

A CONVERSATION ABOUT COLLABORATION



A conversation featuring Barbara J. Smith, Mary Louise Hemmeter, and Lise Fox discussing the collaborative efforts of the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) and the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL).

Lise Fox: I want to reflect on where we were when we started and this almost startling, amazing place where we are now.

**Bringing Two
National
Centers
Together**

Barbara Smith: We forget now, eight years down the road, how unique it was to bring two national centers together from the get go. And we realized, from the beginning, that to do that meant that we would be sharing resources, sharing ideas, but we would be able to reach all kids, all programs, all stake holder groups.

Mary Louise Hemmeter: All service deliveries.

BS: All service delivery. It was the efficient and smart way to go.

LF: It's remarkable in the scheme of federally funded projects or centers. They were even almost baffled by the notion of us collaborating, and you know, and the power of that collaboration.

**Evidence-
Based
Practice**

BS: And we also knew that at the local level one of the biggest problems at the time, and probably still is, is all the different messages that people hear. Depending on where they've been trained, depending on who funds them, where they are in a certain region of the country, they get a different message about what they should be doing around kids' social emotional development and challenging behavior. And we wanted to say, "No, there's a set amount of evidence-based practice of what we know works." And we brought that together and shared the conceptual framework. We agreed on the practices. We agreed in the process of what we would consider works.

ML: What we heard from the very beginning from people was, "This makes sense to me. This is a way to pull together the things I've always known about children." And it wasn't new, but it was a new way of thinking. It organized it for people, and people really, I think, latched onto the model.

**National
Partners**

BS: Bringing on the partners early on, the national associations. You know, part of the thought of that was we all had been involved in projects that would come and go, and all of our good work, and all of our passion, and all of our excitement just went away. And we all thought associations will live on, and they can continue and sustain some of our work and our ideas.

ML: And we knew they were better situated to tell us what their members needed than we could do on our own. I think that was huge.

LF: But the very cool thing is then when we get them together, they had never met together.

BS: They had never been in the same room.

LF: They hadn't had this discussion together, and yet each one of them had this captive, really critical stakeholder audience.

BS: And recognized the need that challenging behavior and social emotional development was one of the top priorities of their members.

ML: And I think it's had the effect of our partners actually integrating the work we do into the work that they're doing. So, not only have they advised us and helped us do our work better, but we see them doing initiatives that are building on the work that we've done with them.

**State
Partners**

LF: So, then when we go in to work in states, you know that collaboration we've seen on this federal level, this really big picture level, is replicated in each of the states. So, they have it—their state team, their state level, "How do we roll this out and bring it?" They're thinking about bringing it to all children. And so if you bring it to all children then you have Head Start at the table, you have early childhood special ed. at the table, you have mental health at the table, you have public health at the table. You have everyone there, and our states then reflect that. It's just really amazing to see them struggle with that and then pull it together and be successful.

BS: I think that it's fair to say that all the states that we're in, that I know of, plan to sustain. This is their effort. They own this. And I think that our model of working with them, from the state level, from coaches and trainers to the demonstration sites, collecting data, seeing that things are working has really helped with that. But they are really planning to sustain this effort, and it's cross sector. It's cross discipline. We have walked that talk. We have helped with that. And now we have, in one state, Colorado, has funded across agencies a center to sustain this work. So, it's literally theirs. It's funded by state funds, and it's across three programs.

**Local
Partners**

ML: And what's interesting is at the local level people are doing this. So, out in programs, when we start to bring people on board they've got Head Start, childcare and pre-K all working together, because they have to in their communities. They're still struggling with it, but they're doing it. I think that's been a lesson for all of us.

LF: So, the other interesting thing I've seen in states: everyone is working very hard to use data and systems of accountability, so that we all work smarter with limited resources. And so, because we come at this from a database framework, they immediately see how it pieces together, and they're taking what they're learning about social emotional development and behavior and integrating that into their state systems. And it just flows. And they're really smart about it, because of the work that they've done around the Pyramid Model.

**Getting the
Message Out
to Everyone**

LF: Another thing that we should reflect on that I think is really unique to our center and makes me really proud to be a part of it is that we have an ethic about getting it out there to everyone. We get it out there. It's free, or at cost. And so, we have the leading researchers in behavior or behavior intervention involved. No one's sitting on their work, waiting to publish it. Nobody's saying, "Let's not put it out there, because it needs to be a peer-reviewed publication." They are committed to put what we know, what we know will make a difference, out on the street so we can best support children and their families.

**Knowledge to
Practice**

BS: And we have partners of other centers and national associations helping us get that information out. I mean, it's really...it's really one of the highlights of my career, anyways, to be able to bridge that knowledge generation gap to practice.

ML: And it's so exciting to see people so behind an initiative, and they're making it their own. And we're hearing this from Head Start, teachers, we're hearing it from childcare providers, we're hearing it from mental health consultants, we're hearing it from preschool special ed. teachers, and it's working. It's working for them, it's working for the children they work with, they're committed to it, they're working hard to see that they're doing it with fidelity. It's just really exciting.

LF: A meeting stands out in my mind. I remember presenting to a children's board. It was a Governor's appointed board, and people were listening to us talk about the model. And after the meeting, you know those are always kind of scary, you're talking about political people who have money and control things. And folks came up and said, "This is remarkable. We want this. How do we do this at our community?" It just captures people's attention so quickly. And in that community they have funded a community-wide effort to get program wide adoption, and we have a childcare program, just a mom and pop childcare program, at two sites, and they are like, "We are so invested in this."

BS: So, it kind of takes us back to eight years ago when Head Start and childcare got together to fund CSEFEL, which was quite unique that within one department across two programs decided to come together and fund a program together. And then the Department of Ed, the Office of Special Ed Programs, funded a similar center to address the needs of children with disabilities or at risk of disabilities, and then we brought them together.

**Transforming
Through
Collaboration**

BS: I can't think of two national centers, particularly being funded out of two different federal departments that ever came together from the very beginning. You know, I was looking at a model of collaboration that sorted on a scale of one to five recently, and we are at the five. The five is like transformation. It's choosing to continue beyond an original point in time and transforming what you do through collaboration, and that's what these two centers have done. These two centers now seem like one.

ML: Yes, and to me, the question now is, “We’ve figured this out. We’ve got this model that’s working. We’ve got this model that people have bought into. How can we make sure this is available to all programs? How can we help all families access these materials? How can we keep the momentum going that we’ve built over these last eight years?”

Credits

Featuring

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For More Information:

TACSEI: www.challengingbehavior.org

CSEFEL: www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel