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Alexandra VanSickle
avansickle@murraystate.edu

Alexandra Anna VanSickle
alexandra.a.vansickle@gmail.com

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Special Needs Students in Public Preschool

Alexandra A. VanSickle

Murray State University

Abstract

Preschool teachers that teach in a public preschool setting work with a significant amount of students with special needs. There are significant benefits from special needs students being exposed to a school environment at an early age, not just from the therapies provided by the institution, but also by the structure the school setting can provide. Teachers and administration play a vital role in preparing special needs students for the grade school classroom. The research based curriculums, structures, and classroom routines all play a role in the development of special needs children. By students with special needs attending a public preschool such as Headstart, they are provided with goals and teachers are able to actively measure their progress on a weekly basis. Preschool for special needs students is an incredible support to students and sets them up for long-term success in school.

Keywords: preschool, Headstart, public school, special needs, preschool teachers.

I. Introduction

Early childhood education is an important area of education that establishes a child's basis for learning prior to grade school. Many children are positively impacted through government funded early childhood educational institutions such as Head Start, Early Head Start, and preschools funded through the local school districts. Early childhood education is not just about education but about the child as a whole. Children with special needs are eligible for services through these preschools. There is a great impact on students with special needs who are afforded the opportunity to attend a school such as Head Start.

According to a study by Barnett (2008), "Well-designed preschool education programs produce long-term improvements in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. Some preschool programs are also associated with reduced delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood." This indicates the positive results that stem from early childhood education, not just for regular education students but specifically for students with special needs as well. The results of this study show how well preschool students respond to a preschool education, not just in the short term of their time in preschool, but also as they enter grade school and thereafter.

Teachers, administration, and service providers go above and beyond to meet the needs of special education students in the preschool classroom. Success in the preschool classroom is measured through comprehensive IEPs for students with special needs, this allows for a more individualized learning, higher expectations, and focuses on a variety of benchmarks. These

standards enforced by state government agencies improve the quality of the education provided within public preschool programs and should be considered when differentiating publicly funded preschool programs and privately owned daycares.

Public preschools meet a variety of needs throughout communities. Specifically, public preschools have the ability to aid in the development of special needs students before they begin grade school. This allows the teachers, administrators, and service providers in preschool programs to begin providing resources and working with special needs students and their caregivers to make goals and reach goals before they even begin school. Preschool can provide several different methods of learning that a public grade school may not be able to provide due to their limitations.

Public preschools provide licensed, educated, and trained teachers that many private preschool programs do not have to resources to hire. To be a public preschool teacher, there are many requirements and standards you must meet and keep up to date on a yearly basis, these requirements include a baccalaureate degree, completion of an IECE program, passing score on the IECE Praxis II, completion of a certification program, and a set amount of professional development hours per year. Teachers are the people the preschool students see on a daily basis and form a relationship with. Preschool teachers are held to higher standards than the teachers found in a typical daycare setting.

While privately owned daycare programs serve students well, most programs are unable to hire teachers with the background and education needed to promote education in the way public preschool programs, such as Head Start, are able to. The education and background of teacher hires makes a significant difference in the quality of the education provided, especially for students with special needs or disabilities.

Administrators are equally important in the education of preschoolers, including those with special needs. Administrators play a large role in the preschool classroom. While students may not see them on a daily basis, they are constantly working with families and outside providers to ensure the child's safety, education, and care. Administration is responsible for the hire of every person involved in the preschool classroom, their role is vital and it is important that they understand the complexity and responsibility that is involved in teaching preschoolers and differentiating education to support the needs of students with disabilities.

Service providers are an incredible asset to the preschool classroom. Service providers not only assist the special needs students, but also come alongside teachers and parents to give appropriate therapy suggestions for daily activities for those special needs students. Special needs students have different educational needs than those of their peers. Things that seem simple to a typically developing child can be difficult for a special needs student with a disability. Service providers and therapists are educated in a manner that allows them the background knowledge and training to develop methods of teaching and engaging students with special needs in ways that promote their overall wellbeing.

State and Head Start funded classrooms are going to look different at times. While they serve the same purpose, their models can be different to accommodate the different populations they serve. Within these classrooms, special needs students are served in many different ways. Serving special needs students in the preschool classroom gives them a great opportunity to learn and grow in a safe, school environment prior to the rigorous learning that is grade school. It also allows special needs students to acclimate to the climate of a general education setting. Becoming comfortable with the schedule and structure of school in a more relaxed and play-based environment, allows students with special needs or disabilities to ease into the school model that will be expected of them in grade school.

In preschool, students with special needs must have IEPs, just as they would in grade school. IEPs, or Individualized Education Plans, are created the same way in the preschool classroom as in a grade school classroom. However, by creating the IEP earlier and addressing the need more quickly, the student is far more likely to be successful in school. IEP progress reporting is a regular part of the preschool teacher's requirements, it is done on a regular basis in a way that is easily measurable.

II. Teacher Requirements for Teaching in a Public Preschool

Having pursued a degree in IECE education, I am well aware of the requirements and expectations of the IECE degree program. While some IECE programs may differ, the majority of programs follow this model. To teach in a public preschool classroom, it is a requirement to have an Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education Degree, or IECE. An IECE program is an

accredited program that is intended to provide teachers with the ability to work in early intervention, care, and education for children from infants to kindergarteners. This includes infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarteners. This degree also allows teachers to teach children with and without disabilities. It is important to understand the difference between an IECE teacher and an Elementary Education teacher. Where an elementary education teacher might have a collaborative classroom wherein special needs students are included in the general education classroom but also have service providers, therapists, and a special education teacher available, an IECE teacher would act as the general education teacher as well as the special education teacher.

A. The Requirements of a Public Preschool Teacher.

In the pursuit of an IECE degree, in addition to the typical classes required to graduate with the degree, interdisciplinary early childhood education students also must pass the PRAXIS. The PRAXIS is a series of tests that measure academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. These tests were originally designed to provide assessments for students entering teacher preparation programs. Candidates hoping to enter the field of teaching as an Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educator are held to the same standard as they would be entering any other educational field.

Preschool teachers must complete a number of practicum hours, as well as student teaching. Practicum hours are hours spent within an early childhood education classroom. Practicum allows for active learning, where each student is spending time within a classroom that allows them to practice the skills they will need to serve students in a preschool classroom

once they graduate and leave the program. Depending on the program, IECE students that are completing practicum and student teaching will spend time within an infant classroom, toddler classroom, preschool classroom, and within a kindergarten classroom over two semesters. These experiences are intended to prepare them for their own teaching career and give them a mentor by which they can learn and grow in their skills while still being monitored and critiqued. The length of time spent in each classroom depends upon the program the student is enrolled.

Time spent in the classroom prior to graduation is very important. Student teaching has been described as the capstone experience of the preservice teacher education program and is critical to the process of preparing future teachers (Borne & Moss, 1990). The most significant learning is a direct result of the active learning candidates spend with children in the classroom, and through the professional development host teachers can provide. The host or mentor teachers can mold and shape how the candidate teacher grows and hones his or her teaching strategies. Teaching candidates having a visual example to lead them in their efforts can be extremely helpful, so long as they are open to constructive criticism and are willing to make changes to better serve their students.

Smalley, Retallick, and Paulsen (2015) completed a study, wherein they had student teachers complete a survey questioning the extent to which student teachers believed traditional student teaching skills and activities were relevant as part of the capstone teaching experience. Within the study, Smalley, et. al. (2015) found most of the student teaching constructs to be relevant. Based on what student teachers believed to be most important in their own learning

experience, the student teachers in this study believed that the current student teaching model was effective and helpful in aiding in their educational experience to become teachers.

B. Importance of Classroom Exposure prior to Graduation

Student teachers in the interdisciplinary early childhood education field can gain much from their time student teaching. They are given the opportunity to review lesson plans, and practice making lesson plans. They are able to learn new ways of progress monitoring, and different goals they might be able to set for IEPs. Student teachers are able to see different ways of monitoring and assessing behaviors. Behavior management and classroom management are essential for preschool classrooms, especially those with special needs students. The student teaching experience gives great insight into methods and classroom structures that meet students needs and help manage behaviors in a supportive fashion. Student teaching also allows students an up close look at programs and systems used by teachers. Assessment tools and practice with those tools aids in the development and learning of preschool teacher candidates. In addition, many IECE programs do not have courses catered to the technology typically used and provided within the classroom and how to use that technology appropriately when implementing instruction and objectives. During student teaching, student teachers have the opportunity to use and implement preschool level technology into their own lesson plans, and become familiar with the programs available to them. There are several specific areas of the education field students are not subjected to prior to practicum hours and student teaching. Student teaching gives a more realistic idea of how to implement lessons, what materials will be available to them as teachers, and how students will respond to the ways in which they plan to implement lessons.

C. Tasks Charged to Successful Preschool Teachers

After receiving an Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education degree from an accredited university, and a teaching certificate, teachers must then assess their responsibilities within the classroom after accepting a teaching position. The first task most early childhood educators are charged with is the organization and set up of their classroom. Classroom organization is a large aspect of the preschool program as a whole. How the classroom is set up aids in the education process for preschool students. While preschool students with special needs or disabilities need a sense of consistency and routine, it is also important for materials to be changed on a regular basis to aid in the units of study. There are many things to take into consideration when organizing centers and setting out materials, manipulatives, and pretend play items.

1. Classroom Organization

Several studies have been completed on the effect of the organization of the preschool classroom on the preschool student. While few studies have linked the instructional quality to classroom organization, it has been found that there are fewer behavioral issues based on the organization of the classroom. According to Krzewina (2012), “higher quality emotional support and classroom organization in Educare classrooms were found to predict fewer behavioral problems among preschoolers. Educare programs serve children from impoverished backgrounds in cities throughout the country. Results of this study demonstrate the potential benefits of investment in training that promotes strong teacher support and organizational skills in preschools serving disadvantaged children.” Classroom organization affects the behavior of children. The way a classroom is organized can aid in any behavioral issues that might be present for preschool students both with special needs/disabilities and without. Ensuring the classroom is

organized in a way that promotes learning and eases the students' ability to be productive helps aid in the students' success.

In addition to the simple importance of the classroom composition for early childhood learning purposes, in many public preschool classrooms there are classroom assessments to monitor the classroom as a whole. Things such as examples of cultural differences and mathematical concepts are some of the aspects that are checked for when classroom assessments are completed. ECERS 3 is one type of assessment used to check for appropriate preschool learning materials displayed and used throughout the classroom.

“The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and its revised version (ECERSR) were designed as global measures of quality that assess structural and process aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs,” Brunsek, Perlman, Falenchuk, McMullen, Fletcher, and Shah (2017). Another type of assessment is called CLASS. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS, is an observation based tool used to assess the quality of teacher-child interactions within the preschool classroom. Both CLASS and ECERS are very similar to one another in their purpose and procedure. These tools are not simply used for monitoring the classroom resources and materials available to students, they also monitor the teacher-student interactions, and the types of interactions. The intention is to improve the quality of childhood education through monitoring, assessing, and giving feedback. To ensure adequate assessment ECERS and ECERSR assesses a variety of things within the preschool classroom. “The ECERS and ECERS-R are made up of 37 and 43 items respectively.

All items are rated on a seven-point scale. Both versions consist of the following seven subscales:

- 1) space and furnishings;
- 2) personal care routines;
- 3) language-reasoning;
- 4) activities;
- 5) interactions;
- 6) program structure and
- 7) parents and staff,” Brunsek, et. al. (2017).

ECERS is a great example of the expectations and standards set out for preschool classrooms all the way down to the positioning of each play center. Centers are areas of play within a classroom. There are typically ten centers in any given preschool classroom. The most common centers are blocks, pretend play/housekeeping, music, art, science, reading, manipulatives/fine motor, writing, water/sand table, and some type of gross motor area both within and outside the classroom. These centers aid in the education process for preschoolers. They do this by accommodating the way many children learn at this stage of life, through play. “Early education classrooms are designed to provide children with a variety of experiences throughout the day. Although most teachers may view this classroom structure as necessary to meet rules or regulations, this structure allows for teaching different kinds of learners,” (Brennan 2008). The different centers allow students to choose to play, and as a result learn, in a way that is most pleasing to them. Students have the opportunity to use manipulatives as visuals to count

and do mathematics. Students practice their writing skills at the writing center with things such as stencils or mimicking visuals they see within the center.

Throughout their play, students are prompted to ask important questions in each center. Teachers are able to use guided questioning to allow students to ask and answer, draw conclusions, and find solutions on their own. Students are able to identify with different toys and learning materials. Using this particular type of teaching strategy for preschool aged children engages students further and increases their interest in the learning process. As a result, not only are they learning new and applicable things within the preschool classroom, they are also learning how to process information and find answers for themselves. In addition to the benefits of typically developing preschool students, this also enhances the experience for special needs preschool students.

While Play-based learning is a positive learning experience for preschool children, it is important to note that students need structure and a structured learning environment to gain knowledge in areas of school readiness. Students with special needs especially need to have structure and specific learning time set out within the preschool schedule. During a study of play based learning by McGuiness (2005), it was found that several students were underprepared for guided reading and other academic skills that would aid in their academic development. The research concluded that because of the lack of informal teaching of reading and lack of practicing letter-sounds in the program, children were then unprepared (McGuiness et al., 2015).

2. Differentiated instruction

It is important to consider how curriculum will be incorporated into the preschool classroom. While play is important, especially for such young students in the preschool classroom, it is also important to have time where the teacher is instructing and guiding students in learning. This time for structured learning allows students to acclimate themselves to a more formal classroom setting and what will be expected of them upon entering grade school. This, sometimes short period of time, is preparing students and setting them up for future success in their education.

Differentiating instruction for all students in the preschool classroom is important. It is important to be prepared with different techniques for teaching similar units or lessons. A public preschool classroom has a significant array of manipulatives, toys, and sensory items that aid in the learning process for special needs students. IECE teachers need to be prepared to implement different methods and be open to changing how things are taught in order to see what fits best for different students. Since not all students learn the same, teaching methods and strategies should be ever changing and growing to meet the needs of preschool students.

The education received by early childhood educators allows teachers to find specific items that cater to the individual needs of students with special needs. Sensory play, fine motor skills, and gross motor skills are some of the areas specifically included when providing materials in preschool classrooms for students with special needs. Early childhood education public preschool teachers have significantly more resources available to them that allows them to

better meet the needs of their students and set them up for a successful learning experience within the preschool classroom. Having teachers in the preschool classroom with an education that allows the special needs and general education children to learn and grow is beneficial. “Teacher-managed activities have the potential to benefit children’s development. Studies show that children who were in academically-based preschool programs showed larger gains in language, literacy, and math skills,” (Coste 2017). It is clear, based on research, that teacher lead activities within the classroom produce positive results. When Coste (2017) was comparing play-based v. developmental preschools, she found while developmental preschools scored higher for kindergarten readiness, play-based preschools scored higher later on in school. It could be concluded from such a study that a combination of play-based and developmental teaching strategies should be implemented in the preschool classroom to set students up for the most short-term and long-term success. Teachers are able to keep students engaged with their interactions and activities catered to the needs of their classroom. Studies have seen accelerated growth in the federally and state funded preschools that have the ability to follow a curriculum and hire qualified teachers to guide students in language, math, and other academic skills. All these simple contributions add up to children succeeding in meeting their goals and growing academically, socially, and emotionally.

3. Progress Monitoring

While the classroom organization and resources available set students up for successful learning experiences, it is equally important that the early childhood educator be able to monitor the progress made by special needs students. Progress monitoring is important documentation

done by interdisciplinary early childhood educators for their students with special needs within the preschool classroom.

Progress monitoring is defined by Carta (2003) as a scientifically based practice that is used to assess students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Assessing and monitoring the development of all children is important. Assessing and monitoring in the preschool classroom is primarily used to determine the existence of a delay or disability, to determine eligibility for services, to determine what to teach and how to teach it (IEP goals and objectives), to monitor an individual's progress, and to determine if your curriculum as a whole is improving the quality of the education your students are receiving. It is a requirement for Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educators to monitor the progress toward goals for special needs students. In addition to keeping a running record of the progress students have made throughout the school year, this holds teachers accountable for assessing the progress of their students and assessing themselves in how they are teaching the students with special needs and the success of their methods.

Using progress monitoring, teachers are able to set goals for their students, and see the progress they make, as well as, see areas they are not progressing and make decisions on how to alter their methods and increase the progress rate of their students. Depending on the areas in which a special needs student needs to develop, specific and measurable goals are set for the student.

Some of the areas to consider with any special needs student when developing goals are gross motor, fine motor, speech/communication, peer interactions, and visual needs. For gross motor skills it is important to consider bringing in a physical therapist. The outside resources available to Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educators including the service providers, are able to provide different suggestions that could be helpful to the development of special needs students. It is important to consider the individual student and that student's needs when developing goals. It is equally important to cooperate and coordinate with others who share an interest in the child's education, this includes parents.

Public preschool teachers must consider each students' needs when developing progress monitoring and determining which needs should be monitored and how closely. The monitoring of goals is completed on a regular basis and does not begin until after the goals for the students with special needs have been set and an IEP has been completed. According to McWilliam (1995), In inclusive settings, therapy services can be more or less integrated on a continuum of service delivery models. This would be helpful to teachers, because it allows teachers to implement the strategies professional service providers use within the classroom even when the service providers are not present. While this might be more time consuming for preschool teachers to implement strategies from service providers, it can be extremely beneficial for special needs students who are seen by therapists and service providers for a limited amount of time on a weekly basis. Simply implementing a couple of tasks suggested by professional service providers could significantly aid in the development of special needs students.

Teachers are not only responsible for creating progress monitoring for each special needs student, but also monitoring on a daily and weekly basis the progress each student within their classroom has made. Teachers must use research-based methods to monitor their students throughout the year. Teachers must also keep in direct contact with parents and service providers for their students about the progress made on a regular basis. Service providers will many times contribute to notes on progress monitoring to give a different perspective on the progress the student has made. This can be helpful for preschool teachers to allow the service providers or therapists to monitor the needs they are meeting and addressing on a regular basis. However, providers and therapists should still collaborate with teachers to ensure their strategies are successful in the long-term.

Since progress monitoring must be consistent, preschool teachers are responsible for determining the best method of keeping up with progress while teaching and instructing their students. This can at times be a difficult and time consuming task. While some teachers have a paper form available within the classroom they can refer to as needed, others use technology such as tablets or phones for quick and easy access to goals and objectives and the ability to take notes on specific examples of the student meeting an objective. Something as simple as this should be considered when making a decision on how to monitor progress. The ease of access can greatly affect how well teachers monitor their students.

It is also important for the teacher to reflect back and see how different teaching strategies aided in the education process for different students, or alternatively, detracted from

the learning process for special needs students. Teachers will work to find what works best to fit within their classroom instructional model. What works best for some teachers, may not be best for others. It is important to find a model that works best for each individual's educational needs.

To best teach and monitor learning, there have been several suggested methods. Sharon Raver (2004) gives a three step process that includes: identifying the skills to be taught, teach identified objectives during activities and routines, determine how and when monitoring will occur. "Like teaching, data collection needs to be dispersed throughout the day. Data can be taken at any time during an activity or routine, such as during clean up or during transitions. By monitoring a child's acquisition of individual objectives within routines, a teacher is not only tracking a child's progress, but is monitoring whether a child can demonstrate the skill when it is needed," (Raver 2004).

Progress monitoring of special needs students can take up a substantial amount of time for the preschool teacher. Especially if the best methods are not in place to allow time for instruction as well as monitoring. It is clear that preschool teachers must be held to a higher standard when it comes to the management of their time. Another time consuming task preschool teachers are charged with is the creation and implementation of lesson plans. Lesson plans are important for anyone within the education field. Lesson plans allow teachers to plan out their subjects throughout the week, and plan how to incorporate specific areas of learning into different activities. Lesson plans hold teachers accountable to the school administration for what they are teaching and how they are implementing their objectives. Lesson plans will sometimes

include every detail of the lesson, while others give a broad overview of what teachers intend to cover. This information will depend on the teacher, and the requirements expected by administration.

4. Lesson Plans

Lesson plans can be a little more difficult in a preschool classroom with special needs students. When incorporating students with special needs, teachers need to consider how they will include the students in their plans, and if specific students with disabilities will willingly participate. Small groups are a large part of the education process in preschool classrooms. Small groups are used in the special education setting because it allows teachers to differentiate based on how the groups of students are divided. While these groups may make instruction easier, it can be more time-consuming to plan lessons differentiated for three to four different groups of students.

Lesson planning in the preschool classroom can include changing out of play items in different centers to make those centers relevant to the subjects that are being taught. This allows for a more meaningful learning experience for the students within the classroom. It also gives more opportunity to prompt students to ask questions relevant to the subject they are learning about.

Having worked within a Head Start Program in Kentucky from 2016-2019, I am familiar with the curriculum used by Head Start in the Western Kentucky region. Additionally, I have witnessed the ways in which several preschool teachers have incorporated the new curriculum

into their teaching strategies and daily activities. The preschool curriculum used within the region should be considered in lesson planning for preschool students. More recently public preschools have incorporated specific research based curriculums for individual classroom use. Teachers are expected to use the curriculum and materials that are provided by the curriculum company but are also encouraged to incorporate appropriate lessons previously used to aid in the differentiation of learning. In Kentucky, the curriculum adopted by many preschool programs is called Creative Curriculum. This curriculum specifically promotes exploration and discovery as a way of learning for preschool students in hopes of promoting confidence in the early learner. The curriculum itself is intended to aid teachers in implementing a developmentally appropriate program for students with diverse backgrounds, skill levels, and students with disabilities. Aside from Creative Curriculum, there are several other curriculums available to purchase for the preschool classroom. The implementation of the curriculum depends upon which curriculum is promoted by the school. This is something teachers need to learn about and research to aid in their teaching.

Preschool teachers are responsible for creating and implementing hands on activities relevant to what they are teaching. To appropriately plan for these types of activities, teachers many times work on activities at home to prepare them for their students' participation. Lesson plans can include field trips or bringing in people to give further information to aid in the student's learning. Field trips aid in the learning process of students by allowing them to hear new information from a different source and giving them a different perspective. While field trips are beneficial to the learning process of preschoolers, they must be planned for well in

advance. Many times teachers are responsible for organizing the location, confirming the finances to allow students to visit the location, organizing transportation, and additional support to aid with management of the students during the field trip. While sometimes the preschool administration will aid in some of these tasks, primarily, the preschool teacher is responsible for the planning of the trips. Lesson planning includes several aspects and is a large task charged to the special needs preschool teacher. The basic planning alone can be tedious and time consuming. To include the needs of disabled or special needs students can cause planning to become even more exhausting.

5. Parent-Teacher Communication

Outside of the responsibilities within the classroom such as lesson planning, progress monitoring, and the set up and organization of the classroom, preschool teachers are responsible for keeping regular and reasonable contact with parents. Communication is a major aspect of any school environment. Radic-Hozo (2014) explains, “As stated above *word*, verbal communication is the foundation of every communication, including with pre-school children, some of which are still learning to speak.”

Parents of preschoolers play a significant role in their child’s life. In the article *Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children (2017)*, it gives more specific outcomes of parent involvement in their child’s education, “Supporting parents’ efforts to help their children develop during the preschool years improves child school readiness, reduces child behavior problems, enhances child social skills, and promotes academic success.” It is important to have a great working relationship with parents as a preschool teacher. Many people, and

teachers specifically, believe that a parent knows their child better than anyone, and should be the first person to contact when trying to gain perspective or more information about the child and how best to aid in their education. While it is widely known that teachers are responsible for parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year. Many teachers, especially preschool teachers keep in contact with parents on a weekly, or even daily basis. Parents have information about students that teachers will never have, about their background, home life, likes/dislikes, experiences, family, etc. It is important to take the information parents give seriously and consider this information when working with and teaching the child.

Teachers have a responsibility to keep in contact with parents regarding the education of their students. For students with special needs, this is especially true. More times than not, students with special needs parents' will be more active in communicating with the teacher and inquiring on how school is going for their child. Preschool education for special needs students is not just the formal education of the student, but includes gross motor, fine motor, speech, social/emotional, and more depending on the needs of the student. While service providers are responsible for addressing these types of goals, the preschool teacher is the go between for the parents on these goals. The teacher is responsible for providing the parent with regular updates when asked about progress in any specific area. This means that the preschool teacher is also responsible for regular communication with service providers to keep up to date with the progress of any students with special needs.

Parents of preschoolers are entrusting very young children to preschool teachers. Many times these parents are more worried and attached to their children than grade school students. Due to this, contact between parents and teachers is most likely more frequent. Teachers will use different programs to remain in regular contact with parents, such as Remind, Seesaw, and other technological methods to keep parents updated on the preschool classroom and their preschooler in particular. Students with special needs or disabilities will have differing needs than typically developing students, it is important to speak with parents about the ways in which the teacher could/should differentiate to promote the learning of their student based on that student's needs.

6. Incorporating Differentiation

Differentiation has been discussed briefly when talking about lesson plans and progress monitoring. Differentiation is legally defined as the action or process of differentiating. Moreover, in education, differentiation is a wide variety of teaching techniques and lesson adaptations used by educators to instruct diverse groups of students, with different needs in the same learning environment or classroom. It is important to know what differentiation is before looking at the ways in which preschool teachers differentiate to accommodate special needs preschool students. Brennan's (2008) Theses explains the importance of differentiation:

Children in a group are at different skill levels and progress at different rates. Teachers need to be aware of child differences and determine how best to meet the learning needs of all students... Through Differentiated Instruction, teachers are able to create classroom environments that are respectful, welcoming, and safe for learning (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers utilizing the DI approach acknowledge every child where he or she is in the

learning process, accept differences and figures out how to work with each child's needs.

(pp. 1)

Differentiation in the preschool classroom requires the teacher to change their instruction methods, materials, or sometimes even the activity to allow special needs students to participate in a way that allows them to learn in an effective way. This is another example of how using small groups or the pull-out method can be helpful. Small groups are typically three to four groups of four to five students depending on how many students are in the classroom. This can sometimes be difficult for preschool teacher, because they cannot be with all three to four instructional groups explaining the work at the same time. During small groups it is important for preschool teachers to have additional help in the form of either instructional aids, or even parents. With these people assisting in the implementation and work of each small group, it is important that the preschool teacher explain the activity and instruction beforehand, so anyone assisting can understand and better implement any differentiation. When implementing the pull-out method, it is also important that teachers have additional classroom support in the form of aids or parents. During this time, the teacher can spend time with a specific student and have an opportunity to assess the child on several different levels. It is important that teachers assess which method works best for each student. Doing this sets students up for success and aids in their learning potential.

In addition to making a determination on what setting the child works best in, it is equally important to understand the child's learning styles, preferences, likes, and dislikes. While a good

way to gauge some of these things is through getting to know the students and communication with the parents, assessment is also incredibly helpful in getting a learning profile. Different assessments can give a research based perspective to the child's level of learning and approach to learning. Similar to progress monitoring, assessment is an ongoing process in the classroom. Pre Assessment for differentiation purposes allows you to see where a student begins, it is also helpful to look at later on to see the areas in which they have grown the most. Teachers should use pre-assessment data for planning, on-going assessment, tracking of growth, keeping student profiles, and helping parents understand their child in the learning process (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

There are specific things teachers should keep in mind when utilizing and implementing differentiation. Differentiated Instruction is an approach based on principles referenced by Tomlinson (1999):

1. The teacher is clear about the most important pieces of the subject to be taught
2. The teacher understands student differences and is able to build on these differences
3. There is no separation between assessment and instruction
4. The teacher focuses on content, process and product and how to adjust them
5. The work students participate in is respected
6. Teachers and students are collaborative partners in learning
7. Focus of the DI classroom is on the student and the student's growth
8. A differentiated classroom is flexible Differentiated instruction is focused on helping students learn in a manner that they can understand and in a context that is real.

Differentiated instruction is one of the most important aspects of the preschool classroom for special needs students. The structure of the classroom aids in the development of differentiation for students. This was referenced earlier when discussing the set up and organization of the classroom.

Differentiation is not a curriculum used within preschool classrooms, and many times is not incorporated into curriculums available to preschool programs. It is something preschool teachers must learn about and continue to stay up to date on through additional education or professional development. “At the surface, “professional development” in early childhood programs refers to a number of experiences that promote the education, training, and development opportunities for early childhood practitioners who do or will work with young children birth to age 8 years and their families,” (Sheridan, 2009).

7. Professional Development

Professional development is an important aspect of the teaching profession in general, because it allows teachers to prepare better and/or in different ways to engage their students in learning. Preschool teachers are expected to enrich their student’s educational experiences, while also having those same students prepared to enter kindergarten. Professional development gives preschool teachers ways in which to develop their teaching skills in several different areas. Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, and Knoche outline the specific objective of professional development in early childhood education:

The second objective of early childhood professional development involves sustaining high quality professional practices by enhancing systems and individuals to engage in activities that are self-sustaining and growth-producing. This involves ensuring that the responsibility for delivering effective services and facilitating ongoing growth and development among practitioners is transferred from a formal trainer (coach, consultant, group facilitator) to individuals and groups of professionals within early childhood settings (2009).

While public preschool teachers have the knowledge and education mandated by the state to begin teaching, it is equally important that they continue to learn new research based methods to incorporate into their teaching. Having quality professional development for educators gives a refreshing new perspective in several different areas of education, allowing them to better serve their students and differentiate instruction based on new and updated information. Preschool teachers are not the only staff that attends this type of training and development, administrative staff many times will also attend professional development to gain a better understanding of the research based methods teachers are encouraged to implement.

III. The Role of Administration in Public Preschools

The administration of publicly funded preschool programs is important. The administration plays vital roles in parent involvement and communication, teacher and assistant support, coordination of service providers, and much more. Depending on the specific job of an administrator in a public preschool, there are several responsibilities the administrator will have, not just in ensuring the program itself runs smoothly, but also keeping in contact with families to

ensure the well being of the children within the program, Kivunja refers to the administration in early childhood education as the leaders, and describes these leaders in this way:

Leadership is about enabling followers to bring about desired change by setting up organizational structures which enable the cultural synergies within the ECE context to be shared and dispersed within the ECE organization between and among all members involved in ECE. Leadership is important because it is responsible for calling for a commitment and passion from every member of the ECE setting to make a contribution which results in a positive difference in the lives of the children in the ECE context and to help lay the foundation which will help them to develop into productive citizens who will be able to live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies.

(2015)

A. The Primary Function of Preschool Administration

Administration is essential for a preschool program to run efficiently and effectively. The leaders in the administration for early childhood education, set the tone and culture for the entire organization. We see that the administration roles in early childhood education are more complex than those of grade school administration, as Kivunja (2015) explains, “The people, the place and the practices that s/he has to manage and lead involve intricate structural and cultural dynamics, different from a schooling context of learning stages more advanced than the ECE stages.” Administration in early childhood is held to an especially high standard, in that they are responsible for carrying out a program that cares for very young children.

B. Administration within and outside the Classroom

Administration does not always play a significant role within the preschool classroom. While you will find administrators in the classroom at times to observe or assist the teacher, administrators primary roles exist outside the classroom walls. Administrative staff is responsible for the hiring of staff and teachers. In public preschools, administration is responsible for attending ARCs and aiding in the assessments of children within the program. Administration organizes and aids in the original assessments to determine eligibility for potential students. Administration continues to assess children during their time in the preschool classroom. If the preschool teacher ever is having difficulty with behavior or classroom management, they should be able to ask administration for further support. Administration becomes the backbone of the preschool program. They aid in the implementation of curriculum and progress monitoring, they assist within the classroom when there is a need, they make decisions on who to employ and where. Administrators make decisions that affect the entire preschool and early childhood program. It is important that administrators stay up to date on how to support and lead the preschool program well. Bloom and Rafanello (1995) explain,

The improvement of early childhood administrative ability to provide behavioral support and leadership may be an often overlooked avenue of intervention. Targeting directors for professional development may be an important and effective use of resources, particularly if those training opportunities accommodate for the variance in experience and skill among directors and cultivate directors as change-agents, enacting responsive systemic change (Bloom & Rafanello, 1995).

Successful administration is dependent upon the people in administrative roles. It is important to hire the correct types of people in order to run a successful preschool program.

According to Dos (2015) the characteristics for successful administrators include,

[B]eing good-humored, hardworking, and patient were stated as the outstanding ones.

Having full knowledge of regulations, leadership skills, taking initiatives, and having a broad vision and persuasive skills were seen as administrative characteristics. Moreover, they have professional skills, such as having full knowledge of curriculum and regulations, successful management skills, ability to make unbiased and objective decisions, and ability to motivate teachers and students if required.

Clearly, there are high expectations of administrators and significant needs within the classroom that administrators are expected to meet. Administrators are also responsible for coordinating the necessary service providers to work with and provide for special needs students. Service providers are people educated in a specific area, funded by the school to provide services to special needs students. Under the federal special education law, IDEA, the following are possible related services to be provided to special needs students within the classroom: speech-language and audiology, interpreting, physiological, occupational and physical therapy, recreation including therapeutic recreation, early identification and evaluation of disabilities in children, counseling services, orientation and mobility, medical services, school health/nurse services, social work services, and parent counseling and training. Additionally, if there is

something a child with special needs must have to aid in their success in the preschool classroom, then it should be considered.

IV. How Service Providers Function within and outside the Preschool Classroom and their role in aiding in Preschoolers' Development

Service providers partner with preschool teachers, administrators, and parents to set goals for students with special needs. The service providers then formulate and implement a plan to help students achieve those goals. The LRE or least restrictive environment requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires students' needs be met in the least restrictive environment. This requirement must be met by service providers working with special needs students within the preschool classroom as well. Service providers are responsible for serving special needs students effectively within the preschool classrooms to meet IEP goals and continue to challenge these special needs students. This can be a difficult task, especially with students at such a young age. Providers use research based methods to engage students and keep their attention while also stimulating them and pushing them past points of comfort to begin meeting goals they otherwise would be unable to achieve. While doing this, providers communicate with teachers and parents to better understand the student and his/her interests, and help teachers/parents implement some of the providers' practices into the student's everyday schedule. Reorder (2019) expands on this by explaining, Therapists can also benefit from gaining information on how the child behaves in the classroom, in order to further the child's progress during their sessions. Additionally, the communication between therapists/service providers and teachers allows teachers to implement some appropriate therapies into the classroom. When

teachers know what children are working on with therapists, they can assist in supporting those goals outside of therapy time (McWilliam & Bailey, 1994).

A. How Service Providers work with Special Needs Students in the Preschool Classroom

Service providers work with preschool students in a variety of ways. The most common are small groups within the classroom, or one-on-one, this could be within or outside of the classroom. Within small groups, providers might have an activity or game that would work the skill they are hoping to improve. Small groups allow providers to work with students for a longer period of time, while also promoting social interactions with peers. This also allows providers to serve several students at one time. Therapy is going to be different depending on the child, it is important that therapists not limit themselves to one “best” model, because what is “best” for one child may not be best for another. It is important to consider each child’s needs and preferences before making a determination on how to best service them. Recoder (2019) explains, “It is important to note that the LRE does not refer to a specific model of service delivery that is right for all children. Some children might benefit more from therapy outside of the classroom, in a distraction-free environment. On the other hand, pull-out programs can interfere with classroom participation and disrupt the child’s peer interactions.” Pull-out programs refers to when a service provider removes the student from the classroom to work with the child individually. This is commonly used to work with students who might be distracted or find it more difficult to complete tasks within the classroom. Service providers collaborating with the preschool teacher regarding best practices based on individual needs of the students served will greatly impact the success of services. Preschool teachers are also responsible for giving feedback to the service providers and therapists on what is feasible and successful in the classroom.

The more information a service provider has about the students they serve, the better. When a service provider knows the likes and dislikes of a student, it allows them to fine tune their services to best meet the needs of the students while also keeping their attention, this is incredibly important with preschool age students. Preschool students may easily become distracted or disinterested in an activity in front of them. This is why communication is such an important aspect of the preschool service providers' role. Keeping in contact with teachers to see what students have improved upon, how they are responding within the classroom, and what the teacher believes needs the most immediate attention better aids the service provider in planning for the student. Consultation between therapists and teachers is four times more likely to happen when therapy is provided in the classroom, which is one of the benefits of integrating services (McWilliam & Bailey, 1994). Equally, keeping in contact with parents or caregivers gives providers a better understanding of how the child acts at home, if the student shows improvement at home, and what the parents/caregivers believe to be a high need area for their child.

Service providers are required to keep detailed notes on the ways in which they are working toward each individual students' goals, what they are implementing, how long they have worked with each individual student on a weekly basis, what the communication has been with teachers/parents, progress monitoring and more. Service providers are responsible for ensuring that students are progressing toward their IEP goals. If service providers see that students are not in fact progressing, service providers are then responsible for reassessing their technique to better serve the student.

B. Service Providers' Communication Practices

There was a study completed in 2010, wherein service providers and families were evaluated based on their ability to meet the needs of the child being serviced. While not all students in this study were seen in a preschool classroom, the same methods and strategies were applied to all children. According to Brotherson (2010), the most significant need addressed by both parents and service providers was the need to have hope for a child. Ensuring there is a match between families and service providers' emotional needs is incredibly important. Parents and providers need to be on the same page as far as the child goes to ensure they are giving that child the best chance at success by supporting each other. This goes back to communication. Communication between parents, teachers, and service providers is incredibly important when working to meet the needs of a child.

There is no one effective method for any service provider. Methods and practices will change depending on the child and other outlying circumstances. It is important for service providers to be open and willing to work in different ways to accommodate the needs of each child they serve. Service providers attend professional development and trainings to continue to learn new and improved methods for serving students of different ages with special needs. This allows providers to continue to grow, and aid each child in their individual growth. As one goal is met, another goal will be developed to ensure that child with special needs is continually pushed to learn and make strides in their development.

The way in which service providers work with parents and teachers aids in the success of preschool children. Having service providers available to work on specific needs of disabled or special needs students is not only required but important for children to develop and become successful in life and later schooling. Service provider partnerships aid in the success of special needs children.

C. Types of Service Providers and their role in the Implementation of IEPs

There are several different types of outside services provided within the preschool classroom. Occupational Therapy is a high need in the preschool classroom. Recoder (2019) explains that Occupational Therapy (OT) aims to help people with sensory, physical, or cognitive disability to be as independent as possible in all areas of life. Pediatric Occupational therapists (OTs) work with children with various needs to help them improve skills in cognitive, physical, sensory, and motor domains. Occupational Therapy typically aids a significant population of preschool students. For example, children with birth injuries, sensory processing disorders, traumatic brain or spinal cord injuries, learning disabilities, autism, pervasive developmental disorders, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, mental health or behavioral problems, developmental delays, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and other chronic illnesses (Harron, 2014).

Speech Therapy is another high need area in preschool classrooms. There are many students who have some type of language delay that makes them eligible for services. Speech-language Therapy is used within the preschool classroom, it is a broad term, used to explain the many services provided by Speech Language Pathologists or SLPs. SLPs assess speech, language, communication, and feeding skills, to identify communication problems and

how to treat them. SLPs also work with children that have oral feeding disorders (Crenshaw, 2015). Speech delays or disorders are very common, many students with a speech delay or disorder have not been diagnosed with any other disability. Sometimes the sole production of specific sounds is incorrect and because of the child's age and inability to produce certain letter sounds, this qualifies the student for services.

In addition to occupational therapy and speech language therapy, physical therapy is another common service provider within the preschool classroom. Physical therapy has more of a general aim in working on preschoolers' ability to move and function in a way that benefits their daily life. While many preschoolers are not completely independent when entering and sometimes even completing preschool, it is important that preschoolers gain confidence and the ability to independently complete simple tasks. Pediatric physical therapists (PTs) work with children, their families, and their schools to help children reach their maximum potential to function independently, and to participate actively at home, at school, and in the community (Horwath, 2017). There are several disabilities that would require the aid of a physical therapist. Some examples of these disabilities are Autism, Cancer, Cerebral Palsy, Cystic Fibrosis, Down Syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy, Spina Bifida, Traumatic Brain Injury, and more. Having any one of these disabilities would more than likely warrant an IEP and physical therapy services to be provided for the child. Horwath (2017) gives more information on what to expect from physical therapists within the preschool classroom, Pediatric physical therapists evaluate and provide treatment plans for children with gross motor delays or disabilities, and work on promoting the strength and flexibility needed to navigate the environment effectively. During

physical therapy sessions, children might work on developing flexibility, posture, gait, core strength, balance, and coordination. PTs incorporate motivational factors and play into functional activities in order to engage the child. They also might recommend adaptive equipment, orthotics, and assistive technologies that can further aid the child in developing gross motor skills, or independently moving in their environments.

Service providers typically partner with a public school or federally funded preschool programs, such as Head Start or Early Head Start. Many people aren't aware of the availability of free local preschool programs for those who qualify for services. It is important to know what Head Start is and its purpose. Head Start is a program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start provides early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and families. In addition, under IDEA Head Start must reserve at least 10 percent of their enrollment for children with disabilities.

V. State and Head Start Funded Preschool Programs

Head Start originally began as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965. The original implementation was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low income households quality education. This education was intended to meet the needs of preschool aged children emotionally, socially, nutritionally, and psychologically. Lyndon B. Johnson was the original founder, he declared The War on Poverty during his State of the Union speech. Shortly after that, Sargent Shriver was responsible for organizing a panel of experts in their respective fields to develop an educational program that would help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children.

Pamela addresses the specific concerns and reasoning behind the original initiation of Head Start as this:

Addressing school readiness gaps between low-income children served by the program and children from families with incomes above the federal poverty line is implicit in Head Start's goals. Improving school readiness for low-income children also presents an opportunity to address racial/ethnic gaps in school readiness outcomes because black and Hispanic children consistently represent a disproportionate share of children in poverty (2016).

Later in 1969, Head Start was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development in the U.S. Department of Health, it is now known as the Office of Head Start established within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start grants are awarded by regional offices to allow funding for the operation of Head Start programs in local communities.

A. How Head Start Began and the Original Purpose

Head Start was most recently reauthorized in 2007. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 had bipartisan support and was designed to strengthen the quality of Head Start and improve the impact it had on the families and students it served. The 2007 provisions included alignment with school readiness goals and early learning standards, higher standards for the teachers hired by Head Start, Advisory Councils in every state, and increased program monitoring to ensure the success of individual programs.

Since 1965 when Head Start began as an 8-week program, Head Start has served more than thirty-six million children. Head Start now serves over a million children and their families each year in all 50 states. Head Start serves children age 3 up to age 6. Early Head Start serves children under 3. Children whose families have incomes below the poverty guidelines are eligible for Head Start services. Children from homeless families or families that receive public assistance such as TANF or SSI are also eligible for Head Start services. In addition, children in foster care and children with special needs or a disability. Head start has full day and half-day options available depending on the needs of the family. The full day classrooms are called duration classrooms. These classrooms serve families whose caregivers work full-time and whose income is below the poverty line. These differing school days allow Head Start to reach more students in need and to fulfill needs in different ways.

Head Start's goal is to prepare preschool age students to succeed in education and life. Allowing students to experience a structured school environment prior to beginning grade schools gives these students a significant advantage. Having a structured school with a research based curriculum, and a daily routine aids in the transition to a full time school schedule. Joshi, Geronimo, and Acevedo-Garcia (2016) reviews some of the studies completed over Head Start services and explains that the FACES cohort determined:

Head Start involvement is associated with some school readiness gains in the domains of cognitive development, social-emotional skills, and approaches to learning. The HSIS

found that access to Head Start resulted in initial positive impacts during and at the end of preschool in all measured domains, including cognitive development, social-emotional skills, and health status and services.

In addition to this short term success, studies have been completed on the long term effects of Head Start implementation for students. “Non-experimental longitudinal studies find long-term positive effects of Head Start participation in adulthood,” (Pamela 2016). This signals that participation in Head Start for students who are eligible leads to positive results for these students and potentially their families as a result.

B. The Importance of Publicly Funded Preschools for Children in Need

To enroll a child in a Head Start program, the first step would be to contact the local agency to determine if the local agency has any particular requirements outside of the standard federal requirements. Eligibility is based on family income. The general requirements should be reviewed to determine if the child would meet the requirements. To find local Head Start offices, there are several resources online. In addition, agencies are required to make announcements and have information available to the public regarding when preschool screenings occur. Preschool screenings are when the Head Start and/or Public Preschool staff screen potential students for delays in the areas of gross motor, fine motor, speech/language, cognition, hearing, vision, and income. If a student is eligible based on the household income, the student would not need to be screened, however, the screening is helpful to begin implementation of services for delays or special needs. During screenings, parents are able to bring their child to be screened for

disabilities free of charge. The assessments completed are returned to the parent, and a determination of eligibility is made based on the results of the assessment.

There is a significant difference between a publicly funded preschool programs such as Head Start and a privately owned and operated daycare/preschool program. There are specific standards required by programs like Head Start that are not requirements of privately operated daycares. As such, Head Start is held to higher standards of care and education than that of a private daycare. Curriculum, teachers, classroom supports, outside service providers/therapists, and classroom resources are all things to consider when deciding between a Head Start program and a private daycare.

Head Start as a program is a free program available to those who qualify, however, should a child not qualify for Head Start services, some programs have tuition spots available that allow parents to pay to send their child to a public preschool program. Should a child qualify based on income, many local areas have a duration classroom available to students. Duration classrooms typically run approximately seven to eight hours depending on where the program is located. Should a child qualify based on a disability or special needs, there are half-day sessions available to students. The half-day sessions still ensure the quality learning experience Head Start promises preschool students, however, the shortened day is sometimes better for students, especially such young preschool students.

VI. Special Needs Students within the Preschool Classroom

There are many preschool programs available to those in need. Publicly funded Head Start Programs are the most well known at this time. However, state funded preschool programs are becoming popular as well. Most of these preschool classrooms are considered inclusive classrooms, meaning they include students with special needs or disabilities into the classroom. Inclusion was a widely debated topic and up until 1975, when IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was passed, many students with special needs were isolated, or at times not allowed in school at all before the passing of IDEA.

A. Inclusion in the Preschool Classroom

When implementing inclusion into a classroom, there are several benefits for students with disabilities and without. There are several social benefits for students with disabilities. According to McCarty (2006), “this allows the students with special needs to improve their social skills and their behavior by having appropriate examples in the general education classroom. Students with disabilities have shown improvement in their ability to follow directions and initiate contact with others.” Social interaction for students with special needs can be especially difficult, having this social interaction and the example, as referenced, can aid significantly in social development for students with special needs.

The academic achievement and instruction within a general education classroom is significantly different from special needs students being sanctioned to a special education classroom for the entirety of the school day. While the special education classroom may aid in more individualized instruction and a smaller class size, the general classroom allows the student to be exposed to a richer curriculum, a more structured school day, and instruction that aids in

the development of independence. Students with special needs have improved behavior when they have the opportunity to spend time in a general education classroom with typically developing peers. In a general education classroom, the teacher is responsible for managing behaviors, typically there are higher expectations for behavior in the general education classroom than in the special education classroom. Voltz, Brazil, and Ford (2001) explain, students with disabilities are more able to understand the desired behaviors and will try to abide by them to avoid the consequences if they are taught and shown models of these behaviors.

While the benefits of being in a general education classroom for special needs students are broad, it is important to note that there are significant benefits for typically developing same age peers as well. When general education students are exposed to individuals with differences, students become more tolerant and have a better understanding of special needs students. "When the classroom climate respects and reflects diversity, so will the students that are exposed to that environment. As soon as students with disabilities do not have the "special education student" label while in inclusive classrooms they do not feel singled out or embarrassed in any way," (Brown, 2001). The simple act of inclusion within the classroom aids in the development of both special needs students and general education students.

There have been several studies that looked specifically at special needs students in an inclusive preschool classroom, the Preschool Inclusion for most common disabilities were speech, language, and hearing impairments, developmental delays, cognitive impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, and other health conditions (Green, Terry,

& Gallagher, 2014; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Nahmias, Kase, & Mandell, 2014; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Rafferty, Piscitelli, & Boettcher, 2003). For preschool, there are not special education classrooms available. All special needs students are served and taught within the inclusive classroom. This does not mean that teachers can't work one-on-one with special needs students, or service providers can't take students out of the classroom to individualize instruction. It simply means, special needs preschool students will primarily be served within the preschool classroom like all their other peers. This gives special needs students an important and positive introduction to the school environment. Program and teacher quality need to be considered when assessing the success of inclusion within specific classrooms. Overall, the research provides support for inclusion as a strategy for improving key competencies related to later school success, and for helping children with disabilities become more fully engaged in the social life of preschool classrooms. However, there are several important factors that can influence the effects of inclusion on children with disabilities, especially features of program quality (Lawrence, Smith, Banerjee 2016).

While inclusion is seen as very positive for students, it can be difficult and time consuming for teachers. Teachers are responsible for planning and differentiating instruction for special needs students in a way that sets them up for educational success. While preschool teachers have been taught in school on how to include students with special needs students within their preschool classroom, continued training on this topic is important. Preschool teachers should have training available to them that aid in the structure and instruction in their

classrooms. Affording teachers the training necessary to help them better instruct special needs students allows teachers to be more confident with improved methods that are research based.

Implementation of inclusion in the preschool classroom includes a multitude of aspects. Students with special needs or disabilities should not simply be enrolled in an inclusive classroom. The classroom itself cannot produce the results intended when serving students with special needs. Interventions and specialized instruction that focus on improving particular skills of children with disabilities are typically needed to create high quality learning experiences in inclusive classrooms (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). Teachers acknowledging the differences of students is important for students to have a model of how to behave and treat their peers with differences. When teachers directly discuss various types of human diversity, as well as the individual strengths and weaknesses that we all have, this can be used to develop a sense of acceptance and understanding, according to Voltz et al. (2001). Additionally, the culture of the classroom depends upon the teacher. Students should feel they are a community, all working together to learn and grow. This mindset allows students to be encouraging and kind to students with special needs within the classroom. The rules of the classroom should reflect the same goals. Setting standards and expectations early in the year eases the burden of classroom management the rest of the year. It also gives students an understanding of what is expected of them and how the classroom is to be respected.

B. How Preschool Special Education differs from Elementary Special Education

Preschool teachers have the large responsibility of being both a general education teacher and a special education teacher all within the same classroom. It is important for teachers to be

flexible and willing to work on strategies that best help their students. Since the preschool teacher will not have the ability to work one-on-one with every special needs student within their classroom, it is important to incorporate peer assisted activities. In this way, peers within the classroom can aid the special needs peers in completing activities and tasks expected of them within the classroom. In the preschool classroom, special needs students are gaining exposure to enriched curriculum and activities that will broaden their learning. Modifications to the activities are also important, to make them challenging but reachable for the students with special needs. McMillan (2008) explains the necessity of the incorporation of different strategies best, “By incorporating different types of instructional strategies, modifications to tasks, and peer support strategies in inclusive settings, teachers are improving the likelihood that the students with disabilities that are in their classroom are going to be successful. Most students with special needs can meet the high standards being set in today' s general education classrooms; it is up to teachers to find ways to tap into their potential.”

The effectiveness of the preschool teacher working in both the special education role and lead teacher in the general classroom setting is completely dependent upon the teacher. It can be a difficult task to take on. The IECE education is designed to prepare teachers to take on that role in an effective and organized manner. The support of administration, classroom assistants, ratio of children all play as factors in how smoothly the classroom can be run as an inclusion setting. Professional development is also important for preschool teachers, to allow them to continue learning improved research based methods with which to aid their special needs students to be successful.

Special needs students within the preschool classroom is overall a benefit to all parties. It aids in the development and learning of the students with special needs, it aids in the general education's students learning, and ability to include peers with differences, and it allows teachers to include those special needs students and set a standard of community within the classroom. In determining if a student has special needs or a disability, an IEP is developed and implemented for that child. An IEP is an Individualized Education Plan intended to specifically address the needs of each special needs students and how those needs will be met within the classroom by teachers, service providers, instructional aids, parent support, and additional classroom support.

VII. IEPs and How they are Incorporated with the Preschool Classroom

Individualized Education Plans pave the path for individualized services for children with special needs. They have specific goals and objectives that are laid out within the plan along with how the goals and objectives will be measured. Having these plans and measurable goals allows for more consistency and accountability when it comes to special needs students. The goals and objectives are well thought out and based on comprehensive assessments of the child they are written for. In addition, these goals and objectives give teachers, parents, and service providers a clear idea of what this child will be learning, how it will be taught, and when it will be implemented. It allows parents to have access to a clearly written document that holds their child's teachers and service providers accountable for their educational success. It also gives teachers and service providers a clear goal to work toward with simple ways to measure progress. The purpose of an IEP aids all parties involved, including the child and it ensures that

all parties are on the same page when it comes to goals and expectations for the child's development and educational goals.

A. Individualized Learning - How Teachers Differentiate Based on Students' Needs

Individualized Education Plans are not set in stone, they continue to develop and change along with the child's needs and accomplishments. The IEP is reviewed on a yearly basis, changes are made to the document as needed. These changes are made to accommodate progress, when priorities shift, or after a goal has been met to challenge a student further. Due to the fluidity of the IEP it is important for parents, teachers, and other providers to keep an open dialogue as to the plans and goals of the child.

The IEP is reviewed on an annual basis. These meetings are referred to as ARCs. ARC stands for Admission and Release Committee. This committee typically consists of the parents/caregivers of the student, the general education teacher, the special education teacher (in preschool, this would be the same person), any related service providers, and the principal or preschool coordinator.

During an ARC the student will be discussed, there will already be a draft IEP based on the needs of the student and what the school personnel has deemed important in aiding in the child's educational, physical, and emotional success. During the ARC edits may be made to the IEP based on what is discussed and any determinations that are made during the meeting. The ARC is a time where all parties who have an interest in the child's education may meet and discuss the plan that will be implemented to aid in that child's success in school. Parents or

caregivers may have questions to be answered about the specifics of the IEP and the goals therein. ARCs can be difficult for parents/caregivers but are meant to be fruitful and aid in the child's best interests.

Individualized Education Plans allow teachers solid guidelines in differentiating their instruction to meet the needs of their students. By reviewing their students' goals, teachers are able to modify their lesson plans in ways that promote special needs students' success. It is important for teachers to have documentation to refer back to when planning their lessons, especially at the beginning of the year when they are not as familiar with their students as they would be in the middle or towards the end of the year. In addition, IEPs assist teachers in creating and implementing a progress monitoring system for each student with special needs within their classroom. The goals laid out within the IEP are the goals the teachers monitor throughout the year. Within the IEP it specifically explains how each goal will be measured so the teacher can implement that system into his or her progress monitoring on a regular basis.

B. Meeting Benchmarks

The implementation of IEPs in preschool is important for the academic success for children with special needs. While this early intervention may seem over the top or excessive to some, it allows students with special needs to receive a head start and gain educational experience prior to entering grade school. When special needs students have been assessed and an IEP has been developed during their time in preschool, they begin meeting goals prior to entering grade school. This means they are developing and learning in a way that will aid in the educational success.

There are several effective techniques teachers use to monitor the progress of their students. The original goals are set out in the student's IEP, the teacher is responsible for keeping track of the progress made by the student on a regular basis throughout the year, and having that information available to service providers, parents, and other parties with an interest in the child's education.

There is a lot of responsibility given to the teacher in regards to the monitoring of IEP progress. Their methods must be clear, easy to understand, easily measured, and follow the original plan set out in the IEP. Progress monitoring must also be somewhat simple and quick for the teacher to write down during the school day. This is because tracking IEP progress in addition to instructing a preschool classroom can be difficult. Having progress monitoring easily accessible is something to be thought about as well, this would allow teachers to review throughout the school day and to allow service providers to reference during their time at the school.

Staying on track with IEP goals and monitoring takes a significant amount of discipline and self-evaluation and reevaluation. Teachers should account for the number of students within their classroom. Teachers can then assess the amount of responsibility they will assign to instructional aids and what responsibilities they will take on as their own. Having a specific plan for the classroom will aid in the teachers ability to monitor IEP goals and objectives. Having a

schedule not just for the students, but also for teachers and staff also allows teachers to better prepare for their responsibilities outside the basic teaching and instruction.

VIII. Conclusion

There are several things to take into consideration when considering a career in a public preschool setting. Public Preschools serve a multitude of students, and teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of many different types of students with different needs. There are many responsibilities assumed by teachers in the public preschool classroom. Due to the expectations of preschool teachers in programs such as Head Start, responsibilities expected of preschool teachers are significantly more than those expected of a regular education teacher in an elementary education setting. Meeting the needs of special education students in a preschool classroom is extremely beneficial to those students.

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