The Implementation of Individualized Education Program in an inclusive class, Taiwan

Tsuey-ling Lee   Mei-ching Chung
National Hsinchu University of Education

I-chun Chiu    Chang-Chun Chiu    Shih-chi Lin
Hsinchu Municipal Xi-Men Primary School

Abstract

This study is aimed to discover the problems of Individualized Education Program during its implementing in preschool inclusive class, following, the scholar-led supportive team presented the problem-solving strategies. Two young children with multiple disabilities were observed, their teacher and one administrator were interviewed, and their IEPs were examined for collecting data. The main findings indicated as: (1) Seat and curriculum adjustment are the key strategies to improve the inclusion for young children with disabilities; (2) The present popular IEP form (e.g. C1 and C2) is suitable for the mild but not suitable for the severe; (3) Lack of personnel in an inclusive class is the main problem for implementing the functional and inclusive IEP objectives. Based on the problems of IEP found in inclusive class, the team presented the problem-solving strategies including: (1) The IEP form needs to be adjusted based on the children’s special needs; (2) One of the main missions for the supportive team is to assist the teacher to discover the special needs for the children with disabilities in inclusive class; (3) Organizing a task list for class volunteers is helpful for inclusive class; (4) It’s important to help teachers to improve their ability to transfer the thematic objectives to functional objectives when implementing the IEP.

Keywords: IEP, preschool, inclusive class
Introduction

The successful inclusion is the ability of children with disabilities to attain the outcomes or goals on their Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Cross, Traub, Huffer-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004). Research has shown that young children with disabilities can make programs as they do in noninclusive programs’ (Holahann & Costenbader, 2000; Hundert, Mohoney, Mundy, & Vernon, 1998). IEP has become the critical instrument to understand how inclusion conducting for young children with disabilities in an inclusive class.

Recently urges development of goals encourage IEPs that meet the unique needs of the child and that are meaningful and functional in the variety of contexts within which the child participates (Nortari-syverson & Schuster, 1995). The Individualized Education Program (IEP) emphasizes that the education should meet the special needs for students with disabilities.

There are a number of programs focusing on how to meet the students’ special need in IEP. Horn, Lieber, Li, Sandall & Schwartz (2000) used 3 case studies to assess the feasibility for teachers in inclusive early education programs support young children’s learning objectives through embedded learning opportunities and it proved effective after conducting the study. Kohler & Strain (1996) examined the merging naturalistic teaching and peer-based strategies to address the IEP objectives of preschoolers with autism and found that teachers often conducted instructional episodes in a 1:1 fashion during the naturalistic teaching phase.

IEP has been becoming the curriculum core nowadays. It’s created intentionally to help the individual student with special needs to fulfill his or her own potential. In this situation, IEP goals and objectives have to be based on student’s special needs. Thomson, Bachor and Tomson (2002) used a decision-making model in means of identifying the student’s current instructional needs initially, extended instructional materials and methods afterwards. Finally, the progress of the child was examined. The teachers who participated in this study showed positive in developing IEPs based on curriculum-oriented model. It tends to enter an era to connect the student’s unique needs, goals, objectives and class dynamical activities in IEP. The approach related to environment, ecology and curriculum has been addressed for wider application across all areas of school provision.

In Taiwan The Special Education Law provides the strongest legislative direction for mandating teamwork services in implementing Individualized Education Program (IEP). It mandates that a cooperative teamwork that develops and implements the IEP, a written document outlining early intervention services required in inclusive education. At present there is 48.13% of young children with special needs served in inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2006). However the researches indicated that teachers of inclusive classes need supports to develop and implement IEPs (Lee, 2006; Wang, 2003; Tsai & Chen, 2002).
Effective implementation of IEP requires the collaboration of all the members of the support team. In fact, a considerable body of literature has established collaborative teamwork as one of the most critical components of quality Inclusive early childhood education (Guralnick, 2001; Lieber, Beckman, Hanson, Janko, Marquart, Horn et al., 1997; Odom, 2002). The support team members must work together to develop and implement IEPs for young children with disabilities in the inclusive settings. This study is intended to use a teamwork to enable IEP for young children with special needs in an inclusive class, therefore, the purposes of this study are:

1. To explore the implementing IEP process supported by the teamwork
2. To discover the current IEP problems in preschool inclusive class
3. To present the problems-solving strategies for implementing IEP in an inclusive class
4. To discuss the professional growth for the participants in this study

Method

Design of research

This study used action research to explore and find the effective pathway for implementing IEP for young children with disabilities in an inclusive class. The process includes: defining a problem, gathering important information from multiple sources, analyzing what the information means before planning and making action, evaluating the results of that action and beginning again. The action research process gives teachers and participants new knowledge about student by providing ongoing practical guidelines for teacher to deal with the problems of developing and implementing IEPs in an inclusive class. Fig. 1 shows the issues to involve the team members in each step of the process.
Exploring step

- Proposing Questions for inclusive education
  - How to deal with non-participation?
  - How to implement IEP?

Planning action IEP

- Establishing support team

Picking students and collecting data

- Integrating assessment in classroom
- Observation, Interview, IEP documents

Analyzing questions and deciding strategies

- C1: Seat and curriculum modification
- C2: Curriculum modification

Action in implementation IEP

Ongoing observations and meetings

Evaluation

Analyzing data and practical theory

Fig. 1 Action research process
Participants

Two pre-school children were selected and supported by the teamwork to implement their IEP goals in an inclusive class. Table 1 shows their background.

Table 1  Backgrounds of the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Eligibility categories</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Primary: Multiple</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary: Physical Disability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Primary: Multiple</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary: ADHD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five participants joined the team in this study to provide support during developing and implementing students’ IEPs. The team consisted of a scholar from the department of Special Education, a scholar from the department of Early Childhood, a school administrator, a school special education teacher and one occupational therapist. Three college students from the Department of Special Education assisted to collect data.

Instruments

Observations, interviews and written records (e.g C1 & C2’s IEPs) were the sources for eliciting the students’ present levels of performance, the unique needs, IEP goals and evaluating the effectiveness to enable the IEP goals supported by the teamwork approach.

Data Analysis

All data were collected and analyzed simultaneously based on action research. The method of coding data shows as: methodology (OB----observation; IT----interview; Individualized Education Program----IEP) + case + date (month/day/year). For example: OB-C1-2007.12.8 means observation record about C1 on 2007.12.8. In-2007.4.30 means interview transcript with teacher on 2007.4.30. C1-IEP means C1’s IEP document.

Based on the purposes of study, certain themes were identified from detailed, line-by line analysis of observation records, interview transcripts, and IEP documents conducted by the supporting team.

Credibility and trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to ensure that the data collected and interpreted accurately reflect the experiences of the participants. The following verification procedures were used in this study to address trustworthiness and credibility of findings:
1. Triangulation: Triangulation was accomplished by using multiple researchers and multiple methods (observations, interviews and IEP documents) to increase understanding of the issues that the participants face. Collectively, the researchers had backgrounds in special education, early childhood special education, school administration in special education, inclusive education in practice and occupational therapy to deliver the services.

2. Continuing observations: There were 2 days observations per week and the observations continued 3 months. It’s intended to use rich and continuing observation records to raise the credibility.

3. Peer Debriefings: Peer debriefing were important to understanding and interpreting the data and allowed for exploration of different researchers’ perceptions and interpretations. The research team met regularly to solicit input from the students to plan data collection procedures. To discuss issues of data collection to debrief after conducting IEP, to discuss emerging themes, to prepare preliminary results for discussion, and to clarify data interpretations and implications. The research team reviewed interpretations to assure they were consistent and supported in the data.

4. Member checks: To further ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the students and teachers’ experiences, there was 3 hours in a week for discussions and feedback on the accuracy and clarify of the data and results.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study were described and discussed as:

(I) IEP process for teamwork supporting special needs young students

1. Case one: C1

   C1 is a 6.2-year-old girl with multiple disabilities i.e. physical disability and autism. She is also identified to be a slow learner. In 4 weeks continuing observations in pre-intervention period, it’s found that she was placed to sit near the door because she had the problems to participate in the classroom activities. She was playing her fingers and lacked of the interactions with teacher and classmates.

   The strategies of ‘seat modification’ and ‘curriculum modification’ were determined in response to C1’s IEP goals to take participation in classroom activities and routines. The occupational therapist made a heavy chair for C1 and placed her in her typical peer group in classroom activities. It’s observed that the teacher aid assisted C1 to join the activity of climbing through the cave of arching hands during intervention period (Ob-C1-2006.12.21). In the dancing activities, it’s noted that when C1 heard the sound of music, she popped out
orally ‘ready go’ (Ob-C1-2006.12.22). It’s obvious that C1 started to participate in class activities in the intervention times supported by teamwork.

2. Case two: C2

C2 is a 5.5-year-old boy with ADHD and language problems. He is also identified to be a slow learner. He is always walking around without participating in class activities. He is observed that he was unable to sit on his seat still for 5 minutes (Ob-C2-2007.11.17).

The team decided to improve his participation in classroom activities as his IEP priority goal by using visual support and playing dough as his enforcement. The big picture books were made to enhance the visual support for C2. Teacher found that he was able to sit on his seat over 30 minutes and painted a big red cock from this book after intervention times (In-2007.4.30).

(II) The current IEP form problems in an inclusive class

The teacher indicated that the problems for writing and implementing IEP in an inclusive class in interviews include:

1. Current IEP form of inclusive class works for the mild but not works for the severe

In order to present the traits of inclusive education, the curricula in an inclusive class will always follows the thematic curriculum which was commonly used in the preschool classes. For example, ‘Holding hands’ and ‘Body secret code’ were the main themes in this class and the IEP goals and objectives of C1 and C2 were designed based on these 2 themes. However, after being observed by the research team, it’s found that the priority objective for C1 should aim at ‘decreasing the numbers of self-stimulation in hands and increasing the numbers of participating in classroom activities.’

2. Functional objectives were restricted to develop in present IEP form

Based on the thematic curriculum, the current objectives of IEP were divided into 3 areas including cognitive, affectional and skilled areas. In this condition, it’s difficulty to include the area of functional area. Teacher reported ‘C1 and C2 need functional objectives in their IEPs but it’s no places for functional objectives in current IEP form.’ (In-2007.4.30).

3. Same seat modification in theory but different result in practice

C1 was arranged to sit in her typical peer for facilitating her inclusion according to the suggestions proposed by the research team. But C1 was observed to be seated near the door and this is isolated from her peer group before intervention. C2’s seat was frequently empty because most of time he was walking around in classroom. It’s found in their IEP documents that ‘Seat modification: C1 (C2) is unable to concentrate on classroom activities so the seat has to be adjusted and placed in the area away from C1’s (C2’s) typical peer with no
disturbance’ (C1-IEP; C2-IEP). This seat modification in their current IEP arranged by teacher compared with the modification proposed by the team present a contrary practice attached to same principle of ‘seat modification’. It reflects that the adequate personnel would be the crucial factor to influence the inclusion or isolation based on the same principle of seat modification.

4. Unable to finish developing IEP within one month as stipulated

Although the law mandates that IEP should finish developing in one month after the semester starts but the teacher responded that it’s difficulty to finish writing new students’ IEPs within one month. The teacher said:

I cannot finish writing IEP within one month after semester starts. It will be finished by the time of the end of the semester because the objectives are added little by little with the development of thematic curriculum in that semester.’ (In-2007.4.30)

5. Shortage of personnel to support to accomplish IEP goals in inclusive class

During the process of writing IEP, the teacher indicated that the support needed in an inclusive class most would be the personnel for assisting to discover the special needs for young students with disabilities because:

- When I am writing C1’s IEP, I feel that I cannot find out C1’s special needs.
- I feel I need to focus on C1’s self-helping and motor training areas because she needs these as the preparation for entering future elementary school.
- If I need to implement the IEP objectives successfully, the volunteers should be available to me.
(In-2007.4.30)

(III) The problem-solving approaches for IEP of an inclusive class

In view of the problems happened during implementing IEP in the inclusive class, the problem-solving approaches were discussed and proposed by the research team as:

1. Adjusting IEP form

The IEP form for current inclusive class needs to be revised to meet the practice in the inclusive class i.e. concluding the strengths and weakness for the focus students, design the space for writing functional objectives in IEP form and multiple times for evaluation in IEP form.

2. Supporting the implementation of IEP by teamwork

   (1) Providing the information and knowledge based on the students’ special needs
to promote inclusion

The team members should integrate their profession in the process of implementing students’ IEP i.e. assisting teacher to discover the special needs for the children with special needs, to determining the priority of IEP goals and objectives and provide the strategies for attaining IEP goals and objectives and supervising how the progress made by the students with teamwork support.

(2) Organizing volunteer to resolve the shortage of personnel

At this moment there is a shortage of budget for hiring qualified personnel to support the inclusion in the class. It can be considered to organize a volunteer team and arrange several hours pre-service training. It’s also needed to list the task items that the volunteers can help in the classroom. This will help to resolve the problem of shortage of personnel.

(3) Improving teachers’ knowledge in transferring from the thematic objectives to functional objectives

Based on the kindergarten curriculum, the themes become the main focus for designing the students’ objectives in an inclusive class at present. In this situation, the ability of transferring the thematic instructional objectives into IEP objectives would be a challenge and important issue for teachers. The research is trying to present the example of C1’s IEP objectives from thematic orientation to functional orientation.

Table 2 sample of C1’s original IEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit theme</th>
<th>Area of evaluation</th>
<th>School year goals (Unit goal)</th>
<th>Semester (activity) objectives &amp; Standard of evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Hand holding small hand</td>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>1. To know the campus &amp; facilities  2. To know new classmates  3. To know mid-autumn festival  4. To know astronaut</td>
<td>To know the place of yard with help  To indicate the favorite place in school with help  To tell 2 new classmates’ name  To listen to the songs related to mid-autumn festival  To listen to the introduction of astronaut in use of PPT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: C1’s IEP

Reviewing C1’s school year goals in the area of cognition in Table 2, it’s found that the goal ‘To know astronaut’ is not useful for her in her daily life so the research team determined to delete it in C1’s IEP. After transferring from thematic goals and objectives into functional characteristics, C1’s IEP can be adjusted as Table 3:
Table 3  sample of C1’s IEP after transferring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit theme</th>
<th>Evaluation area</th>
<th>School year goals (Unit goal)</th>
<th>Semester (activity) objectives</th>
<th>Standard of evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Hand holding small hand</td>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>1. To know the campus &amp; facilities</td>
<td>1-1 To point out the right place of restaurant in campus with help</td>
<td>2 of 3 opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 To point out the right place of playground in campus with help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-3 To point out 3 favorite places in campus with help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To know new classmates</td>
<td></td>
<td>2-1 To tell 2 classmates’ name</td>
<td>2 of 3 opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To know mid-autumn festival</td>
<td></td>
<td>2-2 To tell 3 classmates’ name</td>
<td>2 of 3 opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3-1 To sit on chair and listen to the songs of mid-autumn festival still for 5 minutes</td>
<td>2 of 3 opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3-2 To sing at least one sentence about the song of mid-autumn festival</td>
<td>2 of 3 opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(IV) The professional growth and reflections for teachers and research participants

1. To deal with non-participation problems in inclusive class

At the beginning of the study, the teacher shared her feeling of C1 and C2 as:

She (C1) has no motivation in the class. She doesn’t like to eat. I don’t know where I have to start to teach her. I don’t know where her special needs are. C 2 comes to school and he runs around in the classroom all the time. I don’t know how to teach him. (In-2006.11.3)

After discussion with the research team, seat modification was determined to be the key strategy to improve C1’s participation in classroom activities. After intervention, teacher said ‘The seat modification is very effective for C1.’ (In-2007.4.30). Teacher also noted that the number of C1’s problem behavior of self-stimulating in hand is up to the activity that the class is carrying on (In-2007.4.30). And this is consistent of the observation result ‘The teacher aid holds C1 to pass the hands cave with the music’ (In-2006.11.18). As for C2, the teacher responded positively to the use of big picture book and the play dough suggested by the research team for C2 ‘Not bad, the effect is very good.’ (In-2007.4.30) The experience promotes the professional growth for teacher to deal with non-participation of young students with disabilities in an inclusive class.

Before the research, the occupational therapist pulled out C1 and C2 to the Sensory Motor Training Room for occupational therapy. In response of the request of the research team, occupational therapist started to enter C1’s and C2’s classroom to carry on diagnosis
and intervention in classroom. This type of integrating therapy and assessment in the class proved positively. It’s a kind of professional growth for occupational therapist from this experience.

2. To develop and implement IEP in an inclusive class

It’s found by the research team that the strength of C1 is in ‘hearing’ and the strategy of ‘seat modification’ was determined to improve C1’s participating in class activities. After adaptation in the classroom, teacher noted ‘C1 can listen to teacher telling stories. She really listens.’ (In- 2007.4.30) This finding attribute to professional growth for teacher to use seat modification as an effective strategy to attain student’s IEP goal.

3. Issues about the support from a team

The support team in this research used video to observe C1 and C2, then developed the observation record for discussions in the meetings for proposing suggestions to teacher to implement IEP based on every observation. This ongoing observations and discussions in meetings needs adequate personnel and plenty of time, but in reality, the teacher has heavy teaching load in the inclusive class. So once the support team leaves the class, it would be a problem for an inclusive class to implement C1 and C2’s IEP by providing adaptation suggestions and put them in practice in class to help students to improve their participation in classroom activities. Therefore the issues should be considered when implementing the successful IEP in the inclusive class.

Conclusions

This study identified the support team associated with the successful implementing IEP for young children with disabilities in an inclusive class. The results attributed to the implications in the successful inclusion. First, each child’s successful inclusion involved a large number of adults. This requires intensive cooperation between the members of a team in academics and practice. Second, including children with disabilities in an inclusive class requires looking more closely at their IEP to ensure their special needs can be met by modification and adaptation in class activities. Further research is needed to document the links between effective implementation of IEP by a variety of models of collaborative teaming and positive outcomes for preschoolers in the inclusive education.

Reference


