

Let's Get Involved: Getting Students and Parents Involved in the IEP Process

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Abstract

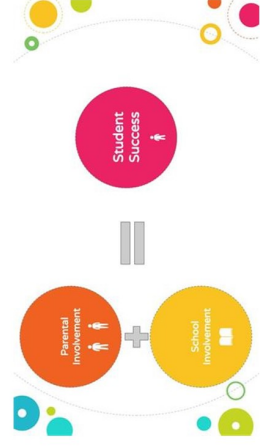
This study taught student teacher interns on how to support students and parents to participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. While previous research has determined students with disabilities can learn the skills needed to participate in their IEP meetings, researchers suggested that educators need training on how to conduct IEP meetings in which students and parents will be active participants (Chandross et al., 2018; Sanderson & Goldman, 2022). This study focused on teaching interns to build relationships with parents and students to create a level of comfortability so that when in an IEP meeting, everyone has a comfortable environment to speak in. A curriculum was developed to train the educators how to teach students and parents about the IEP meeting, and how to structure an IEP meeting so students and parents can be active participants. A pretest positest design was used to measure a change in student teacher interns' knowledge of IEP meetings and student and parent engagement strategies. I will talk about the curriculum, the research design, and future plans to measure if the student teacher interns implemented the strategies learned during their first year of teaching.

Rationale

While participating in this research, it came to my attention that when talking about IEPs, the students hardly ever understand what it means even though it is especially designed for them. I also was made aware that parents assume everything they are being told is beneficial, so they agree before understanding. Statistics show that 53% of high schoolers with an IEP went to their IEP meeting and of that 53%, only 33% knew what their goals were. If IEP meetings are meant to be student-centered, that number needs to increase immensely by interacting with students and parents/guardians in new and different way.

Methodology

- Pre-test/Post-test design.
- Participants completed concept maps to depict their individual ideas about elements associated with or contributing to student and family engagement in the IEP process.
- "A concept map is a way of organizing ideas about a topic so that relationships among various sub-topics are displayed visually" (Morine-Dershimer, et al., 1992, p. 472).
- For the concept maps, participants arranged the categories, subcategories, ideas, and terms around the central concept of student and family engagement in a way that demonstrated the relationships among concepts.
- Participants watched videos explaining how to get students and parents involved in the IEP process.
- Participants then completed a second concept map for a comparison.
- Coding steps (Correa et al., 2004):
 1. One of the researchers examined the preconcept maps and identified tentative categories by combining superordinate terms.
 2. Subcategories were also collapsed until each category had subheadings and details based on the language used in the concept maps.
 3. Categories and subcategories were finalized through discussion by both researchers.



Results

- Categories and Subcategories:
1. Interview parents
 1. Strengths and limitations
 2. Future goals
 3. Needed support
 2. Interview students
 1. Strengths and limitations
 2. Future goals
 3. Needed support
 3. Activities to complete with students
 1. Assessments - skills
 - Independent living, employment/career, education
 2. Assessments – interests
 - Independent living, employment/career, education
 4. Student-centered planning

Discussion

What I learned:

Students and parents need to be aware of what is going on with their/their child's education. I learned that different teachers would do different things regarding the IEP process, and that is okay, as long as it stays student-centered, and everyone is aware and can comprehend the IEP.

Limitations:

- Limited to one intern group.
- Prior knowledge of participants.

Future research:

- Will special education interns report that they used their knowledge during their first year of teaching?
- Will infusing knowledge of student and parent involvement in the IEP process throughout the undergraduate program results in similar knowledge gains?

Practical Considerations

- Consider the placement of each intern (elementary, middle school, high school).
- Consider the communication availability with parents/guardians.
- Consider the collaboration team for the interns. How closely do they work with paraprofessionals, general education teachers, administration, etc.?
- Consider designing different steps for interns working with students who are non-verbal.
- Consider the dates of IEP meetings and work with what has been done so far towards the goal of complete understanding of the process by all parties involved.
- Consider relationships with cooperating teacher (CT), students, and families.
- Consider infusing knowledge of student and parent involvement in the IEP process throughout the undergraduate program.

References

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