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Training Pre-service Special Education Teachers to Facilitate Meaningful Parent

Participation in IEPs Using Simulated Meetings

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Natalie Robin O'Connor Holdren

Committee in charge:

Professor George Singer, Chair

Professor Michael Gerber

Professor Mian Wang

Professor Andrew Fedders

September 2017

The dissertation of Natalie Robin O'Connor Holdren is approved.

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George H. S. Singer, Committee Chair

August 2017

Training Pre-service Special Education Teachers to Facilitate Meaningful Parent

Participation in IEPs Using Simulated Meetings

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my friend and research partner, Matthew O'Neill, who was the heart behind this research and who left this world entirely too soon. Your humor and kindness are always with me and for that I am forever grateful. I am honored to bring this work to life on your behalf. Thank you for your persistence and vision.

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To my research partners, assistants, and credential students who have contributed countless hours of both work and support, thank you. Every single one of you has helped make this process rich and rewarding. Learning alongside you has been an absolute pleasure. Many of you have also become wonderful friends and colleagues and I am immensely grateful for that as well.

To all of my former students and their families during my years as a K-12 special educator and to my neighbors at UCP, it is really because of you that this dissertation has come to fruition. Thank you for sharing your lives with me.

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2004-2005   Education Specialist Credential
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1998-2002   B.A. Psychology – Honors
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2016-2017   Siff Educational Foundation Dean's Scholar Fellow
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2012   UCSB GSA Excellence in Teaching Award Nominee
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              Assessment, and Transitions in Special Education
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2015   <u>Graduate Course Instructor</u>: Functional Behavioral Assessment
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2009-2011	Special Education Teacher Goleta Union School District Mountain View Elementary Grades 2-4 (Moderate – Severe)
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2013-2014	Team Research Project, Special Education, Disability & Risk Studies "Using simulated IEPs to train pre-service special educators. A pilot study." Faculty Advisor: George Singer, Ph.D.
2011-2014	Independent Research Project, Special Education, Disability & Risk Studies "Using engagement strategies to improve reading outcomes for students with autism."

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

2017	35th Annual Cal-TASH Conference: San Diego, CA Paper Presentation: Building a more diverse Cal-TASH/TASH.
2017	35th Annual Cal-TASH Conference: San Diego, CA Paper Presentation: Building culturally competent family-professional relationships.

2016   TASH Conference: St. Louis, MI
Moderator: Inclusion means diversity and cultural competency symposium.

2016   TASH Conference: St. Louis, MI
Paper Presentation: Meaningful parent participation: Professional considerations for teaming with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

2016   TASH Conference: St. Louis, MI
Paper Presentation: Creating a more diverse TASH: Building cultural competence within TASH chapters.

2016   TASH Amplified
Podcast Feature: Inclusion means diversity and cultural competency.

2016   34th Annual Cal-TASH Conference: Sacramento, CA
Paper Presentation: A teacher's role in facilitating meaningful parent participation in IEP meetings.

2016   34th Annual Cal-TASH Conference: Sacramento, CA
Paper Presentation: Creating inclusive communities.

2016   34th Annual Cal-TASH Conference: Sacramento, CA
Paper Presentation: Professional considerations for serving culturally and linguistically diverse families.

2015   South Bay Down Syndrome Association: Torrance, CA
Making Inclusion Better Conference
Invited Presentation: Creating inclusive communities.

2015   University of California, Santa Barbara
Teacher Education Program Faculty Retreat
Invited Presentation: Innovating to meet the needs of diverse learners.

2015   TASH Conference: Portland, OR
Paper Presentation: Professional considerations for serving culturally and linguistically diverse families.

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Paper Presentation: Creating inclusive communities.

2015   TASH Conference: Portland, OR
Invited Presentation: Cultural and Linguistic Competence: Using what we have learned to implement change.

2015   Council for Exceptional Children Convention: San Diego, CA
Paper Presentation: Improving Direct Instruction phonetic reading responses for students with autism using fun.

| 2015 | 8th Annual International Pivotal Response Training Conference for ASD |
| | Paper Presentation: Training pre-service teachers to facilitate parent-friendly IEP meetings using simulated meetings. |

| 2015 | 33rd Annual Cal-TASH Conference: Irvine, CA |
| | Paper Presentation: Creating inclusive communities. |

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2014	McEnroe Reading & Language Arts Clinic
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	Training: Applying teacher presentation techniques across contexts.

2011-2014	University of California, Santa Barbara
	Law, Ethics and History of Special Education (Instructor: George Singer)
	Guest Lecture: Community integration & the Olmstead Act.

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| 2013 | TASH Conference: Chicago, IL |
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	Direct Instruction & Strategy Instruction (Instructor: George Singer)
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PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS, SERVICE:

2016-2018	Cal-TASH President – Elected
2016-Present	Council for Exception Children – Division of Research
	Families Research Committee – Leadership Team
2017	Council for Exceptional Children – Conference Proposal Reviewer
	Topics: Family-Professional Partnership and Collaboration
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	Topics: Diversity & Cultural Competency, Inclusive Education, Positive Behavior Support, Self-Advocacy
2016	Reading Intervention and Assessment Specialist – SB SELPA

2015-2016	Georgetown University Leadership Academy on Cultural Diversity and Cultural and Linguistic Competence
2015-2016	Cal-TASH Vice President – Elected
2013-Present	Cal-TASH Board of Directors – Elected
2005-Present	TASH/Cal-TASH Member
2008-Present	CEC Member
2014-Present	UCSB Pacific Islander Student Association Advisor
2011-2013	UCSB Pacific Islander Student Association Member
2010-2011	Goleta Union School District RtI and Assessment Committee
2010	Goleta Union School District - Special Education Self Review Panel
2009	AVID training in English Language Arts instruction
2008	Behavior Intervention Case Manager Certification
2006	Pivotal Response Training Certification

RELATED EXPERIENCE

2017   Educational Consultant
Santa Barbara City College
Develop course curriculum and a certificate program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Project funded by the Adult Education Block Grant.

2017   Educational Consultant
Adelante Dual Immersion Charter School
Develop a special education program that meets the needs of dual immersion students and facilitate the process of Adelante becoming their own LEA recognized by the Santa Barbara SELPA.

2009-2016 Educational Consultant
Solvang Elementary, Peabody Charter School, Santa Barbara School District, Goleta Union School District, Carpinteria Unified School District
Provide support, administrative guidance, and professional development on a variety of projects related to special education, inclusive education, co-teaching, instructional strategies, program design, assistive technology, IEP support, and positive behavior supports.

2006-2011 Cooperating Teacher
University of California, Santa Barbara – Teacher Education Program

2003-2016 Accessible Housing Regional Project Manager
United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara & Ventura Counties

2000-2003 Children's Programs Coordinator & Grant Writer
United Cerebral Palsy/WORK, Inc.

Abstract

Training Pre-service Special Education Teachers to Facilitate Meaningful Parent

Participation in IEPs Using Simulated Meetings

by

Natalie Robin O'Connor Holdren

The current study sought to establish whether simulated Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

meetings using scenarios and actors may serve as an effective tool for assessing and

improving pre-service special education teachers' ability to facilitate parent participation in

legally correct IEP meetings with the introduction of a training intervention. This

investigation sought to answer the following research questions: 1) Are the content and

methods of a training program designed to teach pre-service special educators to conduct

legally correct IEP meetings inclusive of parent participation socially valid as determined by

a survey of practicing special educators?, 2) Can pre-service special educators learn to

encourage parent participation in simulated IEP meetings with actors across scenario

difficulty levels through the use of a training intervention? 3) Can participants learn the skills

required to run an IEP that successfully addresses legally required meeting agenda

components?, 4) When levels of difficulty of scenarios are compared, do they impact the

level of participant and parent actor responding at both pre and post?, and 5) Is there a

functional relationship between the training intervention and increases in encouraging parent

participation and parent actor participation in response to teacher facilitation as determined

by a multiple baseline across subjects design? The training intervention method and content

were rated socially valid by in-service special educators. Data indicated that the training intervention was successful at increasing pre-service teachers' facilitation of parent participation skills as well as the mean number of meeting components completed across pre and post levels. Findings suggested that there was no difference in the patterns of participant and parent actor responding at the easy and medium scenario levels, where by visual inspection, an increase in participant use of parent facilitation strategies appears associated with an increase in parent actor participation. In the difficult level, however, an increase in participant facilitation skills did not appear to be associated with an increase in parent actor participation. Analysis of the multiple baseline design data indicated several issues with upward trends in baseline and overlapping levels across baseline and intervention phases, which raised questions regarding an ability to claim a functional effect between the training intervention and the dependent variables under investigation. An examination of an ad hoc hypothesis is presented, whereby a case is made through both direct observation and qualitative data that one actor performed as an outlier. Analysis of the multiple baseline design with outlier data excised demonstrates a likelihood of a functional effect between the intervention and the dependent variables. Findings are discussed in terms of implications for future research and practice for both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

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I. Introduction

The current study sought to examine whether a program consisting of didactic training plus participation in simulated Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings may result in improvements in a pre-service special education teachers' ability to facilitate meaningful parent participation while increasing the completion of key meeting agenda items required by law.

Research demonstrates that parent involvement in the educational process has a positive impact on students with disabilities including greater continuity in interventions, greater generalization and maintenance of treatment gains, more effective strategies for solving problems, and greater academic performance (Bailey & Wolery, 1989; Cox, 2005; Koegel, Koegel, & Schriebman, 1991; Newman, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) recognizes the critical role that families play in their child's development and legitimizes this by mandating parent participation in the individualized education plan (IEP) process (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2015). The IEP is the keystone of the IDEA and is designed to develop and formalize a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students receiving special education services (Bateman, 2011). The term IEP refers both to the process dictated by the procedural requirements of the IDEA and to the document that results from this process, which directs all aspects of a student's special education program (Smith, 1990). The IEP serves a variety of functions related to management, accountability, compliance, and monitoring. Additionally, the IEP process is intended to serve as a vehicle for communication and collaboration between home and school (Yell, 2015).

The IDEA requires parent participation in all aspects of a student's IEP, including

assessment and eligibility determination, goal identification, behavior support plans, and transition (Friend, 2003). In an effort to ensure that parents are equal partners in the IEP process, the IDEA contains specific guidelines that schools must follow to ensure that parents are participants in the meeting where the IEP document is developed. For example, the school must make good-faith efforts to schedule the meeting at a mutually agreed upon time and place, give parents sufficient notice of the meeting in a language they comprehend, and arrange for interpreters for parents who are deaf or whose native language is not English (Yell, 2015). Despite the presence of these mandates, however, some have argued that the IDEA's provisions are tied more to parent attendance than actual parent participation (Wolfe & Durán, 2013). The IDEA states that parents are to be considered "full and equal participants" in the IEP meeting (IDEA 2004, 34 CFR 300.322), which suggests an active, decision-making role. The IDEA does not, however, specify what constitutes full and equal participation, thus parents, teachers, and administrators are left to determine how best to navigate this collaboration (Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

In a literature review of studies on IEP development published since the 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA, 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 (Fish, 2008; Gaffney & Ruppar, 2011; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Lo, 2008; Martin, Huber, & Sale, 2004; Salas, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdez, 2012; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). They also found that 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, & Valdes, 2012).

Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, and Valdes (2012) 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. The authors posited 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. While some studies have attempted to remedy these issues by providing parents with training on participating in IEPs, Goldman and Burke (2016) performed a meta-analysis of the existing literature and found a lack of evidence for the effectiveness of parent training interventions to increase parent involvement in special education. The authors noted that due to the power differentials between the school and parent that have been demonstrated in past research (Leitner & Krauss, 2004), it is important to focus attention on the behavior of other IEP team members as well (i.e., school personnel). They argued that an increase in parent advocacy and participation is dependent upon the behaviors of school staff.

In addition to these findings, federal accountability metrics have shown a lack of improvement in schools' facilitation of parent involvement. Indicator 8 is a performance indicator that measures the percentage of parents who reported that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for their children with disabilities. The national average for this indicator 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).

Elbaum, Blatz and Rodriguez (2016) argued that the lack of progress regarding the facilitation of parent involvement cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge base on family-school collaboration citing that there are empirically-tested models of family-school relations (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007) as well as recommended engagement practices for parents of students receiving special education services (Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, & Benz, 2013; Harry, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). They posited that at greater issue may be the lack of training pre- and in-service teachers receive on communicating and collaborating with parents. Studies have found that most teacher education programs fall short of providing future teachers with opportunities to navigate social interactions with parents and caregivers and develop the necessary skills, knowledge and dispositions they need to engage families as an educational resource (Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). This failure to prepare pre-service teachers to work with families is compounded by the fact that while schools are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, etc., educators entering the profession continue to reflect the White, middle class, majority culture (Villegas, 2007). As Dotger (2010) noted, "increasing cultural diversification, the continued importance of parent involvement, and the paucity of teacher preparation in school-family communications, constitute a complex intersection for teacher education institutions" (p. 1).

In addition to highlighting the lack of training pre-service special educators receive on parent engagement strategies, Elbaum, Blatz and Rodriguez (2016) also noted that the wealth of recommendations available in the parent involvement literature may contribute to implementation challenges. For example, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) offers 30 specific

strategies to promote parent involvement. Elbaum, Blatz, and Rodriguez (2016) argued that

prioritizing too many strategies would lead to poor implementation and a failure to meet

desired outcomes. They recommended that a better solution would be to identify a

parsimonious set of recommendations and prioritize those strategies for maximum effect,

which they refer to as selective prioritization. One way to help identify and establish high

impact strategies for selective prioritization in the training of future special educators is to

identify the most common barriers to parent participation in the research literature and then

conduct studies that build a knowledge base around teaching pre-service educators strategies

to help diminish these barriers. The following literature review will look at three common

barriers to parent participation reflected in the literature as a basis for the research questions

guiding the current study.

Barrier to Parent Participation: Understanding

One common barrier that is documented in the literature is the difficulty parents

often experience understanding and navigating the IEP. The IEP process is structured by the

procedural requirements of the IDEA and as a result is both complex and bureaucratic. Due

to the specialized knowledge, training, and skills that professionals have regarding the IDEA

and special education they are advantaged over families in the IEP process. Early scholars

noted that the parent participation mandate presumes that parents are capable of acting as

educational decision-makers, though this is not a role that all parents are equipped to assume

(A.P. Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982). Parents have reported that IEP meetings are confusing

and obtaining services is complicated (Public Agenda, 2002; Stoner et al., 2005). They have

questioned both their ability to know if the services offered were appropriate for their

children and their ability to advocate for them due to their lack of knowledge (Lake &

Billingsley, 2000). A related barrier parents experience in the IEP process is the frequent use

of jargon and technical language by special education professionals. The research literature is replete with examples of parents struggling to understand the language used by professionals and documents the alienation and disempowerment families often experience as a result (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Salas, 2004; Smith, 2001). Interestingly, Childre and Chambers (2005) found that parents did not feel that it was the professional's duty to give information in more comprehensible terms. The families instead believed that it was their responsibility to understand the information as educators presented it. Fish (2006) found that some participants believed districts should help educate parents about the IEP process but since they do not, recommended that all parents educate themselves. Unfortunately, this is not a viable option for many families. For example, those who experience poverty may have less of a sense that they can educate themselves, have fewer available resources to do so, and lack access to a network of knowledgeable peers for support (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Though all parents have the potential to find IEPs difficult to understand, these challenges are often intensified for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds who may have less knowledge of the American educational system and special education, and more difficulty navigating technical language and complicated reports and documentation. In their review of studies looking at CLD families' experiences in the IEP process, Wolfe & Duran (2013) found that a communication barrier was evident in all eight studies they identified between 2001 and 2011. In six of those studies, parents felt that their level of English proficiency limited the extent to which they participated in the IEP meeting. Lo (2008) found that though a father reported that he understood English well, he could not understand the assessment results and felt confused and stressed. In the meetings where interpreters were present, excessive information was provided before the team stopped and

allowed for translation. Additionally, translators were found to be summarizing instead of interpreting and often did not know how to translate technical terms commonly used in special education. These additional barriers to understanding that CLD families face further hinder their ability to truly participate in the process. In order to increase parent participation in the IEP, special educators must help parents understand how to make both the IEP process and the language used during the process more comprehensible.

Barrier to Parent Participation: Lack of Input

Another barrier found in the literature on parent involvement in the IEP process is that parents often have little input during IEP meetings. In their literature review of IEP development studies, Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) found that though parents frequently attended IEPs, they were often not provided the opportunity to make significant contributions to the content of the meeting (Salas, 2004; Lo, 2008; Fish, 2008; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz & Valdez, 2012; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). Martin et al. (2006), found that teachers largely controlled the IEP development conversations and families were not meaningful, active participants in the process. Other researchers have found that there were few requests for input from parents by educators during IEP meetings (Jones & Gansle, 2010) and that parental input was rarely welcomed by educators in determining placement, discipline or instruction (Fish, 2006). This is consistent with Klingner and Harry's (2006) observation that education professionals viewed IEP meetings as a place to inform parents of their decisions as opposed to including them in decision-making.

Studies have found that low levels of parent participation can be due in part to power differentials within the meeting and parents feeling intimidated by professionals (Leitner & Krauss, 2004; Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004). In the field of special education, professionals are

assumed to have the expertise to not only instruct students but to also identify those students who will benefit from this specialized instruction and are required to do this by law based on their professional knowledge (Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). As Kalyanpur & Harry (2012) noted, this duty establishes a clear hierarchy of knowledge where professionals' expertise ranks higher than that of a parent. Walker and Singer (1993) noted that "parents and professionals often speak from different vantage points, have different reasons for interacting the way they do, and use very different language" (p. 298). Walker (1989) found that teachers tended to speak in a highly-focused, business-like manner, with an emphasis on goals, progress, or problems. Parents, in contrast, spoke about their children more personally and in terms of their home life. While both forms of discourse are critical to a collaborative IEP process, scholars have argued that the way professionals speak often dominates and drives out the voice of the family (Walker & Singer, 1993). Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) noted that though the IDEA attempts to restore status to parents by mandating their input, the issue of power continues to affect families and professionals in the implementation of the mandate. Professional knowledge continues to carry more clout because it is rooted in science and therefore considered more objective whereas parents' everyday knowledge of their child traditionally has been dismissed as subjective and anecdotal (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Turnbull et al., 2007).

The literature indicates that the challenges associated with a parents' ability to have input in an IEP is another barrier that is intensified for culturally and linguistically diverse families as well as for families experiencing poverty (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Hernandez, Harry, & Newman, 2008). In their review of nine studies of culturally and linguistically diverse parents' perceptions of the IEP process, Wolfe & Duran (2013) found

that the most common concern of parents who felt disrespected in the IEP meeting was the devaluing of parental expertise. Studies of Mexican-American (Salas, 2004), Chinese-American (Lo, 2008), and Korean-American families (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Park, Turnbull, & Park, 2001) and a range of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Fish, 2008; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012) found that CLD parents struggle to have an impact on the content of the IEP. The parent participants in Lo's (2008) study indicated that, overall, their input was not valued or welcomed, preventing them from participating meaningfully. Park, Turnbull, and Park (2001) reported that the Korean American mothers in their study felt that the interpreters provided were focused more on delivering the school's message to them rather than representing their point of view in the meetings. Cho and Gannotti (2005) reported that even though a number of the Korean mothers in the study attended workshops on how to participate effectively in IEP meetings, they were unable to engage effectively with professionals to obtain the services they deemed appropriate for their child.

Diverging cultural values may play a role in creating additional challenges regarding parent input in the IEP process for CLD families. For example, many Native American and Asian families may expect figures of authority to tell them how to manage their child's health or behavioral needs and the culturally appropriate response to an authority figure is respectful silence (Ovesen & Trankell, 2010; Sutton & Broken Nose, 2005). Individuals from some cultures may also place a great value on personal stoicism and emotional containment and may prefer to remain silent than discuss private family matters with a professional (Lau, Fung, & Yung, 2010; Manuelito, 2005). Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005) have reported that for some African American families, silence may indicate a lack in trust of authority figures. These cultural differences may create scenarios where a parent's desires

for and knowledge about their child is never heard or considered by the professionals during the development of their individualized plan.

Training pre-service educators to facilitate parent input during IEP development should be another focus for the field when selectively prioritizing strategies to increase parent participation in the IEP. In their study to pinpoint parent involvement variables for selective prioritization, Elbaum, Blatz, and Rodriguez (2016) investigated which dimensions of parents' experiences with schools are most strongly associated with parents' perceptions that schools are not facilitating their involvement. Ninety-two parents completed quantitative measures used by their state to gauge schools' parent engagement efforts and then described their experiences qualitatively. Data from the qualitative analysis were transformed into quantitative variables used to predict how well a school facilitated parent involvement. Results indicated that a lack of openness to parent input (as demonstrated by failure of school personnel to proactively solicit parent input) was a powerful predictor of parent dissatisfaction. These findings help build a case for a stronger focus on training pre-service special educators in strategies for facilitating parent input.

Barrier to Parent Involvement: Lack of Consensus Building

A third related barrier to parent involvement in the IEP process found in the literature is that IEP teams often fail to seek and reach true consensus with parents in the creation of the IEP. Studies have found that much of the content of the IEP is decided on among professionals prior to the meeting and parents feel that their job is simply to agree (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Fish, 2006; Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). Childre & Chambers (2005) found that five of the six families interviewed said that their primary role in the IEP was to agree with a preset agenda and goals. One parent felt pressured to accept a placement at a special school even though

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she believed the assessment information she received to be invalid. Lo (2008) reported that when asked how they prepared themselves for an IEP all but one participant said that they perceived IEP meetings as a place where professionals reported their children's progress, evaluation results, and changes made in placement or services and therefore, were unsure how to prepare for the meeting. Participants in a qualitative study by Fish (2006) reported that they would not be as defensive in IEPs if educators viewed the meetings as more of a team effort between schools and families. They wanted a more democratic process where parents felt they were equal contributors.

These parent concerns are representative of what Harry (1992) has referred to as the traditional framework of parent participation, where professionals determine eligibility, placement, and services and the role of the parent is limited to agreement and disagreement. Similarly, Rock (2000) referred to the IEP as a "meaningless ritual" where educators implement and expect parents to approve pre-determined educational plans. Mlawer (1993) noted that the IDEA mandates regarding parent participation do little to alter the reality that schools can employ the expertise "necessary to impose their will on parents" (p.112). Again, this barrier can be especially challenging for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds due to professionals' lack of cultural responsiveness, parents' limited English proficiency, and the potential for cross-cultural miscommunication (Lo, 2012; Harry, Klingner, & Hart, 2005; Ovesen & Trankell, 2010; Sutton & Broken Nose, 2005; Zhang & Bennett, 2003). These barriers to authentic parent participation could potentially be remedied if teachers were trained to make sure parents were part of a process of seeking and reaching consensus throughout the meeting.

Training Teacher Candidates Using Simulation with Actors

Upon synthesizing the results of their literature review of IEP development studies

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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. Studies, however, have found that there is limited professional development at school or district levels regarding the importance of collaborating with parents (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Additionally, research has indicated that many Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) lack the coursework and practicum experience to help student teachers develop skills for supporting parent participation (Whitbread, Bruder, Fleming, & Park, 2007; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). It is also often difficult to provide student teachers with experience facilitating actual IEP meetings during their student teaching due to the professional and legal implications for the host school district and mentor teacher.

One approach to assessing and training professionals in the skills necessary for effective communication and relationship building that has had success in the medical and counseling fields is simulation using actors. Simulation is an approach where academic content is coupled with professional contexts in order to provide a learning environment where students engage as future professionals in realistic settings (Dotger, 2008). Simulation is valuable in the education of professionals in that it evokes and replicates substantial aspects of the real world in a fully interactive manner and can reproduce settings of various levels of complexity (Gaba & DeAnda, 1989; Jones, Passos-Neto, & Braghiroli, 2015). In the preparation of medical students, simulation exercises role-played by professional actors are accepted as methods for both teaching and evaluating professional competence worldwide (Anderson, Stillman, & Wang, 1994; Hardoff & Schonmann, 2001; Pieters, Touw-Otten, & DeMelker, 1994). The use of actors to create patient encounters was first

reported by Barrows in 1964 who went on to systematically use healthy actors to simulate patients in order to teach and asses his students (Barrows, 1993). Barrow's work became the basis for a now widely-used pedagogy, the standardized patient, the use of trained actors to simulate a clinical case in a standardized way for the purpose of training medical professionals to both diagnose and communicate with their patients (Barrows, 1993).

Recently, researchers have applied simulation to the field of teacher education through the creation of simulated parent-teacher conferences using standardized parents, actors trained to portray parents in a standardized way (Dotger, Harris, and Hansel, 2008; Dotger, 2009). In 2008, Dotger, Harris and Hansel provided pre-service teachers with six different simulated parent-teacher conferences using standardized parents across a 15-week course where they implemented their Parent/Caregiver Conferencing Model (PCM). The researchers used real-life situations as the basis for their cases which were derived from individual and focus group interviews with parents, teachers, principals, school superintendents, and guidance counselors. Initial pilot simulations led to revisions and the creation of their six cases. Two professionally trained actors were given a general overview of the standardized parent concept and a case-specific profile that provided a thorough description of the parent the actor would play including both informational content (i.e., employment history, marital status, disposition, socioeconomic status) and interactional content (the emotional components of the case). Following the simulation, after teachers had the opportunity to review the recording of their simulations, they met with the researchers to reflect and critique their performance. They also constructed a reflection outlining their strengths, areas for improvement and primary leanings. This was followed by two final debriefings where data they completed assessments measures. The researchers found that participants in the PCM showed advances in multicultural awareness and ethical sensitivity

using quantitative measures (Dotger, 2009) indicating that simulation with actors with video analysis and reflection may be a promising approach to training pre-service educators in the skills related to communication with parents.

To date, no similar simulation studies have been published looking at the training of pre-service special educators in the IEP process. This approach may prove promising as a means for assessing and training special educators for the skills necessary to facilitate parent involvement in the IEP process when paired with a training intervention. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to use simulation and actors to investigate the following research questions:

1) Are the content and methods of a training program designed to teach pre-service special educators to conduct legally correct IEP meetings inclusive of parent participation socially valid as determined by a survey of practicing special educators?

2) Can pre-service special educators learn to encourage parent participation in simulated IEP meetings with actors across scenario difficulty levels through the use of a training intervention?

3) Can participants learn the skills required to run an IEP that successfully addresses legally required meeting agenda components?

4) When levels of difficulty of scenarios are compared, do they impact the level of participant and parent actor responding at both pre and post?

5) Is there a functional relationship between the training intervention and increases in encouraging parent participation and parent actor participation as determined by a multiple baseline across subjects design?

A. Participants

The participants in this study were four female special education teacher candidates enrolled in a large public university located in the Southwestern United States. Participation in the study was voluntary and not part of the prescribed teacher preparation curriculum. Upon completion of the study, all participants received financial compensation based on the number of sessions attended. The participants' pseudonyms and general demographic information are identified in Table 1. All participants signed consent forms approved by the Human Subjects Committee and were notified that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence.

All participants received instruction on the IDEA and the IEP process in a traditional lecture format during graduate courses taken prior to participating in the study. They had not yet participated in a course focused on collaboration with stakeholders in special education. The candidates were all required to attend IEP meetings as part of their competencies for the program but had different levels of experience when the study commenced depending on their schedule and the mentor teachers they worked with. Karen had attended two IEP meetings prior to participating in the study as an observer. Sandra observed three IEP meetings and participated in multiple informal team meetings where the special education team collaborated with general education teachers and related service providers. She also had experience prior to entering the program as an in-home behavior therapist for children with autism where she often took part in planning meetings with parents and other stakeholders. Maya observed one meeting prior to participating in the study. Donelle attended two IEPs and had experience attending and leading Individual Service Plan

meetings, which involved planning goals and services for adults with disabilities, in her

previous role as an employee of an adult services agency.

Table 1. Teacher Participant Pseudonyms and General Demographic Information.

Teacher Participant	Age	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Native Language	Other Languages Spoken
Karen	23	Latina	Spanish	English and Portuguese
Sandra	24	White	English	
Maya	25	White	English	American Sign Language
Donelle	23	Bi-Racial Black/White	English	

B. Setting and Materials

All simulations and intervention sessions took place in a conference room on the

campus of the university. Chairs were situated around a long oval table. The sessions were

recorded using two Sony HDR-CX240 camcorders set on tripods. One camera was oriented

directly towards the participant and the parent actor, who sat next to each other. The other

camera captured an alternate view of the meeting attendees. Audio was also recorded using a

Tascam DR-07 audio recorder in case the other recording devices malfunctioned. Time was

kept using a timer on an iPad, which was made visible to all simulation attendees during the

meetings.

C. Scenario Development

The cases used in the simulated IEP meetings were created based on real life

situations encountered in the field by the research team, which were then developed into

eleven scenarios. The research team consisted of a special education attorney, a behavior

interventionist, and three former special education teachers, two of whom were also parents

of children with disabilities. The issues included in the scenarios were selected based on the

team's notion that 1) pre-service educators would likely encounter similar issues in the field

and 2) they centered on critical aspects of offering students a free and appropriate education.

For example, scenarios included issues related to: a students' meaningful participation in

general education settings, responding to parent requests for services, responding to parent

inquiries regarding the appropriateness of a placement, leading meetings with immigrant

families who are unfamiliar with the IEP process, and the provision of appropriate

modifications and accommodations. The scenarios included student demographic

information including the nature of their disability, background information regarding the

parent and family, the reason why the meeting was taking place, the characters and their roles, and a description of the school and school district. A sample scenario is included in Appendix A. Each scenario listed the main issues to drive the content of the meeting and a paragraph of common information that all meeting attendees had access to. In addition to this information, each meeting attendee received additional individual knowledge specific to their role and their motivations for the meeting that other attendees were not privy to. For example, attendees would receive information regarding their desired outcome for the meeting as well as a next best alternative that they would try to advocate for if the desired outcome was not feasible. While the scenario provided detail on the circumstances surrounding the meeting and the characters' motivations, it did not script or direct any of their actions, verbalizations, or decisions within the simulation. Teacher candidate participants were instructed to base their decisions and actions in the simulated meeting on their professional judgement based on the context provided. All meetings were requested reviews, IEP meetings requested by a team member to discuss a specific topic, as opposed to annual or triennial meetings where the entire content of the IEP would be discussed.

A survey containing a summary of the main issues from each of the eleven scenarios was given to 41 stakeholders in special education including 11 parents of students with disabilities, 8 special education administrators, 17 special education teachers, 2 school psychologists, a preschool teacher, an inclusion specialist and a school nurse. Survey recipients were instructed to rate the difficulty of the circumstances in each IEP meeting using a Likert-type scale with 1 representing an easy scenario for an IEP meeting and 5 representing a difficult one. The eleven cases were ranked according to their mean difficulty score and the nine cases that fell closest to a 1 (easy), 2.5 (medium) or 5 (difficult) rating

were used in the final study. Three cases were rated easy, three medium, and three difficult. A summary of scenario content and the difficulty ratings are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Scenario Case Order, Content, and Difficulty Level.

Case Name	Difficulty	Case Content
Daniel Rivera	Easy	The parent of a high school student with intellectual disability has requested an IEP meeting to figure out how to get her son included in a 5th period dance class as an alternative to special education physical education. The general education teacher knows the student and is eager to have the student in class.
Sarah Manning	Medium	The special education teacher has requested an IEP meeting to increase the amount of time a student will spend in her general education class. On occasion, the student has some behaviors that are causing the general education to feel hesitant about the change.
Kayla Whitmore	Difficult	The parent has requested an IEP meeting to ask for several costly interventions for her daughter that are not supported by research.
Lucas Walker	Easy	The parent has requested an IEP to discuss increasing her son's time spent in general education in order for him to spend time around good language models. The speech therapist and special education teacher are in support of this change. The general education teacher is amenable provided that the student receives the appropriate amount of support.
Paul Dierden	Difficult	The parent has requested an IEP because he believes the program his son is placed in is not appropriate. The parent would like a more appropriate option to be offered at his home school. The school is suggesting Paul attend a regional program across town. The parent feels distrust towards the district due to past negative experiences.
Phillip Leakey	Medium	The student of a family who is new to the country and to the idea of special education are meeting with the team to discuss the amount of time the student will spend in the general education setting.
Kyle Jensen	Easy	The team is meeting to discuss the student adding a general education ceramics course to his schedule in lieu of a special education vocational skills class. The general education teacher is very interested in having the student in her class.
Malcolm Johnson	Medium	A parent has requested an IEP to discuss her concern that her son, who uses a wheelchair, is not given opportunities to actively participate during adapted PE class. The Adapted PE Teacher, though kind and friendly, lacks creativity around modifying activities and often gives the student jobs like scorekeeper and equipment collector while the other students participate in physical activities.
Indra Singh	Difficult	The parent has requested an IEP meeting to seek more time in the general education setting for her daughter at the recommendation of her in-home behavior therapist. The parent is new to the country and special education and feels very nervous about making the request.

D. Scenario Roles

The teacher candidates participating in the study played the role of the special education teacher in the simulated IEPs and were responsible for facilitating the meeting. Each simulated meeting had one parent in attendance, which was played by a trained actor recruited for the study from the on campus theater department, both undergraduate and graduate students. Ten actors participated in total and were compensated for their time based on the number of sessions they participated in. Actors were unfamiliar with the purpose of the study. The remaining roles in each simulation (administrators, general education teachers, related service providers, etc.) were played by graduate student members of the research team who all had substantial experience participating in and leading actual IEP meetings as special education teachers and/or parents of children with disabilities. Each scenario had between four and five attendees depending on the content of the meeting. Participants received scenario information regarding each simulated IEP meeting one day prior to participating in the simulation and were instructed to familiarize themselves with the details of the case. The parent actors received the scenario information two days prior to participating in the sessions and were instructed to familiarize themselves with their character and the case information. They were also provided with basic information about their child's disability and were told not to seek any additional information or do any outside research prior to participating in the simulated meetings. The team members playing the additional roles had access to the scenarios throughout the study and played their characters according to the information included. All simulation attendees signed consent forms approved by the Human Subjects Committee.

E. Experimental Design and Procedure

This study was designed to investigate a series of research questions meant to assist in the development of a process for teaching and assessing pre-service educators' ability to run compliant IEP meetings that meaningfully facilitate parent participation. The first step in this process was to develop a training intervention designed to teach these skills and then establish social validity of the training by soliciting input from in-service special education teachers with experience running IEPs. Participants took part in simulated IEP meetings with actors to establish pre test measures of their meeting and parent participation facilitation skills. Parent actor participation in direct response to these skills was also measured. Pre-service teachers took part in a four-hour training intervention and then participated in a series of follow-up meetings. An across participants multiple baseline design was employed to assess whether the candidates implemented skills and strategies taught to them during the intervention training in subsequent simulated IEP meetings.

IEP meeting simulations were 20 minutes in length. A total of 30 simulated IEPs took place. Each simulation was videotaped for analysis at a later time. The simulation started when the parent actor entered the room. Participants were instructed to greet the parent at the door, direct them to the seat on their right and begin leading the meeting. The study took place over the course of a two-week period. See Table 3 for an overview of both independent and dependent variables.

Table 3. Dependent and Independent Variables.

Variable Type	Variable Name	Description
Dependent Variable	Intervention Training	Each candidate received one, four-hour training intervention session. The training included interactive lecture, an introduction to and modification of an IEP meeting agenda, video analysis, and video modeling. See appendix for comprehensive explanation of the training content.
Independent Variables	Eliciting Parent Participation	Eliciting Parent Participation included any of the following three behaviors: (a) checking for/facilitating parent understanding (b) checking for/facilitating parent agreement (c) checking for/facilitating parent input
	Parent Actor Participation	A parent actor verbally participated in the meeting in response to a participant's use of eliciting parent participation behaviors.
	Completion of Meeting Components	The number of meetings components completed by the participant during each simulation. The list was comprised from components taken from sample meeting agendas published by various school districts and also included additional meeting management components considered good practice in the field such as establishing time parameters and giving an overview of procedural safeguards after handing them to the parent.

F. Dependent Measures

Data were collected on the following three dependent measures: 1) Encouraging Parent Participation, 2) Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation, and 3) Completion of Meeting Components. Three trained coders who were unfamiliar with the purpose of the study independently scored all the variables using the dependent measure operational definitions. Observers were trained by the author and practiced scoring video probes until inter observer agreement (IOA) was consistently greater than 90% for three consecutive simulation sessions. Once trained, observers scored sessions independently. Operational definitions are listed below.

Encouraging parent participation. This variable consisted of the following three component classes of behaviors: (a) checking for/facilitating parent understanding, (b) checking for/facilitating parent agreement, and (c) checking for/facilitating parent input. Observations were coded as instances of encouraging parent participation if any of the three classes of behavior were observed during a 30-second interval. Data were analyzed by percentage of intervals where the behavior took place.

Check for/facilitate parent understanding. The participant either checks with the parent actor to see if they understand the content of the conversation, takes an opportunity to explain information to them about the meeting in general, or helps explain information that is presented by another team member. This can include identifying jargon and explaining what it means or asking a team member to explain technical language using more common terms. If the parent actor asked for clarification regarding meeting content, the teacher response was not counted as facilitating understanding.

Check for/facilitate parent input. Teacher specifically checks in with the parent

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actor to see if they have input that they would like to share either in a general way or through a specific line of questioning. For example, during a discussion about the student's independent living skills, the parent is asked to tell the team what other skills might be important to address.

Check for/facilitate parent agreement. The participant checks with the parent actor to see if they agree with the content of the meeting or takes an opportunity during the meeting to make sure they feel in accord with information that is presented by a professional in the meeting. For example, after the speech therapist has reported assessment information to the team, the participant asks the parent if the findings are consistent with how the student communicates at home.

Parent actor participation in response to teacher facilitation. An interval was scored as containing instances of Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation if the parent actor verbally participated in the meeting as a direct result of the participant using the Encouraging Parent Participation behaviors listed above. Data were analyzed by percentage of intervals where the behavior took place.

Completion of Meeting Components. Data for this variable were collected using a checklist of legally required meeting components successfully completed by the participant during each simulation. The checklist consisted of components taken from sample meeting agendas published by various school districts and included additional meeting management components considered good practice in the field such as establishing time parameters and giving an overview of procedural safeguards after handing them to the parent. The checklist consisted of a total of 13 items. See Table 4 for the components included. Data was analyzed in terms of the mean number of components completed and compared across pre and post

conditions for each participant.

Table 4. IEP Meeting Components and Descriptions.

Meeting Components	Description
1. Introductions	Teacher introduces themselves and then begins the introduction process for the rest of the attendees.
2. Share an anecdote/positive team input	Teacher either shares a positive/fun story about the student OR encourages team members to do the same.
3. Share meeting agenda	Teacher explains the agenda for the meeting and how the meeting will progress to the parent.
4. Introduce procedural safeguards	Teacher gives parent a copy of the procedural rights document.
5. Give overview of procedural safeguards	Teacher explains any portion of the procedural rights document to the parent.
6. Establish time parameters	Teacher checks with the team to see if anyone has time constraints regarding the length of the meeting.
7. Explain purpose of the meeting	Teacher explains what type of IEP meeting is occurring and the reason for the meeting (for example, a requested called by mom to discuss speech services).
8. Present level of performance	The teacher describes the students' present level of performance as it relates to the topic of the requested review. This could include how the student is performing behaviorally, academically, socially, etc. This could also entail a teacher asking another team member to talk about the students' present levels as it relates to the meeting.
9. Discuss/develop goals	Teacher participates in or starts a discussion about goals or goal areas for the student.
10. Discuss services	Teacher participates in or starts a discussion about the services the student may need and perhaps the frequency.
11. Discuss placement	Teacher participates in or starts a discussion about placement for the student.
12. Consent/parent signatures	Parent consents to the content of the meeting by signing the IEP document.
13. Debrief	The teacher checks in with the parent following the close of the meeting, but prior to them leaving, to see how the IEP experience was for them.

G. IEP Training Session

Each candidate received one intervention session, which consisted of a four-hour training with three members of the research team and one teacher candidate in attendance. The training included an interactive lecture, an introduction to the IEP agenda, a strategy for modifying the meeting agenda, video analysis, and video modeling. A comprehensive explanation of the training content is provided in the Appendix B. Delivery of training content was individualized based on student performance during the baseline condition. For example, more time would be spent on materials related to specific areas of need as evidenced from watching participant performance during baseline sessions.

Interactive lecture. The content of the interactive lecture included an explanation of the goals of the training session including introduction and modification of the IEP meeting agenda, increasing parent participation in the IEP meeting, and strategies for creating a positive, collaborative, child-centered, parent-friendly environment in the meeting. Examples of parent-friendly content tied to the dependent variables include starting the meeting with a positive anecdote about the child or work samples demonstrating growth, explaining the meeting agenda to the parents and asking them to add to the agenda, explaining procedural safeguards and other technical aspects of the process in clear language and providing opportunities for questions, and regularly checking in with the parent to ensure understanding, to solicit input, or to ensure that they are in agreement with the process and content.

Introduction to and modification of the IEP meeting agenda. During the interactive lecture, participants were introduced to a basic IEP meeting agenda and

instructed to annotate it with reminders to engage in specific behaviors designed to create a positive meeting that facilitated parent participation at specific times. This approach centered on an analysis of the IEP meeting based on the author's professional experiences and the IEP agenda. It rested on the idea that certain pivotal moments in the meeting are critical junctures for checking for and facilitating meaningful parent participation. For example, the first moments of a meeting can set the tone for the environment, so at this point participants were taught to pay attention to their own body language, create a warm, responsive tone, and initiate casual conversations that were positive and child centered. Participants were encouraged to annotate the greeting portion of their agenda with reminders of these specific behaviors. Another example is that during the discussion of present levels of performance, the sharing of assessment information can often involve the use of jargon and technical language, an emphasis on professional expertise, and a lack of opportunities for parents to express their input and develop consensus about the findings. Participants were asked to reflect on these things and annotate their agenda to provide reminders to remain vigilant for these opportunities to facilitate parent participation. Participants modified their meeting agenda with similar reminders during each content portion of the training session (which were aligned with the meeting agenda) and were encouraged to use their modified agenda as a tool at all future IEP meetings (both real and simulated).

Video analysis. During the training session, participants were also shown sample video clips from their own baseline simulated meetings and asked to reflect on how certain behaviors either supported or hindered a parents' participation in the meetings and contributed to or detracted from a positive environment. Video clips were selected strategically to highlight both positive and negative aspects of their facilitation skills within

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the simulated meetings.

Video modeling. Participants were shown sample footage from IEP meetings videos that demonstrated professionals facilitating positive, parent-friendly meetings. Participants watch the videos one time all the way through and then were asked to watch the video again and stop it at times when they noticed the professional engaging in a behavior that improved the positive, and parent-friendly nature of the meeting. They then would reflect on the behavior they saw the professional engage in and talk about why they perceived it as good practice. If the participant missed a behavior that the research team deemed important they would show the participant the clip and lead the participant through a discussion of why the behavior might contribute to a positive meeting.

Mastery criteria. Participant mastery of training content was formatively assessed based on performance during video modeling and video analysis exercises. Students participated in the interactive lecture prior to these components and then were assessed on their ability to identify the target behaviors in their own simulation videos and those present during their baseline videos. They were also asked to identify times in their baseline videos where they did not implement the target behaviors discussed in the training, but could have based on their new knowledge regarding facilitating parent participation in legally correct meetings.

H. Social Validity of the Intervention Training

Seventeen in-service special education teachers read a detailed description about the intervention training content provided to study participants and completed a survey designed to evaluate the social and ecological validity of the intervention. Surveys were sent to teachers credentialed to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities who were identified as high quality teachers based on their interaction with the teacher education

program or their participation in a disability and inclusion advocacy organization. The survey consisted of three yes or no questions designed to determine their professional role in IEP meetings and seven statements to assess the social and ecological validity of the intervention, which were rated on a 5-point scale of varying meaning depending on the item. The rating scale appears in Appendix C.

I. Inter Observer Agreement

Two observers independently coded data for over 33% of the videotaped simulation sessions to establish inter observer agreement for the three dependent measures across all participants. Videotaped probes used for reliability were randomly selected from baseline and intervention conditions. Inter observer agreement was calculated using the following formulas: Agreement/(Agreements + Disagreements) X 100%. Inter observer agreement for Encouraging Parent Involvement averaged 88% (range 80-100%), 89% for Parent Actor Involvement (range 78-100%), and 96% for Completion of Meeting Components (range 85-100%).

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III. Results

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This section will address the results of the findings in the order that the research questions were presented.

Social Validation of the Training Intervention

The first question investigated whether the content and methods of a training program designed to teach pre-service special educators to conduct legally correct IEP meetings inclusive of parent participation was socially valid. A social validity survey was completed by seventeen in-service special education teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities. They were provided with a detailed description of the intervention

training content and teaching methods and asked to respond to 10 survey items. The first three items consisted of yes or no questions to determine their professional role and the extent of their participation in IEP meetings. All seventeen survey participants identified as special education teachers who participated in IEP meetings as a function of their job. Of those, thirteen indicated that they played the primary role in facilitating or leading the IEP meetings for their students, while the remaining four indicated that this role was generally carried out by another IEP team member. For those who indicated that they did not lead the meetings, the role was either played by the school psychologist, a designated IEP chairperson, or an administrator (either site or district level). The next two survey items were meant to gauge how important the problem of limited parent participation was for teachers within the IEP meeting. All the teachers rated this problem as either extremely important or important (where 1 means extremely important and 5 means extremely unimportant). Fourteen respondents found it to be among the top five obstacles for educators related to the IEP process, the remaining three rated it among the top ten obstacles. The remaining items and the in-service teacher responses are displayed in Table 5. One statement pertained to how likely the teacher would be to use the strategies in their actual IEP meetings if they received the training. All the respondents said that they would be either extremely likely or likely to use the techniques. Another item asked how feasible it would be for a teacher to use these strategies even if they were not technically the person leading the IEP meeting. This is promising in that, though 23% of respondents were not the official person presiding over the meeting, 83% of the teachers still believed that it was either feasible or extremely feasible to use these techniques. The remaining respondents selected the neutral answer of neither likely or unlikely. One respondent stated: "I currently do not lead the meetings, but still frequently have opportunities when I am speaking to parents and

could implement these strategies." The final survey item indicated that 88% of the respondents felt that it was either extremely likely or likely that implementing these strategies would lead to increased parent participation. The remaining two respondents gave a neutral answer of neither likely or unlikely. One respondent who indicated extremely likely said "in my opinion, parents have the BEST ideas about their own children's learning when given the opportunity to speak out!" Another said, "I think these techniques would greatly increase parent participation in IEP meetings and if they were adopted as a special education department's expectations of staff members, I think it would make parents feel like they were a much bigger part of the IEP process."

Table 5. In-service Teacher Ratings on the Social Validity of the Intervention Training.

Rating	Number & Percentage of Responses by Likert-type Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
Survey Item					
According to the IDEA, parents are supposed to be considered "full and equal participants" in the IEP meeting, which suggests an active, decision-making role. However, a review of 20 years of research studies looking at IEP meetings indicates that special educators and administrators exert considerable control over the direction of IEP meetings and content, while families are frequently passive participants. Given your knowledge and experience of special education and the IEP process, how important is this problem?	7 41.18%	8 47.06%	2 11.76%	0	0
How likely is it that a special education teacher could use the strategies featured in this intervention in real IEP meetings?	8 47.06%	9 52.94%	0	0	0
If you were provided training on implementing these facilitation techniques, how likely is it that you would use them in real IEP meetings?	14 82.35%	3 17.65%	0	0	0
If you were provided a training on how to use these techniques, how feasible is it that you would use them?	10 58.82%	7 41.18%	0	0	0
How likely is it that you could use these techniques in a meeting even if you were not facilitating/leading the meeting?	5 29.41%	9 52.94%	3 17.65%	0	0
In your opinion, how likely is it that these techniques would increase parent participation in the IEP meeting?	8 47.06%	7 41.18%	2 11.76%	0	0

Note. 1 = Extremely Likely/Feasible, 2 = Likely/Feasible 3 = Neither Likely/Unlikely or Neither Feasible/Unfeasible, 4 = Unlikely/Unfeasible, 5 = Extremely Unlikely/Unfeasible.

Encouraging Parent Participation

      The next question asked, can pre-service special educators learn to encourage parent participation in simulated IEP meetings with actors across scenario difficulty levels using a training intervention. For this question, the percentage of intervals in which the target behavior occurred in each simulation were averaged across participants and compared by scenario difficulty levels. Figure 1 shows the mean percentage of intervals in which participants demonstrated Encouraging Parent Participation by levels of difficulty of the scenarios across participants. Table 6 shows the corresponding means. Means increased from pre to post across all scenario difficulty levels, with the biggest increase happening with medium level scenarios and the smallest increase with difficult ones.

Figure 1. Mean Percentage of Interval in Baseline and Intervention Phases in which Participants Demonstrated Encouraging Parent Participation Behaviors Across Levels of Scenario Difficulty.
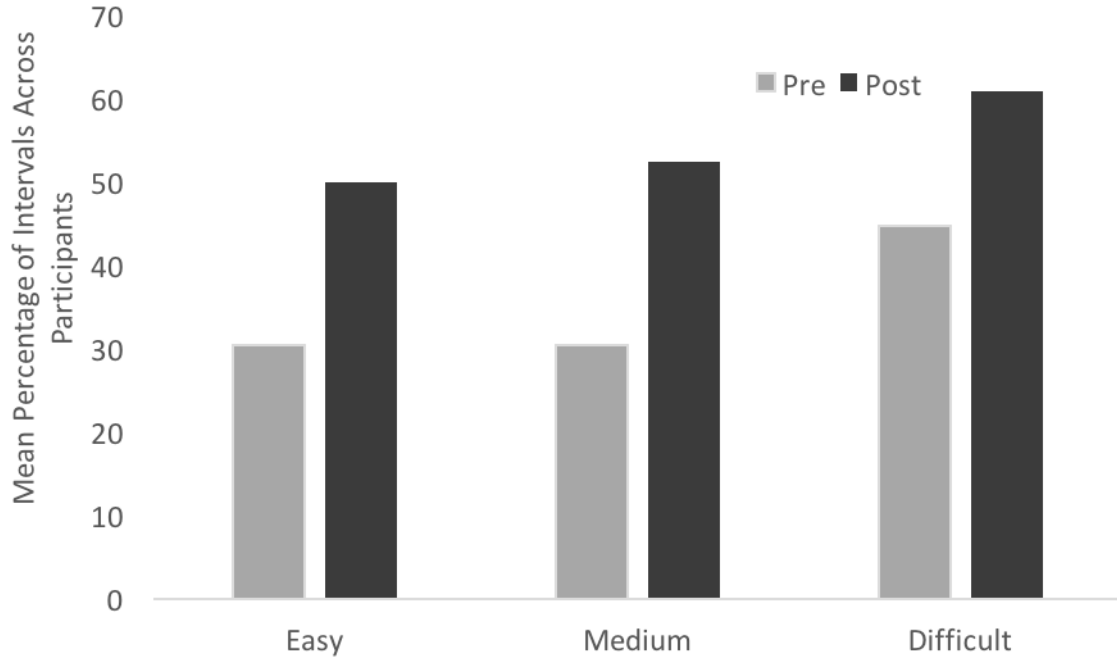
Table 6. Mean Percentage of Interval Scores for Encouraging Parent Participation Across Participants.

	Easy		Medium		Difficult	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Mean	30.48	49.99	30.48	52.43	44.71	60.97
SD	10.25	10.99	10.25	8.33	1.40	12.67

Completion of Meeting Components

The next question investigated whether participants can learn the skills required to run a legally correct IEP that successfully addresses meeting agenda components through the intervention training. Table 6 lists and defines the meeting components and Table 7 displays the mean number of meeting components completed by each participant before and after the intervention training. Baseline data points were averaged as were intervention phase observations. There were increases across all participants from baseline to post intervention phases, with the smallest increase happening for Maya, the student who had the highest average pre test score.

Table 7. Mean Pre and Post Meeting Components Completed by Participant.

Participant	Pre		Post	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Donelle	4.3	1.5	8.6	4.04
Sarah	5	9.13	9.3	4.04
Karen	4.2	6.06	8.6	7
Maya	5.16	4.88	8	3.79

Evaluating Participant and Parent Actor Responding by Difficulty Levels

The next research question investigated whether participant and actor responding vary on pre and post test by level of scenario difficulty. Figure 2 shows the mean percentage of intervals across participants for Encouraging Parent Participation and Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation by difficulty levels. In the easy level, there was an increase in Encouraging Parent Participation behaviors (mean percentage increase of 19.51%) that corresponded to an increase in Parent Actor Participation (mean percentage increase of 28.65%). A change also occurred in the medium level of scenario difficulty where an increase in Encouraging Parent Participation (mean percentage increase of 21.95%) corresponded with Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation (mean percentage increase of 25.61%). In the difficult level, however, Encouraging Parent Participation increases slightly from pre to post (with a mean change of 16.26%), which corresponded to a mean percentage increase of only 1.6% in the Parent Actor Participation. See Table 8 for the mean scores.

Figure 2. Mean Percentage of Intervals Coded for Encouraging Parent Participation and Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation across Participants.
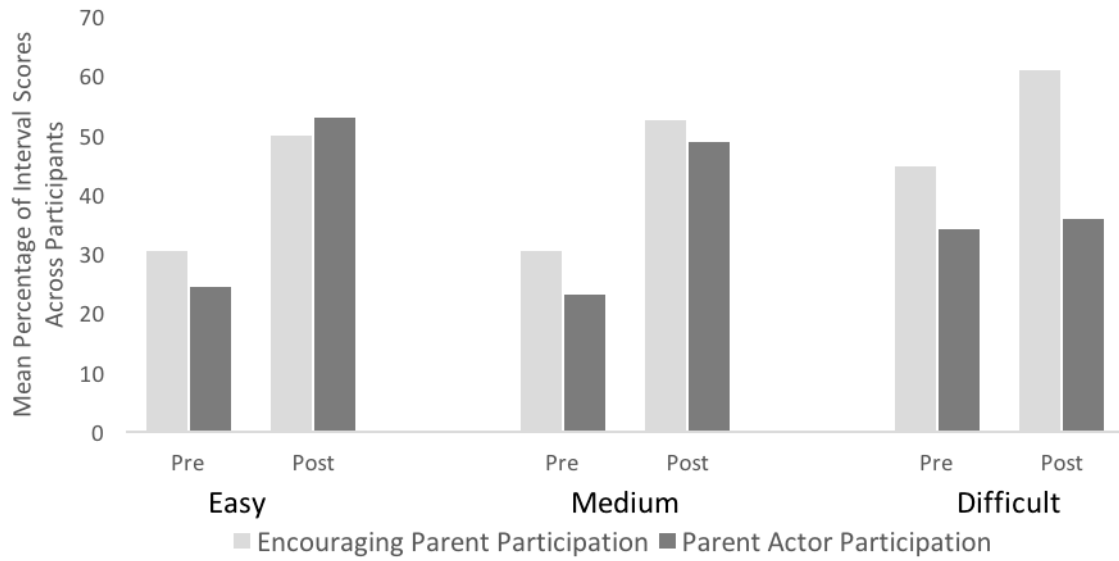
Table 8. Mean Scores for Encouraging Parent Participation (EPP) and Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation by Difficulty Levels.

Level	Condition	Encouraging Parent Participation		Parent Actor Participation	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Easy	Pre	30.48	10.25	24.39	9.9
	Post	49.99	10.99	53.04	10.96
Medium	Pre	30.48	10.25	23.17	6.1
	Post	52.43	8.33	48.78	7.52
Difficult	Pre	44.71	1.40	34.14	13.06
	Post	60.97	12.67	35.77	6.99

Functional Relationship Between Training Intervention and Increases in Encouraging

Parent Participation and Parent Actor Participation

The next research question asked whether there was a functional relationship between the training intervention and increases in encouraging parent participation and parent actor participation as determined by a multiple baseline across subjects design. The results of this investigation will be addressed in two analyses.

Analysis 1: Full data analysis. The following analysis will examine the research question with the full data set and will be discussed according to each of the two dependent variables.

Encouraging parent participation. Figure 3 shows the percentage of intervals for Encouraging Parent Participation during baseline and intervention across the four participants. During baseline, Donelle's percentage of intervals increased from session one to session three (M = 13.3%, range 10 – 18%), creating an upward trend in the data. Following the intervention, Donelle's percentage both increased and stabilized when compared to baseline (M = 20.3%, range 18 – 22%) with a slight change in level. Sandra's percentage of intervals fluctuated substantially during baseline (M = 15.3%, range 7 – 24%), with session three overlapping with intervention levels. Following intervention, her mean percentage of intervals increased and individual scores stabilized as (M = 22.3%, range 17 – 26%). Karen's mean percentage of intervals during baseline was 13.4% (range 11 – 18%) which overlapped with intervention levels. The mean increased to 19.6% (range 17 – 22%) during the intervention phase. Maya had the highest mean in the baseline condition of the four participants (M = 18%, range 12 – 25%) and baseline levels demonstrated an upward trend. In the intervention phase her mean increased and her individual scores stabilized (M = 22%, range 18 – 25%), though there was an overlap between baseline and intervention

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levels. The upward trend increases during baseline and overlapping levels across baseline and intervention raise questions regarding whether there was sufficient change to claim a functional effect.

Figure 3. Percentage of Intervals for Encouraging Parent Participation During Baseline and Intervention.

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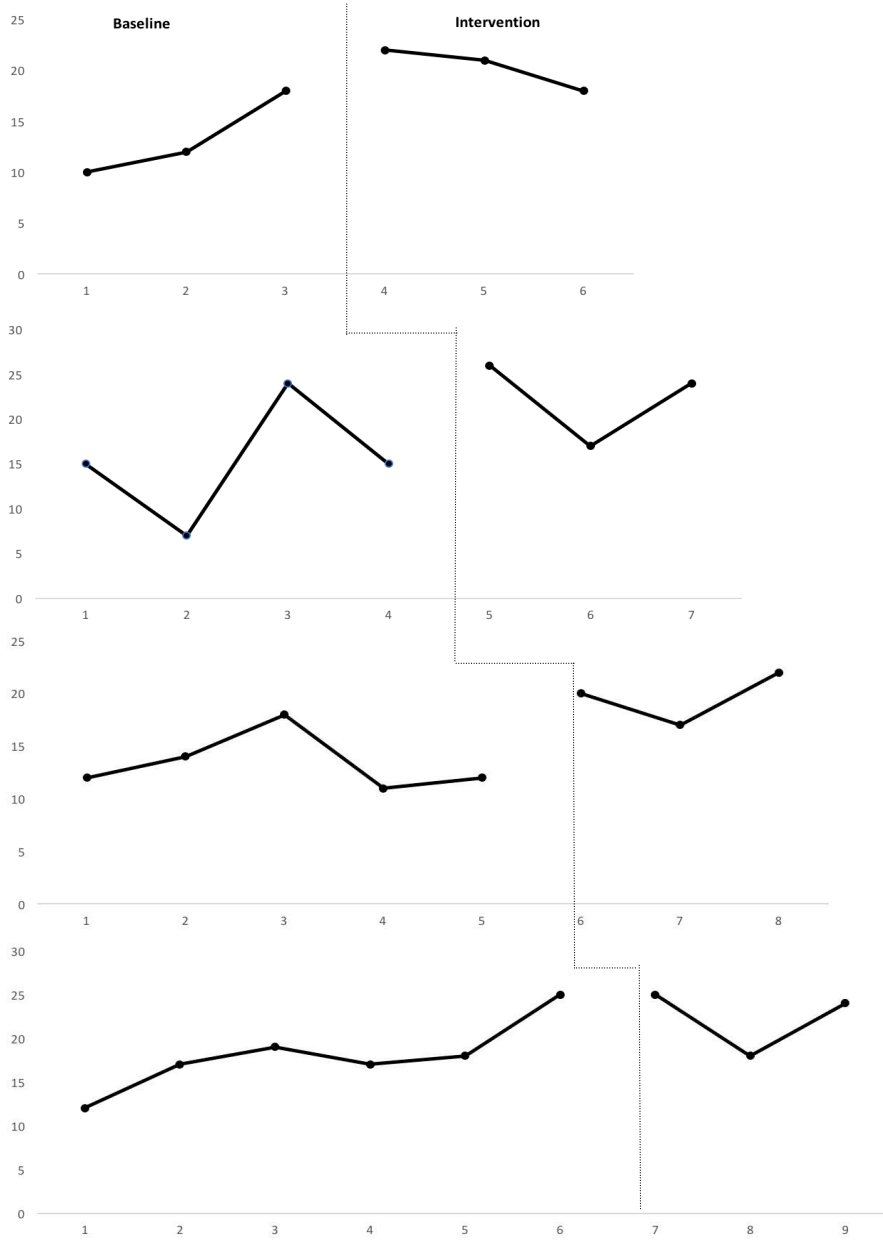***Parent actor participation in response to teacher facilitation.*** Figure 4 displays the

percentage of intervals for Parent Actor Participation in Response to Teacher Facilitation.

During baseline, Donelle's percentage of interval data points for parent actor participation

increased with each session (M = 12.3%, range 5 – 20%), exhibiting both an upward trend

during baseline and an overlap between baseline and intervention levels. During the

intervention phase, scores stabilized and the mean increased slightly (M = 15.6%, range 11 –

18%). Sandra's baseline was relatively higher than Donelle's (M = 15%, range 7 – 28%) and

had one data point in baseline that overlapped with intervention levels. Following the

treatment, her mean percentage of intervals coded for parent actor participation increased

and her individual scores stabilized (M = 20.6%, range 17 – 25%). Karen had the lowest

baseline mean for parent participation (M = 10.4, range 7 – 21%) with one data point that

overlapped with intervention data. In the intervention phase her mean increased (M = 20%,

range 15 – 28%). Finally, Maya's mean percentage of intervals coded for parent actor

participation during the baseline condition was 13.8% (range 6 – 21%), again with a data

point overlapping with intervention levels. In the intervention phase the mean increased to

22.3% (range 18 – 25%). As with the previous dependent variable, overlapping levels across

pre and post and upward trends during baseline are problematic in terms of claiming a

functional effect.

Figure 4. Percentage of Intervals for Parent Actor Participation as a Result of Teacher Facilitation During Baseline and Intervention.
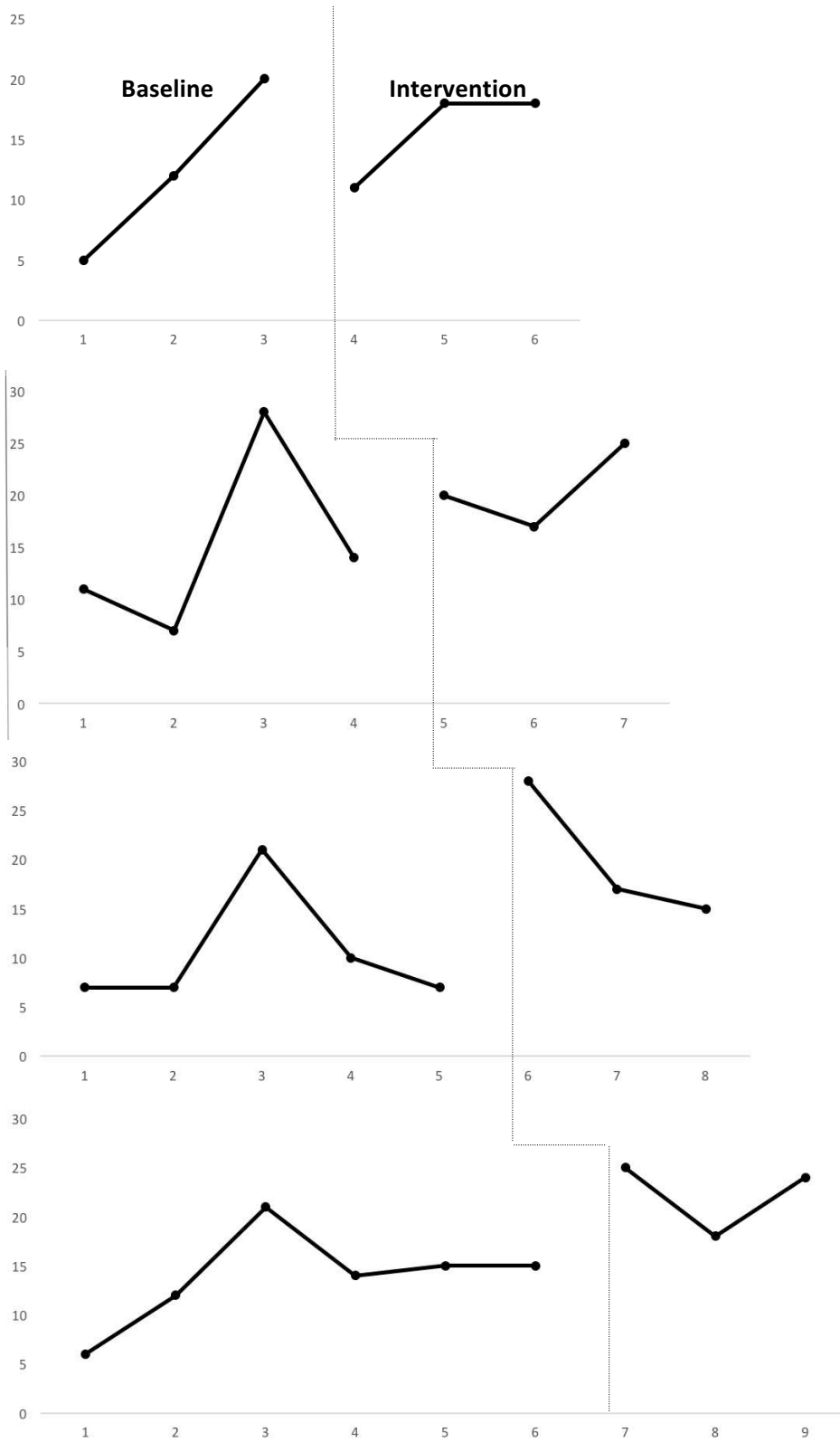
Analysis 2: Ad hoc hypothesis. The second analysis will consist of an examination of an ad hoc hypothesis. It was evident to the participants, observers and the researchers that one of the actors did not behave consistently in the same way as the others. Table 9 presents the mean percentage of intervals coded for Parent Actor Participation during baseline sessions by actor behavior. The mean for actor 3 was much higher than that of the other actors (M = 22.5, range 20 – 28), indicating that this actor talked for substantially longer periods than the other actors. In addition to this direct observation data, anecdotal comments from a participant reflected this as well. The following quote comes from a follow-up email: "that meeting was by far one of the toughest I have even been in…the mother was relentless and spent the majority of the meeting pushing back." As a result of these findings, I hypothesized that actor 3's data should be treated as an outlier. I then reexamined the data without actor 3's data points.

Table 9. Mean Percentage of Intervals Coded for Parent Actor Participation During Baseline by Actor.

	Actor 1	Actor 2	Actor 3	Actor 4	Actor 5	Actor 6
	5	12	20	14	7	15
	11	7	28	10	15	
	7	7	21	14		
	6	12	21			
Mean	7.25	9.5	22.5	12.66	11	15

Encouraging parent participation. Figure 5 shows the percentage of intervals coded

for Encouraging Parent Participation during baseline and intervention across the four

participants with actor 3's data removed. At baseline, Donelle's mean increased slightly (M

= 11%, range 10 – 12%) across sessions. Following intervention, her percentage increased

(M = 20.3%, range 18 – 22%) demonstrating a visible level change. Sandra's mean at

baseline was 12.3% (range 7 – 15%) with an upward trend. We see a level change in the

intervention phase (M = 22.3%. range 17 – 26%). Karen's baseline mean was 12.3% (range

11 – 14%). Following intervention there was a clear level change (M = 19.7%, range 17 –

22%). Finally, Maya had the highest mean in the baseline condition and a substantial

amount of variability (M = 17.8%, range 12 – 25%) with an upward trend. Her mean

increased slightly (M = 22.3%, range 18 – 24%).

Figure 5. Percentage of Intervals Coded for Encouraging Parent Participation During Baseline and Intervention without Actor 3.

Parent Actor Participation as a Result of Teaching Facilitation. Figure 6 shows the

percentage of intervals for Parent Actor Participation as a Result of Teacher Facilitation
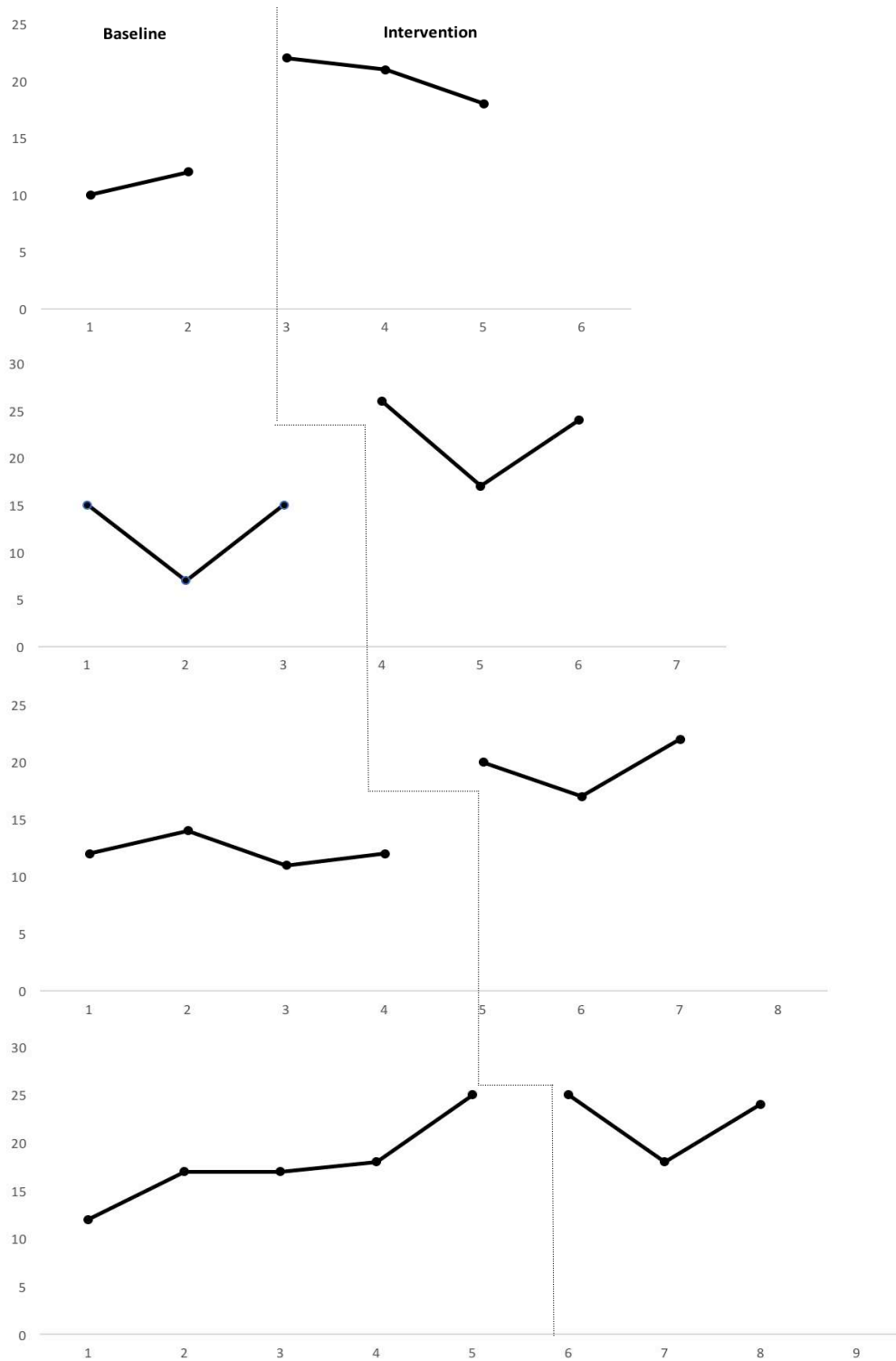
during baseline and intervention with actor 3's data removed. During baseline, Donnelle's

percentage of interval scores increased presenting an upward trend (M = 8.5%, range 5 –

12%). We see a level increase from baseline to intervention (M = 15.7%, range 11 – 18%).

Sandra's mean during baseline was 10.7% (range 7 – 14). Follow treatment, there is a level

increase (M = 20.67, range 17 – 25%). Karen had a mean of 7.8% (range 7 – 10%) in the

baseline condition and visual inspection indicates a level increase following treatment (M –

20%, range 15 – 28). Finally, Maya's mean percentage of intervals coded for parent actor

participation were 12.4% in the baseline phase (range 6 – 15%). Her mean increased to

22.3% in the intervention phase and her scores stabilized (range 18-24%).

Figure 6. Percentage of Intervals Coded for Parent Actor Participation as a Result of Teacher Facilitation During Baseline and Intervention without Actor 3.
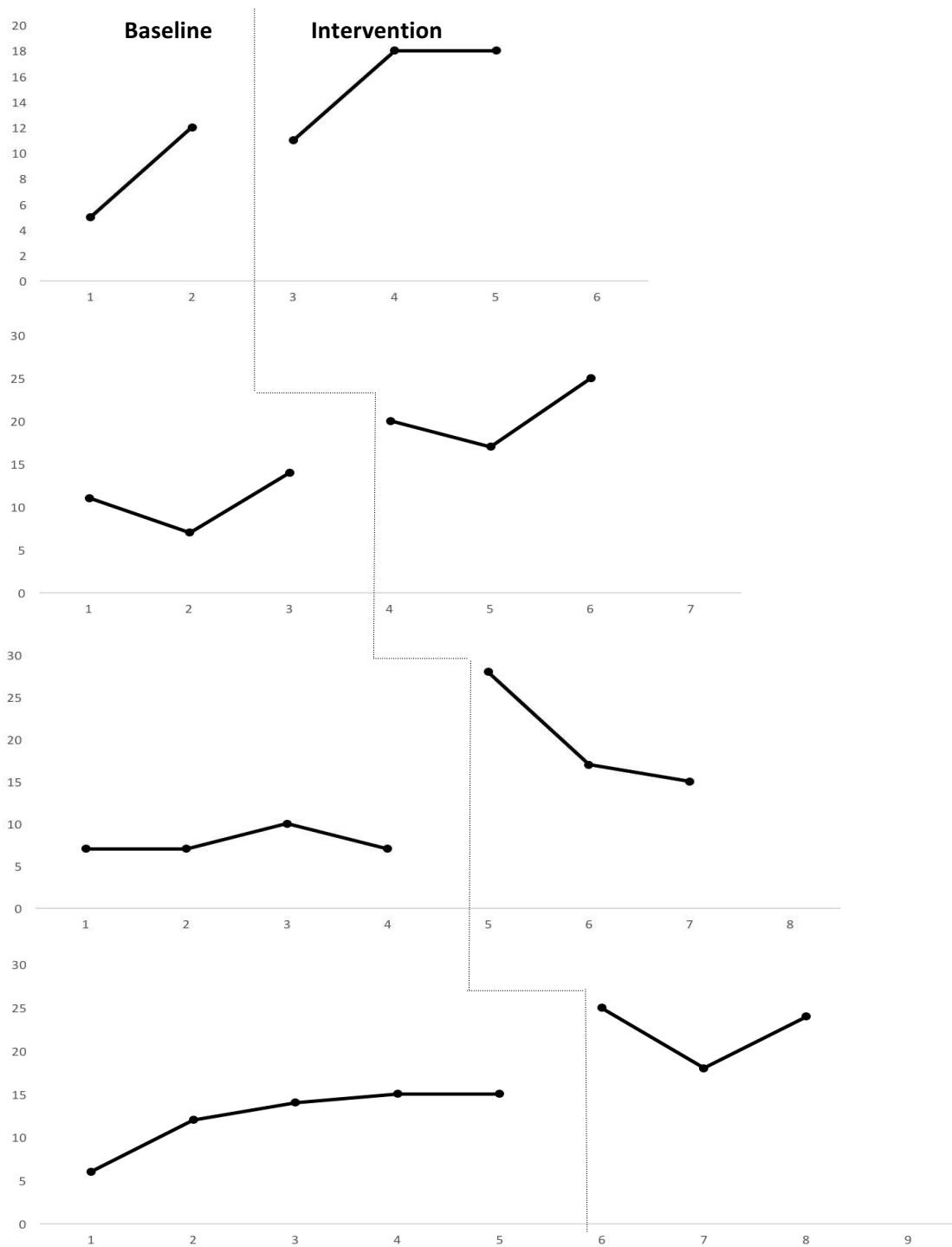
IV. Discussion

In this research study, I investigated a series of questions designed to develop and evaluate a process for assessing and improving pre-service teachers' ability to lead legally correct IEP meetings while facilitating parent participation.

Creating a Socially Valid Training Intervention

The first research question asked whether the content and methods of a training program designed to teach pre-service special educators to conduct legally correct IEP meetings inclusive of parent participation was socially valid as determined by a survey of practicing special educators. Our initial aim was to establish whether limited parent participation in IEP meetings was considered problematic for teachers in the field and to determine how it ranked in importance in relation to other concerns they had regarding IEPs. Results from the social validity survey of 17 working special education teachers indicated that they felt that the control administrators and educators exert over the direction and content of IEP meetings combined with the passive participation of parents is an important issue, with most of them ranking it among the top five issues they face in IEPs.

We also set out to determine how many of the survey respondents were designated as the primary facilitator in their IEP meetings. During the development of our intervention, we received input from special education administrators who were concerned that the training might not be valuable if the trained teacher was not the person in charge of facilitating the meeting. Some districts have protocols whereby this role is played by another team member such as a site administrator or a designated IEP chair. According to our survey, however, not only did most respondents chair their IEP meetings, but they also felt that they could implement the strategies taught in the intervention regardless of whether they were the

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designated meeting facilitator or not. This is important, as teacher educators are preparing

pre-service candidates who will work at school districts that vary in their approaches to the

IEP. Therefore, it is important to prepare pre-service teachers in a manner that will lead to

improved outcomes regardless of who is the designated facilitator. Overall teachers had very

positive feedback regarding the intervention and felt that they would be both willing and

able to use the facilitation strategies if they received the training. One respondent wrote: "I

would certainly implement these techniques, and the agenda with the reminders about the

strategies would be really helpful to reference during an IEP." The respondents also

indicated that they believed that if they implemented the strategies, increased parent

participation would occur as a result.

These findings were a critical part of establishing a meaningful intervention. A

training designed to yield positive outcomes for in-service teachers should be evaluated by

the professionals who are the intended focus of the intervention. This establishment of social

validity set the foundation for us to move forward and implement the training knowing that

according to practitioners in the field: 1) the issues we were addressing were of importance,

2) the content and methods we were using to train participants were deemed useful and

feasible to implement in a one day training workshop in real settings, and 3) that they

believed the intervention would result in the desired effect, increased parent participation in

legally correct IEP meetings.

Determining the Effectiveness of the Training Intervention

The next two research questions evaluated the effectiveness of the training

intervention and will be discussed in concert. The first question was: can participants learn

to use parent participation strategies in simulated IEP meetings across varying difficulty

levels. We found that participants increased the percentage of intervals in which they used

the targeted parent participation strategies during simulated IEP meetings across all levels of scenario difficulty following participation in the training intervention. The next question concerned determining whether pre-service teachers were also learning to facilitate legally correct IEPs that successfully addressed the components of an IEP meeting agenda. This was important to establish because a teacher who focused solely on facilitation of parent participation would not be considered effective in leading IEP meetings if they did not also know how to also successfully move the team through the legally required components of developing an IEP in order to create an individualized education plan tailored to provide educational benefit, a fundamental basis for a free and appropriate education (FAPE) under the law. The creation of an IEP requires both meaningful parent participation and systematically moving through the development process of the IEP in the required logical sequence (for example, discussing the student's present levels of performance, which then informs their areas of need, which then lead to goal development, which then inform the services deemed necessary, etc.). Data showed that participants increased their ability to complete the components of a legally correct meeting. These results indicated that the training intervention simultaneously increased pre-service teachers' ability to run legally correct meetings and their use of strategies to encourage parent participation. These are two important aspects of a training intervention intended to improve teachers' ability to facilitate IEP meetings.

Another important aspect of these findings is that they not only demonstrate the effectiveness of the training intervention, but they also demonstrate that using simulation with actors is an effective context for evaluating the meeting facilitation skills of pre-service educators. In a research review, Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) concluded that special education teachers needed to be provided with training to improve their meeting facilitation

skills. A body of research has also demonstrated that Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) are not successfully developing the skills student teachers need for supporting parent participation (Whitbread, Bruder, Fleming, & Park, 2007; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). Our preliminary data indicated that the approach under investigation in this study holds promise as a way to assess and improve pre-service educators' abilities related to these critical skills.

Parent and Actor Responding by Difficulty Level

The next research question investigated whether participant and actor responding varied according to the difficulty levels of the simulation scenarios. Visual inspection suggests that there was no difference in the patterns of responding in the easy and medium scenario levels but there was at the difficult level. In particular, in the easy and medium levels, increases in the participants' behavior appear to be associated with increases in the parent actor behavior. By contrast, in the difficult scenarios, although the pre-service teacher increased their use of parent participation strategies in pre and post meetings, there was not an associated increase in the parent actors' participation. It is unclear if the increase in parent participation strategies in the difficult scenarios was related to a practice effect and the experience of participating in simulations alone lead to an improvement in meeting facilitation skills (the hard scenario was the third scenario each student received) or if the increased demands involved in navigating these scenarios lead to the teachers becoming more attentive to parents.

The fact that the parent actors' participation in the difficult condition stayed level despite an increase in teacher facilitation strategies is relevant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the actor was behaving as instructed, by nature of the scenario specifics, to be distrustful or resistant towards the IEP team. It is realistic that under challenging

circumstances, a parent would not be responsive to friendly invitations to participate in the meeting. Second, although the parent was less responsive, we see that the participants keep trying to implement the strategies regardless and show improvement in their facilitation skills in the face of the more difficult context. It is important to consider that in a difficult IEP, where families are experiencing feelings of distrust with the district, these meeting-specific strategies presented in the current study are just one aspect of the relationship building that should take place in order to alleviate difficult relations between schools and families. Additional collaboration strategies that take place over time are also necessary.

Functional Relationship Between Training Intervention and Increases in Encouraging Parent Participation and Parent Actor Participation

The final research question asked if there was a functional relationship between the training intervention and increases in encouraging parent participation and parent actor participation as investigated using a multiple baseline design. An analysis of the full data set indicated several issues that raised a question about whether there was sufficient change across baseline and intervention phases to claim a functional effect with either dependent variable. For the dependent variable Encouraging Parent Participation, there were two participants whose data indicated a clear upward trend during the baseline phase. Three of the participants' data demonstrated an overlap of levels across baseline and intervention phases. For the dependent variable Parent Actor Participation, an overlap of levels was indicated across three participants and at least one participants' data showed a clear upward trend in baseline making it very difficult to establish a functional relationship.

This was a developmental study aimed to establish an approach to training new teachers and to develop that method. In keeping with the developmental stage of research, I

looked for additional patterns in the data that were meaningful and formed hypotheses based on those. During the study, as well as in the analysis phase, it was clear to participants, observers, and researchers that one of the actors behaved markedly different than the others. Specifically, she talked substantially more than the other parent actors. Since we had more than one type of data indicating that there was a difference in this actor, and since the actor did not participate in an intervention session for comparison, we decided to examine an ad hoc hypothesis. We treated the third actor as an outlier and excised the data. Analysis of the multiple baseline design data during the ad hoc analysis demonstrated a more compelling case that a functional relationship did exist between the training intervention and the dependent variables under investigation. Specifically, though there was an overlap in one participant for Encouraging Parent Participation, we saw clear level changes in the remaining three. For Parent Actor Participation, we again saw a clear level change in three of the participants. One issue with treating actor 3 as an outlier is that the excision of the data leaves Donelle with only two baseline points, which violates standards for single case design. Regardless, we feel that the ad hoc analysis provides valuable evidence that this approach to training educators holds promise moving forward. An expansion on the present study that included more participants and controlled for parents' duration of speaking is just one concrete modification that would make sense moving forward.

Future Directions

The findings of this study represent preliminary steps in the development of a methodology for training and assessing pre-service teachers to facilitate meaningful participation of parents in the context of a legally correct IEP. There are several areas that warrant future research based on the initial findings. First, it would be valuable to continue

the developmental research approach to this topic in order to explore and refine approaches to training and assessing educators. When the study began, it was intended to be a simple multiple baseline design. It soon became clear that a developmental approach allowed for analysis that moved beyond the limits of single case design in order to capture the complexities and subtleties often inherent in the problems of the research and practice of teacher education. This will likely be an important consideration in this line of work moving forward.

Another important next step would be to follow participants into the field to systematically observe actual IEP meetings and determine if these strategies are used by participants once they are in-service teachers. The author gathered anecdotal feedback regarding the participants' current practice in IEP meetings. Participants in the study were asked to reflect on whether the practices they learned in the intervention have sustained over time. They received an e-mail survey two years following their participation in the training program. One teacher said: "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." Another participant said the study taught her 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." She added "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." Similarly, 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 from this survey also suggest that the experience of participating in simulations helped student teachers practice their IEP skills in low-stakes settings, thus helping them experience less nervousness in actual IEPs where they can better focus on the meeting. One participant noted that following a difficult simulation: "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." Another participant said: "participating in this study has certainly increased my confidence…I've felt much more confident with my role during the meeting."

Finally, participants also responded that they found the use of the modified IEP agenda to be very valuable, both during the study and in subsequent IEP meetings. Of the four participants, the three who are currently in-service special education teachers noted that they continue to use and modify IEP agendas as a result of the training they received in the study. The IEP agenda analysis and modification activity, which rests on the notion that some parts of the meeting represent pivotal moments and opportunities for facilitating parent involvement, is another important aspect of this study that warrants additional research and refinement in the future.

In addition to observing pre-service teachers who have received the intervention in IEP meetings, it would also be important to measure the actual parent participation that

occurs as a result. Though the social validity survey indicated that teachers believed the strategies would result in increased parent participation, it would be critical to measure this in IEP meetings with real parents to ensure effectiveness. One approach to achieve this could involve giving the training to in-service teachers and using actual IEP meetings as the context to evaluate targeted behaviors as opposed to simulations. This may be complicated, however, due to a need for direct observation coding which could be in conflict with school district confidentiality concerns.

A related and final consideration that warrants further study is to investigate how the training intervention might impact the experience of culturally and linguistically diverse families, those who experience poverty, and others who are more likely to experience barriers to participation according to the research literature. It would be valuable to use this approach in IEPs with families from diverse backgrounds and gather data to assess whether modifications in the training might be necessary to improve outcomes for these families specifically.

In summary, the findings of this study contribute to the research literature by introducing a new methodology for training pre-service special educators to facilitate legally correct IEP meetings where parent participation is a central focus. Elbaum, Blatz, and Rodriguez (2016) suggested identifying and establishing high impact strategies to improve the ability of teachers to communicate with parents and facilitate parent participation. This study is a first step in investigating common barriers to parent participation in the IEP that have emerged in the literature and attempting to build a research base around a methodology for addressing them.

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IEP Project Scenario: Lucas Walker
Difficulty Level: Easy

General Directions to All:

   Should any of you wish to halt the scenario, you may do so at any time. This will

not affect the compensation provided to you for your time, nor your ability to

participate in the workshop portion of this project. This project has no bearing on your

coursework, grades, and/or ability to graduate. It is for research purposes only. The

entire simulation will be recorded for audio and video.

Student: Lucas Walker

Disability: Intellectual Disability

Age: 7 years

Grade: 1st

Language Skills: Lucas uses one and two-word phrases to make simple requests such

as "help," "more," "bathroom," etc. He also uses gestures and a limited number of signs.

Type of Meeting: Requested review by the parents to request time in the general

education setting.

Main Issues:

- Student has significant speech needs and parent is concerned that none of the students in his special education classroom are verbal.
- Parent wants the student included in a general education classroom part of the day in order to be around good language models.
- The speech therapist and special education teacher both think this is a good idea.
- The general education teacher is open to this as long is there is support provided.

- The principal wants detailed information about the case before signing off on providing additional support but tends to be very reasonable.

Participants: 5

- Special Education Teacher
- General Education Teacher – A.J. Shrieve
- Speech Therapist – Sid O'Connor
- Principal – Ryan Dexter
- Parent – Mr./Mrs. Walker

Setting:

Briggs Elementary School is located in Marston, a city with a population of about 50,000. Briggs Elementary serves a neighborhood with a pretty even mix of professional families of a high socio-economic status and a migrant community who works in local agriculture and struggles to make ends meet. Briggs Elementary serves approximately 400 students and has an active PTA that fundraises aggressively and pays for a wealth of enrichment activities that all students benefit from.

Common Knowledge:

Lucas is a 7-year-old with Intellectual Disability and limited verbal communication. He spends his full day in a Special Education Class but spends recess and lunch with a couple of his typically developing peers. He shows some interest in the other children, but his limited ability to verbally communicate hinders social interactions. His parents feel that he would benefit from more time with his peers in general education where he could be around good language models and build friendships that would encourage him to verbalize more.

Individual Knowledge:

- *Special Education Teacher*

    o Agrees that time around good language models has positive effects on student language acquisition and social skills.

    o *Desires*: Wants to help the parents get what they want for their student.

- *Speech Therapist*
    o Agrees that increased time in the general education setting would allow the student to be around good language models, which would benefit him socially and verbally.
    o *Desires*: To have the student spend more time in the general education class so he could work on socializing with peers.

- *Principal*
    o The principal is going to ask quite a few questions of the team to get an understanding of how Lucas' learning needs will be met during the time he is in the general education class and will want some clarification before signing off on the additional support this change would require. Overall, the principal is open to the idea of having the student spend more time in general education and tends to be very reasonable.
    o *Desires*: To get a full understanding of what this change of placement would mean and what resources it would require.

- *Parent*
    o Does not fully understand the services and support provided in the special education classroom. Thinks of special education is a bleak, unengaging, and segregated place where students are not expected to do much. Feels that being in the special education classroom full-time is limiting student's academic potential. Specifically concerned with student learning to read and does not believe student will be able to do that in a special education classroom. Also concerned that student will pick up bad behaviors of other kids in the class.
    o *Desires*: Feels that special education is not the best place for his/her child, especially not all day. Wants more time spent in the general education classroom around typically developing peers.
    o *Best Alternative*: Anything that allows the student more exposure to peers and/or general education curriculum.

- *General Education Teacher*

- General Education Teacher does not have much experience working with students with significant disabilities but is willing to give it a try if provided with the proper information and supports to help make it a success.
- Desires: Find out about the student and his needs and get the team to provide support for him in the general education class (not sure what 'support' is available but wants to learn).

Components of the Intervention Training Content

Content	Description
Introduction of training goals	Training goals: - Examine the content of an IEP agenda - Modify the IEP agenda to create a tool to support participants in sustaining training goals - Create a warm, positive meeting where all members give input - Increase parent participation in the meeting
Introduction of IEP agenda	Participants are given sample IEP agenda to review and are encouraged to: - Explain IEP agenda to parents - Ask them if they have questions - Ask them if there are specific items they would like to add to it - Use the agenda to help them stay on track with the progression of the meeting and help keep others on track Participants also learn that IEP agendas generally contain similar content but may vary according to their district and that the content of the agenda can differ slightly depending on the type of IEP meeting (annual, requested review, transition, etc.).
Taught IEP agenda modification strategy	Instructed to modify this agenda over the course of the training session to create reminders for them that they can use during future IEP meetings related to training goals Agenda Activity: During the remainder of the training, participants are given time following each content area activity to reflect on the IEP agenda and add reminders on it during critical times in the meeting when the specific skills addressed would be useful.

Creating a warm, welcoming environment	Participants are instructed to: - Use their body language, affect, and tone to help set potentially nervous parents at ease, even if they themselves are nervous - Think about being warm, calm, and attentive toward the parent - Encouraged to have casual, relaxed conversation when welcoming the parent - Avoid using overly formal language - Make sure parents are seated comfortably next to them so they can check in with them easily throughout the meeting - Ask them how they are doing and be attentive if they express concerns
Getting the meeting started	Participants: - Are instructed to facilitate introductions by going first - Are given an example phrase they could use. Video Activity: - Participants watch of video of themselves greeting parents and getting a meeting started. - Participants answer reflection questions about how they performed in relation to our goals for creating a warm welcoming environment. - Participants reflect on strengths they demonstrated and how they could change their practice to improve in the skills addressed in the training so far.
Parents' rights (procedural safeguards)	Participants are: - Instructed to reflect on real IEP meetings they have attended and how parents' rights were addressed in those meetings - Provided a model for explaining parents' rights in a way that is easy to understand and highlights some important rights, especially regarding parent participation and concerns they may have. - Instructed to ask the parents if they have further questions or want more explanation. - Instructed not to remind parents that they have seen these rights many times, which is common practice. This

implies parents should already know and understand their rights and should not have questions.

Establish time parameters	Participants are: - Instructed to find out from the team if there are specific time constraints - Instructed to let the team know that the meeting will reconvene if there is not enough time - Are given a model for explaining this to the team
Child centeredness - Share a positive anecdote or student work	Participants are: - Instructed to share a fun or positive anecdote or a sample of student work demonstrating progress as a way to set the tone for a child-centered meeting - Reminded that if the meeting becomes challenging or off-track, to bring the teams' attention back to the idea of working together as a team in order to do what is best for the child
Purpose of the meeting	Participants are: - Reminded about the different reasons IEP meetings are convened - Instructed to explain this information to parents in clear terms without jargon - Instructed to check for understanding and encourage questions - Instructed to turn the meeting to the person who requested it first, if applicable, so they can address the purpose the meeting. - Given a model for how they might phrase the above items
Facilitating parent participation	Participants are instructed to regularly check in with parents to ensure that: - They understand the process and content of the meeting - They are in agreement with what is discussed or are given opportunities to express disagreement and build consensus - They are regularly provided with opportunities to provide input and are explicitly given opportunities if they are not
Parents as experts	Participants are instructed that: - Parents are the experts on their children - They have known them the longest and will be involved

	with them long after they leave your school - Parent input is critical for creating an IEP that contributes to meaningful life outcomes for that specific family - Their ideals are not more important than the parents'. Listen to them.
Parent perspective-taking	Participants are instructed to: - Try to put themselves in the parents' shoes to understand their perspective. - Ask open-ended questions to determine parents' concerns, goals and desires for their child.
Parent participation video activity	Participants: - Are shown a video of themselves in a simulated IEP meeting. - Are instructed to stop the video anytime they see a missed opportunity to facilitate meaningful parent participation including checking for or facilitating: 1) understanding, 2) input, and 3) agreement.
Developing present levels of performance	Participants are: - Reminded that the IEP process must first start with establishing a student's strengths and needs. - Instructed to encourage all team members to share information relevant to the student's present levels of performance. - Reminded to stay vigilant about reporting assessment information clearly and without jargon - Reminded to watch parents for body language or signs that you should stop the meeting to check for or facilitate 1) understanding, 2) input, of 3) agreement - Provided with models for doing this - Encouraged to politely interject if another service provider is using jargon and provided models for doing this respectfully.
Summarizing and synthesizing the present levels of performance	Participants are: - Encouraged to ask the team for additional input following assessment reporting - If parents do not offer input, ask them if they are in agreement with the information presented or if they have things to add.

	- Provided with a model for how to do this.
	- Instructed that once all input is given, they should synthesize this information in a way that highlights students needs clearly.
	- Instructed to check for/facilitate understanding, input and agreement following your synthesis.
Discussing and developing goals	Participants are:
	- Reminded that the discussion and development of goals should be centered on the student's strengths and needs as discussed during the conversation about present levels.
	Video Clip Activity:
	- Participants watch a video clip example of an IEP team developing and presenting goals in a very clear and collaborative way.
	- Participants are asked to reflect on the different strategies used that contributed to a positive meeting where parent participation is facilitated.
	- If participants did not take note of some of the strategies present in the video, the instructor would highlight and discuss them.
Determining services and placement	Participants are:
	- Reminded that once you have the goals in place you decide on the services and placements that best facilitate meeting the goals.
	- Reminded to consider what a reasonable amount of time would be to work on each goal and the optimal services and environments for this.
	- Reminded about the principals of the least restrictive environment.
	- Instructed to keep this conversation tied to student needs, strengths, and goals.
	- Instructed that it is their job to facilitate the team coming to consensus.
	- Instructed to ensure that parents have played an active role in all aspects of the discussion and have not been "steamrolled" by professionals.
Consent	Participants are:

	- Instructed that once the team has come to an agreement, they should summarize the decisions made by the team regarding the IEP and present the offer of FAPE.
	- Instructed that once the offer is made, check for/facilitate parent understanding, input and agreement.
	- Instructed to ask if there are any additional questions or concerns.
	- Instructed that at this point the parent would sign the IEP document and the meeting would conclude.
	- Instructed to remind participants in the meeting that they can call another IEP meeting at any time if they would like to discuss issues or concerns.
Debriefing and soliciting feedback	Participants are: - Instructed to have an informal relaxed check-in with parents following the meeting to see how it was for them and to solicit feedback that would support their participation in the future. Debriefing video activity: - Participants watch a video example of a teacher debriefing with a family following a meeting and are asked to reflect on how the practice might be useful for the future.

I recently completed a research study designed to train teachers to increase their skills related to facilitating/leading IEP meetings. The specific skills we targeted were designed to help increase meaningful parent participation in IEP meetings. The goal of the training was to teach teachers specific skills that would help increase parent understanding, parent input, and a parents' ability to reach consensus during the meeting process.

Some examples of items covered in the training include:

- avoiding technical language and jargon

- giving an overview of the IEP meeting agenda to parents

- asking if they have specific things they would like to add to the agenda

- presenting ideas using clear, strengths-based language

- putting the child at the center of the planning

- providing parents with specific opportunities to give input and ask questions during meetings

- helping parents be a part of the process of coming to agreement over certain decisions (as opposed to passive participants)

The training also involved providing teachers with a modified IEP agenda that contained reminders for specific times in the meeting when they should incorporate these skills. For example, the portion of an IEP where assessment information is reported is a common time when professionals use jargon and technical language. This is a time in the meeting when

they are reminded to use clear language and to check for parent understanding. This part of the meeting is also a time when professionals are often speaking at parents instead of involving them. The modified agenda also includes reminders during this portion of the meeting to ask if the assessment information presented is in line with the parents' experiences with the child at home, ask them to share any additional information that might be useful for the team, and whether or not they agree with the decisions being made regarding the students' program.

As part of the study, teachers were able to practice these meeting facilitation skills in simulated IEP meetings. Data from the study shows that not only did the training increase the teachers' use of the specific facilitation strategies but that the strategies increase the parent participation in the simulated meetings.

Based on the information you have just read and your own experience as a special educator, please answer the following 10 survey questions:

Social Validity Survey

Facilitating Parent Participation in the IEP Process

1) Are you a special education teacher?
   Yes   No

2) Do you participate in IEP meetings as a special education teachers?
   Yes   No

3) Do you facilitate/lead IEP meetings as part of your role?
   Yes   No

   If someone else takes on this role, who is it?
   Open response

4) According to the IDEA, parents are supposed to be considered "full and equal participants" in the IEP meeting, which suggests an active, decision-making role. However, a review of 20 years of research studies looking at IEP meetings indicates that special educators and administrators exert considerable control over the direction of IEP meetings and content, while families are frequently passive participants. Given your knowledge and experience of special education and the IEP process, how important is this problem?

   1 = Extremely Important

   2 = Important

   3 = Neither Important/Unimportant

   4 = Unimportant

   5= Extremely Unimportant

5) How would you rank the above problem among obstacles related to the IEP process?

It is the top problem.
It is in the top five of problems.
It is in the top 10 of problems.
It is in the top 20 of problems.
It is not a problem.

6) How likely is it that a special education teacher could use the strategies featured in this intervention in real IEP meetings?

1 = Extremely Likely
2 = Likely
3 = Neither Likely or Unlikely
4 = Unlikely
5 = Extremely Unlikely

7) If you were provided training on implementing these facilitation techniques, how likely is it that you would use them in real IEP meetings?

1 = Extremely Likely
2 = Likely
3 = Neither Likely or Unlikely
4 = Unlikely
5 = Extremely Unlikely

8) If you were provided a training on how to use these techniques, how feasible is it that you would use them?

1 = Extremely Feasible
2 = Feasible
3 = Neither Feasible or Unfeasible
4 = Unfeasible
5 = Extremely Unfeasible

9) How likely is it that you could use these techniques in a meeting even if you were not facilitating/leading the meeting?

    1 = Extremely Likely
    2 = Likely
    3 = Neither Likely or Unlikely
    4 = Unlikely
    5 = Extremely Unlikely

10) In your opinion, how likely is it that these techniques would increase parent participation in the IEP meeting?

    1 = Extremely Likely
    2 = Likely
    3 = Neither Likely or Unlikely
    4 = Unlikely
    5 = Extremely Unlikely