

ABSTRACT

de la Peña, Katherine A., Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Educational Leadership, December, 2006, Mothers' Perspectives of and Participation in Individual Family Service Plan Development, 217 pp. 2 tables, references, 66 titles.

This multi-case, qualitative study identifies factors that influenced the involvement of mothers of young children with severe developmental delays in the initial Individual Family Service Planning (IFSP) process for their child. The study also describes the mothers' own expectations for their participation in educational decision-making. The researcher used field observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document reviews to specifically target mothers living in South Texas, whose children were enrolled in one publicly funded Early Childhood Intervention program.

The mothers in this study initially had no experience with which to define their role or frame their expectations for involvement in the IFSP process. As long as they were satisfied with the program and felt a strong positive connection to their service coordinator, involvement in educational decision-making was of little consequence. IFSP meetings were an opportunity for the mothers to gain support and have their questions answered, but they looked to the professionals to develop the strategies and make decisions about service type and frequency. Even after 6 months, equipped with better understanding and a stronger relationship with their service coordinator, parental involvement in the process did not necessarily improve or change.

Many unobservable factors influenced the mothers' involvement in the IFSP meetings. Long held beliefs about parenting and service provision and unvoiced concerns had an effect on how the mothers participated. Observable group dynamic factors, which could be controlled to support the mothers' involvement, also influenced the mothers' participation. The mothers in the study preferred meeting in their homes where their children could be near and they were most involved when they met with just one other adult. The skill level and openness of the professional in explaining the process and engaging parents in the discussion influenced the extent to which parents were involved.

Results of the study have implications for leaders of early childhood intervention programs, for professional preparation programs, for early childhood special education professionals and for further research.