Chapter 2

Understanding Inclusive Practices for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder Through the Individualized Education Plan Process

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ABSTRACT

Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often display atypical behaviors which general education teachers may not know how to handle. As a result, students with ASD may not get the opportunity to be educated alongside typical peers in the least restrictive environment. Segregated settings often become the most recommended setting for students with ASD. The way to change this practice is if the child's parent is willing to speak up and request an inclusive, less restrictive setting. Working together with the school site, as an equal partner, parents can collaboratively prepare the student for an inclusive setting. Inclusive environments can be overwhelming to a student with ASD, if they come from a smaller classroom environment. Preparing the student and teacher for the transition can help to eliminate potential barriers in the inclusion process. Barriers can be identified through the individualized education plan (IEP), and solutions can be devised within that process.

INTRODUCTION

The number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is on the rise in the United States and around the world. Based on the latest data, 1 in 59 children have been diagnosed with ASD in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). ASD is a spectrum disorder, and students with ASD may present with different symptoms and require different supports to ensure success in an inclusive educational setting. It is also a neurodevelopmental disorder thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors (Alhowikan et al., 2019). Individuals with ASD can display certain characteristics of the disorder that are alike, but the severity of how the individual is impacted will vary (DePape & Lindsay, 2016).

When diagnosed early, children with ASD can often receive early intervention services that will help them work through behavioral challenges and improve social language skills. When students are able to communicate, behavioral outbursts may decrease since they are able to tell a trusted adult what they need (Camarata, 2014). Without verbal skills, children with ASD tend to communicate through touch or yelling, which may be deemed inappropriate in a general education classroom. Supporting children early on and finding a communication method that meets their needs will better prepare them to participate in an inclusive setting (DePape & Lindsay, 2016).

There is a wide range of therapies to support children with ASD. Early intervention can include speech therapy, occupational therapy, or applied behavior analysis. Therapies are intended to teach the child and family lifelong skills that will help them through the educational system. Parent participation in therapies is crucial for the acquired skills to be carried over into the home setting (Jones et al., 2019). Parents working with agencies that provide support for their child will significantly increase the child's progress (Shea & Derry, 2019). Parent participation in therapies provides them the opportunity to learn from trained professionals on how to best meet their child's unique needs.

BACKGROUND

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) states that all students with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE for each student will depend on their individual needs, but the goal is to get all students with disabilities as close as possible to the general education environment with supplementary aids and supports. Supplementary aids and services must be unique and tailored to meet the child's individual needs (Kurth et al., 2019). They can include the support of a paraprofessional for one-on-one support or the use

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