Teacher Spotlight: Emily Pedersen, Corvallis School District, Oregon

We're honored to feature Emily Pedersen, first-grade teacher and district SIPPS trainer for Corvallis School District, in Corvallis, Oregon.

In this spotlight, Emily explains how she served on her district’s curriculum adoption committee and piloted Collaborative Literacy and SIPPS. She is currently implementing Collaborative Literacy, SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words), and Caring School Community.

Tell us a little about yourself, your school/district, and the students that you serve.

My name is Emily Pedersen, or Miss Pedersen to my students. I am in my eighth year teaching at Jaguar Elementary School in Corvallis, Oregon. I taught first grade for six years and second grade for one. This year, I will be part-time in the classroom with first grade and part-time supporting our district with SIPPS implementation.

I grew up not far from where I teach and was lucky enough to student-teach at my current school while attending Western Oregon University. I graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education with an ESOL endorsement. I graduated in 2018 from Portland State University with a Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a Reading Endorsement.

What is the most rewarding part of being an educator for you?

I am honored to work at our district’s Life Skills school. Students of all different abilities are included in our general education classroom while getting the necessary support from our amazing Life Skills teachers. I feel so rewarded and fortunate to watch students become inclusive and compassionate individuals who respect diversity.

Collaborative Classroom curricula allow all students to take part in our lessons and create patient, compassionate thinking partners. Our inclusive practices give me the opportunity to adapt curricula to meet the needs of students while watching them blossom and grow. I LOVE that lightbulb moment when students’ eyes spark with confidence and they begin to take more risks and responsibility for their learning.

How long have you been implementing Collaborative Literacy, SIPPS, and Caring School Community? Tell us a little about your implementation.
I was part of our district curriculum adoption committee in 2017, and I spent half the year piloting Collaborative Literacy and SIPPS. I fully implemented it in 2018 in my first-grade classroom.

In 2018, when [the second edition of] Caring Schools Community was released, I purchased it for my classroom. After using it for the year, our district implemented it across all schools. This will be my fourth year fully implementing it.

What do you appreciate about all or one of the following programs: Collaborative Literacy, SIPPS, and Caring School Community?

I love that they make you a better teacher. While the programs are meant for students, Collaborative Classroom has done a phenomenal job of also teaching teachers along the way.

I also love the student-to-student talk implemented into each lesson. This has allowed so much more student talk in my classroom and not as much teacher voice. Students have taken charge with their voice and it is great to see their growth through the year.

Lastly, Caring School Community has Home Connections. I love that students are excited to write; they're communicating with their parents and their parents are given talking points for their children.

What have you noticed about your students' learning and engagement?

Due to a lot of student-to-student talk, students' engagement is up. They want to listen to and take part in the lesson and, in turn, be prepared to work with their partner.

The growth when my students take part in SIPPS continues to amaze me every year. It is awesome to watch them go through the program, and then go back and have them read the first stories included in their SIPPS level to see how far they have progressed.

How has all or one of the following programs—Collaborative Literacy, SIPPS, and Caring School Community—affected or changed your own teaching and learning?

First, students get more voice within my classroom. I had always wanted more student voice, but without student talk intentionally embedded in the curriculum, students' voices tended to be less centered around learning, and my voice would dominate in the lessons.

Second, SIPPS has allowed me to follow routines, and even when students are working outside the program, we follow the routines such as read-spell-read.

And third, with the implementation of Caring School Community, I have intentional time set aside for relationship building. In previous school years, we would focus heavily on that in the beginning of the year, but then get busy with the routine of academics. Caring School Community has allowed me to build relationships every day.

What advice or insights would you share with an educator who is new to all or one of the following programs: Collaborative Literacy, SIPPS, and Caring School Community?

First, be easy on yourself! The programs are amazing and you'll eventually feel like it's second nature. When implementing, share with your students that you are new to the program, too. It's okay to not know things.
Second, organization! Find what works best for you. Organize your reading groups so the students can quickly grab the materials.

Lastly, rely on the Collaborative Classroom community—the webinars, Facebook community, etc. I’m five years in and I still rely on the Facebook community!

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Interested in hearing from other educators who are implementing Collaborative Classroom programs? Read more Educator Spotlights here.