

**Facilitating  
Positive Parent  
Participation in  
IEP Meetings**

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# Parent Participation in the IEP Process

Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) found that special educators and administrators exert considerable control over the direction of IEP meetings and content, while families are frequently passive participants.

The federal intention for parents to be equal partners is not being equally realized for all students served under the IDEA (Elbaum, Blatz, & Rodriguez, 2016; Fish, 2006; Lo; 2008; Lo, 2012; Stoner et al., 2005, Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdez, 2012).

# Parent Participation in the IEP Process

Federal accountability metrics have shown a lack of improvement in schools' facilitation of parent involvement. The national average for Indicator 8 between fiscal year 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 remained at 66%, with approximately one third of parents indicating that schools are not facilitating their involvement (OSEP, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

# Parent Participation in the IEP Process

Researchers looked at nationally representative samples of students with disabilities using two prospective longitudinal studies, the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), and found different rates of parent participation and satisfaction in IEP meetings based on differences in a family's socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, and the child's disability (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012).

# Parent Participation in the IEP Process

The authors suggest that the often-bureaucratic procedures of IEP meetings might be presenting obstacles to lower income members of their schools, to those who are less educated, or those who are non-White facing White-majority school staff (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012).

# Parent Participation in the IEP Process

Upon synthesizing the results of their literature review of IEP development studies published between 1997 and 2014, Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) concluded that special educators need to be provided with training to improve their IEP meeting facilitation skills.

Many teacher education programs lack the coursework and practicum experience to help teachers develop these types of collaboration skills (Whitbread, Bruder, Fleming, & Park, 2007; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Murray, Curran, Zellers, 2008).

# Background Language Socialization

In an IEP meeting, the parent takes on the role of a novice, and can be informed by practices within the meeting of their role.

Within the framework of Participation, “speakers attend to hearers as active coparticipants and systematically modify their talk as it is emerging so as to take into account what their hearers are doing” (Goodwin, 1999, p.177).

Language socialization practices can occur without thought or they can be more purposefully initiated which may be the case during an activity such as employee training or sports coaching (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012).

# Research Questions

Can preservice special educators learn to facilitate parent participation strategies into simulated IEP meetings with actors through the use of a four-hour training intervention:

- Check for/facilitate parent understanding?
- Check for/facilitate parent input?
- Check for/facilitate parent agreement?

Is the use of parent participation strategies associated with an increase in parent actor participation levels across scenario difficulty level?



# Research Questions

In what ways does a preservice educator's speech encourage parent actors in their role as participants in an IEP meeting?

Can an intervention to improve parent actor involvement change the way a preservice educator's speech encourages parent actors in their role as a participant in an IEP meeting?

# Methods

- 4 pre-service special education teachers
- 30 total simulated IEP meetings using actors to play the role of parent
- Scenarios created across 3 difficulty levels
  - Rated by stakeholders in the field
- Pre meetings to establish baseline levels
- 4-hour training intervention
  - Socially validated by in-service teachers
- Post meetings

# Dependent Variables

## Encouraging Parent Participation:

- Checking for/Facilitating Parent Understanding
- Checking for/Facilitating Parent Input
- Checking for/Facilitating Parent Agreement

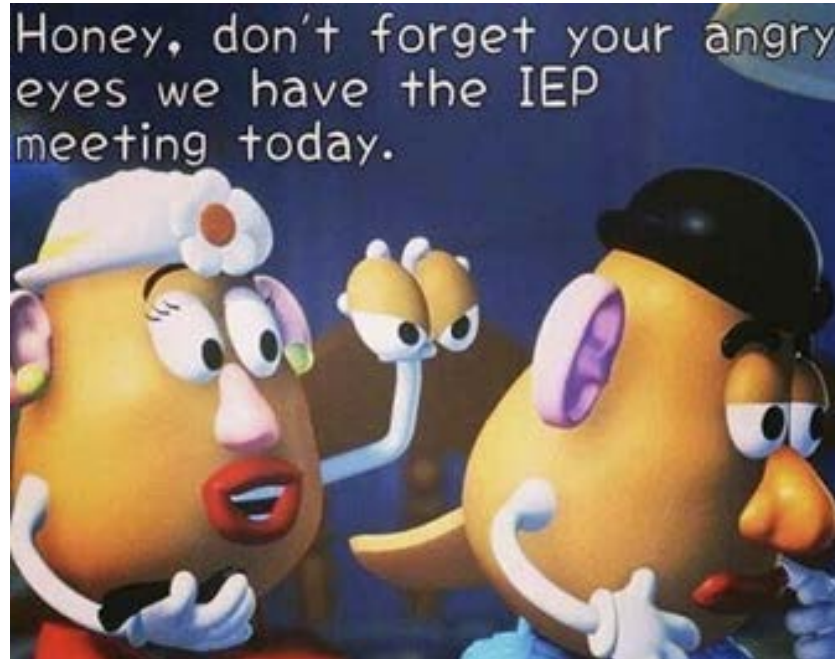
## Parent Actor Participation in Meetings

## Completion of Meeting Components

# Training Intervention

- Interactive Lecture
- IEP Meeting Agenda
  - Introduction to and modification of agenda document
  - Incorporate family and student-centered values
  - Annotate meeting agenda for pivotal times
- Video Analysis

# Running a Positive IEP Meeting with the Goal of Meaningful Parent Participation



# Share an Anecdote or Student Work

After introductions have been made, share a fun or positive anecdote or a sample of student work with the team. This can help set the tone for a child-centered meeting and reminds team members why they are there.



# Review Rights and Procedural Safeguards

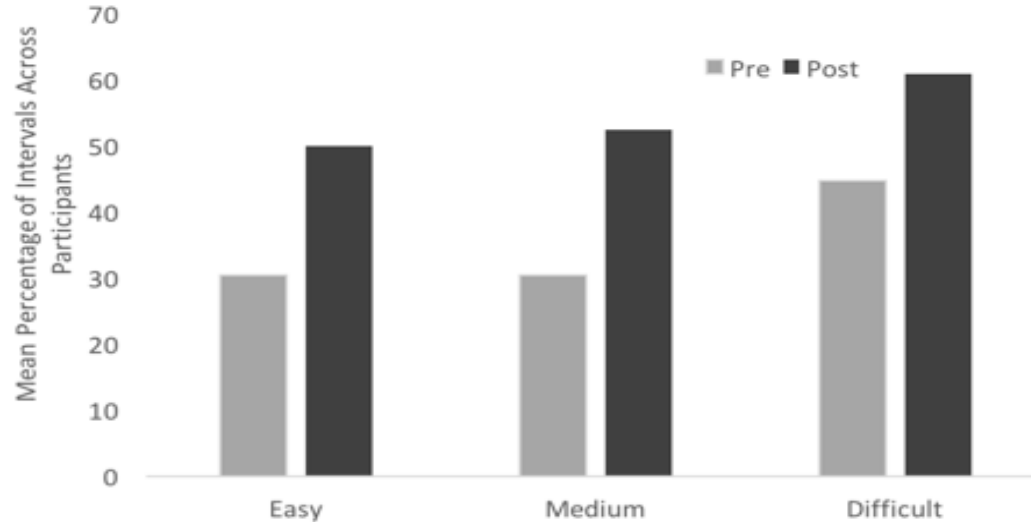
It is good practice to mention some of the most important things in this document:

“Here is a copy of your Parent’s Rights. Remember it’s your right to participate in the creation of your daughter’s educational plan and any concerns you have will be written in the plan and discussed by the team. Also, nothing goes into effect until you give consent by signing the last page.”

Ask the parent if they have any questions about their rights. **Do not remind parents that they have already seen these rights in the past.** This implies that they should not have questions or require additional explanation, which is **not** a way to facilitate meaningful parent involvement.

# Results

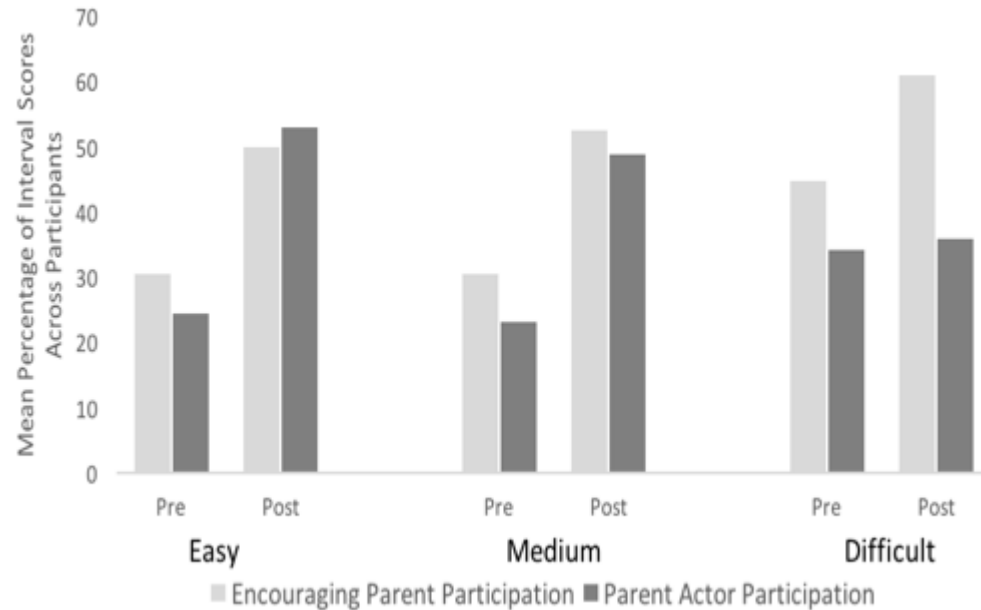
Figure 1. Mean Percentage of Intervals in Baseline and Intervention Phases in which Participants Demonstrated Encouraging Parent Participation Behaviors Across Levels of Scenario Difficulty.





# Results

Figure 2. Mean Percentage of Intervals Coded for Encouraging Parent Participation and Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation across Participants.



# Results

- Saw an increase in completed meeting agenda items
  - Pre-Meeting Mean Across Participants: 4.7
  - Post-Meeting Mean Across Participants: 8.6
  
- Once teachers entered the field observed and interviewed
  - Parent participation strategies sustained
  - Teachers continued to use the modified IEP agenda
  - Teachers were praised by administrators and team members for their IEP facilitation skills

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# Results - Survey Data

Have the skills you learned in the IEP training sustained over time?

“Yes, definitely! Giving the parents a true offer of FAPE, to me, is making sure I provide opportunities during the meeting that allow parents to be active participants...but also maintaining a meeting that is well organized and has an agenda that all team members can follow.”

“The training taught me to be more conscientious when it comes to talking to parents, to make sure to talk in terms that make sense and explain the educational process in a personable way that pertain to their child and their growth as people...without being too overwhelming.”

# Results - Survey Data

Has anyone ever commented on the way you run an IEP meeting?

“I have been complimented by my colleagues many times on my ability to hold an IEP meeting that is inclusive of all IEP team members.”

Another participant said that her Special Education coordinator, after observing a meeting, said the IEP was “a great example of how a meeting should be run and also commented on my relationship with the parent.”

# Results - Survey Data

“I had made it out of most likely the worst meeting I would ever be in. With that mentality, the subsequent meetings were nowhere as challenging...Being a young teacher teaching 18-22 year olds I have to present myself more professionally and prepared than other teachers in my position who are older. This study taught me how to professionally run a meeting and showcase my abilities as a competent educator and team leader.”

“participating in this study has certainly increased my confidence...I’ve felt much more confident with my role during the meeting.”

# Results - Pre-Training

- Use of Language – While use of the word ‘we’ invoked a team mentality, the parent was not consistently asked to share input. This suggests that while parents are present, their input is not necessarily needed within the process. Parent participants had to decide on their own to participate when queries were addressed to the group as a whole.
  - Note use of hand gestures that are open to the group but not necessarily to the parent.

# Results - Pre-Training

- Use of Body - While the IEP is a group interaction, the parent-teacher dyad is a relationship of high importance within the group. In the pre-training phases, teachers often neglected to make eye contact with the parent to check in and sometimes even while the parent was talking. This could signal disinterest as well as give the message that the parent should understand what is going on and should not need to check in.



# Results - Post-Training

- Use of Language - Explanation of parent role and invitation for parent participation at the start of the meeting involves parent as a member immediately and informs with words as well as by giving them the floor that their input is valued.
  - Note eye contact and receptive nods from teacher which show interest and the importance of what the parent is sharing to the meeting at hand.

# Results - Post-Training

- Use of Body – Teacher shares eye contact with parent while restating another team member's unclear point. As the conversation continues, teacher continues to alternate facing her body toward parent and group. This signals that opinions from all members of the group are welcome and desired not just from the primary person she was clarifying for. Teacher also uses her hands when she speaks and opens them toward parent signaling the need for her involvement in the brainstorming.

# Discussion

- Parent participation was more limited in pre-training meetings possibly due to teachers speaking to the group as a whole rather than singling the parent out as a hearer of their speech. Additionally, when they acted as hearers, teachers sometimes engaged in actions that left the parent feeling they were not fully engaged in their speech or understanding it. Jargon was also used and left unexplained by the teacher.
- In post-training, teachers were more careful to include the parent as a hearer of their speech. Teachers paid close attention to parent responses and monitored understanding so changes could be made if needed. Additionally, the words teacher's used and their body orientation positioned the parent as a member of the team rather than

# Discussion

- The teacher-parent dyad is an integral part of making sure a parent feels included and participates in an IEP meeting. This means that teachers need to consider the reaction of a parent not only when they are speaking, but also when others are the speaker.
- Teachers can take on a role as if they are speaking when other team member have the floor and make sure this speech is inclusive to the parent and that the parent is not 'checking out'. In this way, they can help to ensure that the parent understands their role as an active one within the meeting and not merely a bystander.

# Implications for the Field & Future Directions

- Adapting the training program for use with in-service teachers
- Provides a research informed approach to improving schools' facilitation of parent participation in IEP process
- Evidence supporting how teachers can use speech and body language to increase parent comfort and encourage involvement.
- Simulation or role play as a valuable tool for improving meeting facilitation skills
- Modified agenda tool serves as a bridge between training context and actual IEP meetings resulting in sustained practice

# IEP Agenda Modification Activity

- Take a look at the meeting components provided
- Think about pivotal times during the meeting where you would want to be vigilant about the following:
  - Parent Understanding
    - Use of jargon and technical language
    - IEP procedures
  - Parent Input
  - Parent Agreement/Reaching Consensus
- Think about times where you have observed missed opportunities for parent

# Thank You

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