Individualized Education Program Team Decisions: A Preliminary Study of Conversations, Negotiations, and Power

This article is about a case study done in a Midwestern state in the US. The study started because of the centrality of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) services for students with disabilities, the researchers wanted to see how much attention and research the IEP team did before, during, and after the meeting. In this particular case the IEP team was studied on how they interacted and communicated among each other. The meeting was audio recorded, and after the meeting each team member was interviewed individually as soon as they could, from 1 to 10 days after original meeting. The IEP meeting was for a 5-year-old boy (Aaron) with disability (didn’t specifically said what type), and the team members were analyzed on the diagnosis, placement, and goal setting. After the individual interview more research was done, and the results indicated that the meeting had a structure of turn-taking, the flow if the meeting was done by filling in the IEP template, communication before the meeting influenced the decision, and team members held their opinions in the meeting and said nothing until the individualized interview was done.

The criterion to choose the case study by the researchers was a) the development of an IEP for a student with a severe disability, and b) transition between programs. In this case the IEP team was composed of the Special Education Director, the Preschool Teacher, the Special Education Teacher, a Psychologist, an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Therapist, 2 Speech-Language Pathologists (the current, and the one receiving
the kid next year), mother, and father. Aaron was described as to have “really nice” social skills and that he is “very social”. Also in the article it is stated that Aaron has behavior issues where he is too loud in the classroom and the mother was starting to have concerns because she saw behavior issues at home too.

The meeting was done with a turn-take structure because the Special Education Director was filling in the IEP template and moving forward to the next step instead of having discussions for each step. During the meeting the Psychologist advocated that Aaron should be identified under the category of cognitive disability, the mother was not happy with that and she wanted to do some tests to rule out Autism. The decision made was that Aaron would qualify for special education primary under the category of cognitive disability. Aaron had been in preschool for the last year, and the Special Education teacher had not worked with him yet. During the meeting the Special Education teacher gave the goal that Aaron should be able to count from 1 to 10 with 75% accuracy. The preschool teacher told her to “Bump that up… to 20”, at this time a “conversation juncture” (discussion among team members to resolve) happened, but the preschool teacher did not gave an actual goal, even though she was the one that worked with Aaron for the last academic year. I think communication among the team was terrible, and it was not helping the student to get the best action plan. The team decided that for next year Aaron would spend 70% of his time in Special Education, and 30% in general education classes. Later on the interviews was known that this decision was made because the Special Education Director just said 30% in general class to start a discussion, but the other team members took that as a directive instead of a suggestion.
Aaron’s behavior issues were never commented during the meeting even though various members of the team knew about them.

During the individual interviews done by the researchers the participants were asked about their impressions of the outcomes, the agreements with the decision, and the reasons for their opinions. The current Speech Pathologist stated that she thought that an additional secondary diagnosis may be important to explore, but during the meeting she did not shared her concerns. After interviewing the other members data reflected that this same situation happened with other team members, where they had different viewpoints on Aaron’s eligibility category, but they chose not to share them during the meeting.

Aaron’s behavior was aroused in the interviews and team members of the IEP team were concerned because he is too loud for a general education in kindergarten, but decided not to share their concerns during the meeting which might have made to make the wrong placement for Aaron. After studying the data, researchers noticed that Aaron’s behavior would have been a “deal-breaker” for access into inclusive environments.

The purpose of the study was to explore how communication at an IEP meeting influence the decisions that are made during it, and to examine the team members perspective on the decision-making process, and how this decisions are made.

What happened in this meeting is that there was a huge lack of communication, and members didn’t want to question the suggestion that other team member gave. Also the team members did not want to challenge the opinion of the other members, and that is why so many important topics were overlooked, and the team members preferred to stay quiet instead of disagreeing with others opinion. According to Goffman (2005), people conduct themselves during social interactions to avoid being disgraced or humiliated or to
save face for themselves as well as for others. I am sure that this is what happened in this meeting where members were afraid to show their opinions just not to disagree with someone else. I think one of the primary purposes of an IEP is for parents to understand what needs to be done, why it needs to be done that way, and how it will be done. For the future we as educators need to be sure that we are communicating in the best way so that the IEP can have a positive impact for the student, it doesn’t matter how silly a suggestion is, it is better to look into things as minimal as they might look, than regret it on the long run.

**REFERENCE**
