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Reflection SPED 730 IEP Project

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The IEP process is not something I have ever been a part of, or perhaps ever will be, as an early childhood educator. However, many of the families who come to depend on our guidance, often heavily reliant on it, enter the process once their children transition to elementary school. The process is frequently overwhelming and confusing for them. This class helped me better understand the law, the process, and the ideal regarding IEPs.

Hearing how the IEP process is intended to function inspired me. Previously, families and educators had described it as dry, non-inclusive, and perfunctory at best. In contrast, this class emphasized the importance of consensus-building and focusing on the learner's strengths while addressing their needs. This collaborative and solution-focused model resonated with me.

While this process may not be a direct part of my professional responsibilities, its premise and goals should absolutely inform my practice. Watching the detailed, collaborative conversations of an IEP meeting inspired reflection on my leadership approach. My team of five teachers works hard to navigate real-time challenges, with lead teachers often taking it upon themselves to determine the best course of action, even if it does not always succeed. I want to foster an atmosphere that mirrors the collaborative spirit of IEP meetings, where creative dialogue and teamwork take precedence over top-down direction. I want my team to focus on children's strengths, even those of children who present particularly frustrating challenges, and work together to develop innovative strategies to meet their needs.

Achieving these goals requires starting from the foundation. My staff members are talented, dedicated, and loving educators, but like many early childhood professionals, they each hold only the state-required 12 units of early childhood education (ECE) credits. Most of what

they have learned comes from on-the-job experience and guidance from me and each other. I'm enthusiastic about sharing the knowledge I've gained through this program, but I understand that sustainable change requires small steps and a long-term plan.

To that end, I plan to introduce my staff to research-based approaches using resources from the ISIS Center. We will begin with modules focused on early childhood behavior management, as this area is critical to our work. I envision a multi-phase process for this professional development initiative. First, during a workshop, I will introduce the ISIS Center and its resources to provide context and explain how these tools can support their growth. Then, each teacher will select one of several pre-chosen behavior management topics and dive deeper into it. Finally, we will bring the entire group together for a collaborative project where each teacher will teach their peers what they have learned, reinforcing the knowledge through shared discussion and practical application.

This plan will allow my team to grow together, develop expertise in critical areas, and create a culture of mutual learning and support. My ultimate goal is to cultivate an environment where we, as educators, can confidently tackle challenges, celebrate our successes, and always strive to improve.

**References:**

Vanderbilt University. (2024b). *IRIS | High-Leverage Practices*. iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu.

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/high-leverage-practices/>