK

Rukaiya Rahim, Teacher,
Williamsburg Northside Preschool

In my Universal Pre-Kindergarten class, I am presented with a diverse group of children, one-third of whom have special needs. One of my students, Jane, is a sensory child who loves playing with latex gloves and sand, and applying substances such as glue, paint and soap all over her hands, arms and lips. She seems to require this extra sensory input to be involved. Although Jane receives occupational therapy for her sensory needs, she has an extremely hard time keeping her hands to herself. As a result, she is constantly hitting the other children by poking them in the stomach or pinching them on the arm.

Collaborating with Jane's occupational therapist helped me to deal with Jane's behavior. The therapist recommended that Jane be given an item of her interest to hold throughout the day. This item would provide her with the sensory input she needed. When I discussed this with Jane, she chose to hold a sand-filled glove. Occasionally, we fill the glove with water instead.

I have also implemented a behavior plan for Jane that is used during center time and movement time, as these are the periods in the day when she begins to hit the other children. I reinforce Jane with a drop of lotion in her hand for every five minutes that she is able to keep her hands to herself. The behavior plan, coupled with the use of the sand-filled glove, has really been working well with Jane. She is keeping her hands busy and is much more productive during her day. ●

Proactive Management: The Key to Calm Environments

Lisa Kontente, Coordinator of Curriculum,
Herbert G. Birch Services

Early childhood providers have the challenge of establishing a fun, stimulating and ‘managed’ environment. Those working in an integrated environment have the additional challenge of affording those same learning opportunities while meeting the varied needs of each child in the classroom. While every child’s needs are important and must be attended to, those children who arrive with delays or disabilities may present additional management issues due to feelings of frustration and/or limited communication skills.

If you find yourself experiencing frustration, anger, confusion or anxiety, consider this as a ‘gift’ from your children. Often, you are sensing the emotions that they themselves may be experiencing at that very same moment. Tuning in to your emotions is one way of understanding how some children with limited language may feel. It is the task of the early childhood provider to adapt the classroom environment to meet the needs of all the children. Establishing a proactive classroom will, in effect, promote a calm environment.

Here are some key elements to look for within your classroom setting:

Key Elements of the Classroom

- All classroom staff have a clear understanding of the varied developmental ages of each child.
- Classroom expectations are fair and reasonable. They correspond with both the chronological and developmental ages of all the children.
- There is a predictable daily routine that is clear to all the children. Any changes in the routine are communicated in advance.
- There is a daily picture schedule posted at the children’s eye level that is referred to throughout the day.
- Classroom rules are established with the children and are written down using positive terminology.
- Children have opportunities to make choices throughout the day and their learning opportunities are stimulating, novel and engaging. Learning centers are defined and labeled. Learning materials are accessible and developmentally appropriate.
- Communication is relayed via various cues to meet the cognitive levels of all the children in the classroom. This may include visual cues, such as photographs, and verbal cues, such as songs.

- Transitions are predictable and established to meet the needs of each child.
- Educators communicate with guardians on a regular basis to better understand the needs of each child within the classroom.

It is important to remember that ‘managed’ does not mean ‘controlled.’ Children will also take part in the management of the classroom environment. Through building on ‘all’ children’s strengths, allowing children to model and problem solve, and establishing clear predictable expectations, even the most challenging experiences will seem more manageable. The ‘gift’ you give back is a sense of safety, security, warmth and growth. ●

Educational Assessment

Linda Scheer, Early Childhood Consultant,
Quality Improvement Center for Disabilities

The first priority in a quality early childhood program is to gather information on all the children in order to determine each one’s unique needs. To plan activities that reflect the strengths and needs of each child, teachers need to conduct on-going educational assessments. A number of tools designed to help them do this (such as the High/Scope CAR and COR, and Meisel’s Portfolio Assessment) aid the teacher in looking at growth areas to be considered when planning both group and individual activities for children. These tools often identify individual, progressive skills that can be observed (e.g. walking up/down stairs alternating feet, identifying letters/numbers, following directions, demonstrating a sense of time, space, cause/effect, various self-help skills, etc.) What distinguishes these instruments from other assessment tools is that they are not designed to be scored, nor are they standardized; thus, the results cannot be compared with the scores of a population of similar children. They cannot be used to determine the need for referral or diagnosis, rather, each child is measured against him/herself as growth and progress are recorded.

Glossary of Special Education Terms

Assessment. Systematic method of obtaining information from tests or other sources; procedures used to determine child's eligibility, identify the child's strengths and challenges, and the services the child requires to meet these needs.

Consent. Requirement that the parent(s) be fully apprised of all information relating to any action the school wants to take regarding the child, and that the parent(s) understand that consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time.

Delay. Development that does not occur within expected time ranges.

Disability. Defined as physical, sensory, cognitive or affective impairment that substantially affects one or more major life activities and causes the student to need special education.

Early Intervention (EI). Special education and related services provided to children under the age of five.

Inclusion. (Sometimes referred to as Integrated.) Educating children with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities, often in a regular classroom in their neighborhood school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment" possible.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A landmark 1975 federal law, originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. In exchange for federal money, schools must guarantee that all children with disabilities receive a "free appropriate public education." The law covers children from birth to age 21.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). A plan that outlines the individual goals and services for the pre-school or school-age child who receives special education.

Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). A plan that outlines the services to be delivered to families of infants and toddlers receiving special services.

Learning Disabilities. Encompasses a wide variety of learning difficulties; the criteria for the label varies from state to state. In general, a learning disability describes a discrepancy between a child's intelligence and academic achievement. Some children have learning disabilities only in specific areas, such as reading or math.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A term that refers to the spectrum of educational placement options for children with special needs. The law requires that children with special needs be placed in an educational setting that is most like a regular education setting and can still support the child's diverse set of needs, to the maximum extent possible.

Mainstreaming. Practice of placing children with special needs in regular classrooms for at least a part of the children's educational program. See also: Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion.

Referral. Notice to a school district that a child may be in need of special education. Referrals should be written.

Related Services. Services that are necessary for child to benefit from special education; includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, early identification and assessment, counseling, rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, school health services, social work services, parent counseling and training.

Special Education. Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

"Special Education" as a Part of Early Care and Education

Nina Lublin, Early Childhood Program Director,
Resources for Children with Special Needs

A Brief History

The past 35 years of research and practice in special education and early childhood education has taught us many lessons and given us many gifts. We have developed key insights into topics such as how young children learn; how the relationships between young children and their caregivers affect their development; how to prepare professionals to work with children of all abilities; and how to include children with disabilities and their families in all aspects of community life. Additionally, the revolution in the care of newborns, infants and toddlers at risk has opened new doors for concerned families.

The research and practice that began with the Handicapped Children's Early Education Act (in the late 60's) and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975), continues today through the Early Intervention and preschool special education projects funded through the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. (Note: *Zero to Three* and *Young Exceptional Children* are just two of the many journals and publications that keep up with current findings, trends and happenings.) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are two of several federal laws that guarantee young children with disabilities the right to educational opportunities that meet their unique needs. These include (1) referral; (2) early identification of disabilities and

special needs; (3) direct intervention and educational programs and services for young children who are eligible; and (4) access to community-based programs and services, as well as many additional services and supports for their families and the professionals who work with them. Between the federal laws and the years of research and practice, professionals working with very young children and their families now enjoy a wealth of national and local information, programs, services and access to "experts."

Referral Process

For teachers and other early care and early education professionals, there are many people, resources, services and supports to turn to whenever we suspect or know that a child has disabilities or special needs. If parents or professionals have concerns about a young child and want those concerns confirmed or ruled out, referrals for evaluations can be made to: (1) New York City's Early Intervention (EI) Program (for newborns, infants and toddlers under 3 years old), or (2) the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) of the NYC Department of Education in the family's school district (for children three to five years old). Parents can choose from nearly 200 NY State Health Department- and/or Education Department-approved, NYC-contracted evaluation sites for a free evaluation to determine whether a child is eligible to receive services.

Intervention

If a child is eligible for either Early Intervention or preschool special education services, an Individual Family Service Plan/IFSP (for Early Intervention services) or an Individualized Education Program/IEP (for preschool special education services) is written with the parent. Services can then be provided in a variety of settings such as child care programs, Head Start, nursery school programs, Superstart or Superstart Plus or Universal Pre-k programs operated by the Department of Education or local community-based programs. Over the past years, young children with disabilities and other special needs, along with their caregivers and teachers, have benefited greatly when their Early Intervention or preschool special education services have been provided at the community-based early care and education program.

Additional direct services for young children with disabilities and their families are available through state and local organizations, as well as privately, for parents who choose not to go through Early Intervention or the CPSE. ●

Our Changing Classroom

Phyllis Gresen, Director of Pre-School and Child Care Services,
Samuel Field YM&YWHA

In our Universal Pre-K environment, teachers are able to address the special needs of individual children. Activities and materials used are designed to meet the needs of many children, with or without disabilities. When they do not meet a child's specific needs, they can be adapted or expanded to do so.

In the learning centers at Samuel Field YM&YWCA, teachers modify areas based on their observations of children's interests and needs, to ensure that all children are able to actively participate. One way to encourage a setting that allows for child selection is to create a special area for the children during choice time.

Children who need assistance with *fine muscle coordination* are encouraged to do lacing cards, stringing beads and to work with clay. Writing activities are promoted, which will also strengthen fine motor skills.

The dramatic play area can be turned into a restaurant with writing materials. The children take orders from "customers" and write down their requests. Stores can also be set up. The children "purchase" items and use play money to enhance this experience.

An obstacle course can be set up to enhance *gross motor skills*. Children jump, run, hop and use equipment to develop their coordination (such as hoops, tunnels, balls, balance beams and large blocks). Large cartons are used for imaginative play, and are turned into caves, houses, boats or fire engines. Our children share experiences and begin to develop language as they play and learn.

Children who would benefit from developing *socialization skills* learn to interact with others by engaging in activities with their peers in the restaurant or by participating in imaginative play. Other tasks such as counting, writing, and using language reinforce cognition and develop initiative.

All of these experiences promote self-esteem. "I can do it!" and "Look at me!" can be heard from the children as they work

and play. We provide the environment for children's special needs so that each child can meet with success. Our changing classroom is stimulating and challenging for all children! ●

universal pre-k newsflash

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UPK NewsFlash is distributed to UPK programs and staff, policy-makers, foundations, higher education faculty, advocacy groups, and the early childhood educational community.

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Nina's Picks

Nina Lublin, Early Childhood Program Director,
Resources for Children with Special Needs
www.resourcesnyc.com

A variety of resources exist for parents of young children with special needs and disabilities:

- **Early Childhood Direction Centers (ECDC)**
Manhattan Regional Office—212-746-6175
Provides information and referral to parents of children ages birth to five regarding Early Intervention, preschool special education, and other services and support.
- **Parent Training and Information Centers (PTI)**
 1. **Advocates for Children of NY—212-947-9779**
 2. **Resources for Children with Special Needs 212-677-4650**
 3. **Sinergia—212-496-1300**Provides information and referral, training and advocacy to parents of children ages birth to 21 with disabilities, as well as to professionals who work with them.
- **Parent-to-Parent of NYS**
1-800-405-8818
Provides information for parents of children with special needs and disabilities, as well as links to other parents.
- **NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD)**
Manhattan Regional Office—212-229-3132/3135
Provides family support services and some direct services to children with a variety of special needs and conditions.
- **The Mental Health Association of New York City**
212-254-0333
Provides parents and professionals access to services and support for children experiencing emotional and/or behavioral challenges.
- **Zero to Three/National Center for Infants, Toddlers & Families**
202-638-1144 or www.zerotothree.org
The premier research and practice organization in the United States focusing on healthy emotional, social and physical development for all very young children and their families.
- **Division for Early Childhood/Council for Exceptional Children —www.dec-sped.org**
The national organization for early childhood special education research and practice.

Many Thanks

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