

Special Education Law and Interprofessional Collaboration: Viewing Education Through an Occupational Lens

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Overview

- Background
- Needs assessment
- Research focus/recruitment
- Qualitative research design
- Results and implications
- Questions



“Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy, and sustainable human development.”

- Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations



Background

- In the United States, each eligible student's right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Despite IDEA's protections, many students lack the special education and related services they need to progress at school



Needs Assessment

- Host site: Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law) at Kennedy Krieger Institute
 - Maryland's only comprehensive medical-legal partnership
 - Community-based program of the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
- Issues with special education service provision



Research Focus/Recruitment

- Identifying issues in communication and collaboration among individualized education program (IEP) team members
- Parents or guardians, educators, attorneys, and other members of the IEP team (i.e., related service providers)
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved



Qualitative Research Design

Data Collection

- Individual interviews
- Focus group interviews

Data Analysis

- Descriptive coding
- Thematic Analysis (Saldaña, 2013)



Results

- Five themes
 - 1) Parental involvement and advocacy are key to success
 - 2) Invested educators are a great strength
 - 3) Team members and related professionals lack necessary knowledge
 - 4) Communication and collaboration are integral to the process
 - 5) System-based issues limit service provision and follow-through



A few quotations...

- *“The biggest determinant of success for a child is how engaged your parents are”*
- *“We are flying out of the seat of our pants”*
- *“The one hand doesn’t know what the other hand is doing”*
- *“The task was oftentimes impossible”*
- *“...he wanted to pull the fire alarm to get expelled so he wouldn’t have to go to school anymore”* - mother of a student with autism



Implications

- Limitations
- Consideration of at-risk populations such as English language learners and/or students living in poverty
- Future research and advocacy
 - Education/training
 - Relationship to occupational therapy



Questions for Feedback

- 1) Did you find any of the results particularly surprising or significant?
- 2) Any suggestions for improving future related research and/or advocacy efforts?
- 3) How can we promote educational equity despite the diverse needs that exist?



Thank you for attending!

[Project HEAL Website](#)

