



Early Childhood Personnel Center

Cross Disciplinary Competency Area Case Studies

Case Study: Professionalism

Key Indicators

The story of Maria, her family, and IEP team illustrates the challenges presented to the team when a family has complex needs and whose primary language is not English. The story highlights key indicators of the cross disciplinary competency area of Professionalism:

- Demonstrates ethical decision making and professional behavior as an early childhood interventionist;
- Demonstrates knowledge of the early childhood intervention field and their discipline's practice standards and guidelines;
- Demonstrates awareness of other disciplinary practice standards and guidelines in early childhood intervention;
- Uses self-reflection and professional development to stay current in evidenced based disciplinary and interdisciplinary practice;
- Provides reflective supervision to other ECI staff;
- Mentors, teaches and provides feedback to other early childhood interventionists throughout the intervention process;
- Uses effective advocacy skills to improve ECI; and
- Provides disciplinary and interdisciplinary leadership to the field of ECI.

Maria and Her Family: Background Information

Eduardo (age 29) and Sofia Garcia (age 26) are of Mexican origin and have lived in the United States (U.S.) for the past 7 years as undocumented immigrants. The Spanish-speaking couple

moved to the U.S. with the hopes of a better quality of life. The couple has two daughters, Maria (age 4) and Carmen (age 2), who were born in the US and are U.S. citizens. As the sole income source, Eduardo works as a day laborer, usually 12-14 hours a day and on weekends. . This is the fourth place the family has lived in the past two years due to housing insecurity and immigration status. Eduardo finds himself in a predicament by trying to keep a low-profile status because of his undocumented immigration status and the need to be visible while seeking work.

The family lives in a crowded trailer community, along with other undocumented immigrants. The family does not have reliable transportation and is dependent on public transportation for necessary appointments. Sofia worked in the service industry before the birth of her children. She voices pride in being a mother and doesn't mind the hardship of staying at home to attend to the needs of her children. She knows the sacrifice will pay off as she encourages her daughters, even at such a young age, to finish school, work hard, and become "somebody" -- although she and Eduardo did not finish high school in Mexico. She spends time reading to the girls and often asks questions to help them learn.

Maria was born prematurely and required a 2-month stay in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) after she was born. She has hydrocephalus with a shunt and is followed for medical care at a neurology clinic at the local children's hospital. Eduardo and Sofia are constantly aware they might be deported as undocumented immigrants and specifically worried about supporting Maria's special needs. The family takes great solace in their faith as they face life's challenges. Maria had received early intervention (EI) services in the home but was transitioned last year to a Head Start program. Maria is in a preschool classroom in her neighborhood elementary school. Several other children in the Head Start program have developmental delays or disabilities. Maria rides the bus to and from school each day. .

Sofia misses the close relationships she developed with the therapists from Early Intervention (EI). The EI service coordinator spoke Spanish and was able to interpret the family needs for effective communication with other team members. Maria's current school is predominantly English speaking, and there are no Spanish speakers on Maria's IEP team. Unfortunately, there are very few Spanish interpreters for the district so the team has to plan ahead to schedule an interpreter. Eduardo and Sophia are interested in Maria's progress at school and know the teacher probably thinks "they just don't care" but they are wary of the public-school program because of their immigration status and uncomfortable because of the language

barrier. Sophia knows Maria is clumsier than most 4-year olds and wonders if Sophia is playing with other children on the playground.

Yesterday, a letter, written in Spanish, was sent home with Maria letting the parent's know that it was time for an annual meeting about Maria's progress at school. Sophia was apprehensive about how it was going to go and wondered how she could get transportation. She knew Eduardo would not be able to attend because of work. Sophia thinks back to the first IEP meeting at the school. She remembers the first meeting was very confusing with a lot of papers being shuffled back and forth. A Spanish-speaking interpreter was present. Sophia noticed the team members spoke for a long time with the interpreter speaking for a short time. She wondered if she and Eduardo had been given the full information. Sophia remembers how she and Eduardo sat silent during the meeting and were afraid to speak up and ask questions. She wants to be able to participate more this year.

Planning for Maria's IEP Meeting

The IEP team at Grove Hill Elementary had an informal meeting in preparation for annual IEP reviews. The teacher, Ann, and the speech therapist, Glenda, talked over how the day had gone at the end of a challenge-filled day in the Head Start classroom. The conversation turned to Maria and her family. Glenda said "I wish there was more we could do to get the family involved. I don't think the parents understand she has delays in her home language as well as delays in English. I wonder if they care!" Ann said "I have been trying to get them to come in all year but they haven't responded or participated in one event. I realize I could do more and feel guilty as most of the progress notes and the requests sent home for volunteers are in English. It's so hard to schedule time with an interpreter and I don't know Spanish." The OT, Hannah, said "I remember at the first IEP meeting the parents spoke very little and didn't ask any questions. The parents signed the IEP and nodded in agreement although I remember they looked confused when we explained Maria had problems with communication; problem solving; sequencing; following directions; motor problems impacting play; self-care; and learning in the classroom, playground, and community settings. I'm not sure what else we could have done since we had an interpreter. I wish I knew more about their family and wonder if there is someone else in their family or neighborhood who could interpret". Carol, the PT, asked if the parents were undocumented immigrants. Although everyone around the table knew the school administration had requested teachers and staff not to ask the status of citizenship of their

families or students. Carol went on further to say “I know a school system who helps undocumented families to develop a plan in case of the event they are faced with deportation. Do you think they might be afraid to come to the school?”

The team sat in silence as they contemplated whether it was worth trying to get the family involved as the challenges seemed insurmountable. After much thought, Hannah mentioned that it would be helpful to talk to the school principal or human resources representative to determine what the responsibility of the school-based team is in these situations. Ann volunteered to talk to the principal about scheduling a meeting for all staff to be informed. The team members had already researched what information their professional associations have regarding these issues. They discussed what they found and created a chart so they had documentation.

Table 1

Cross-Disciplinary Professional Conduct - Ethical Practice

<u>Cross-Disciplinary Professionalism Practice: Act ethically in the provision of special education and related services to young children with disabilities and their families, as well as in inter- and intraprofessional interactions with colleagues.</u>	
Professional Organization	Example(s) of Applicable Practice Standard
American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)	Fully disclose the benefits, risks, and potential outcomes of any interventions; the personnel who will be providing the intervention; and any reasonable alternatives to the proposed intervention.
American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)	[R]espect the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals. [B]e trustworthy and compassionate in addressing the rights and needs of patient/clients.

American Speech-Hearing Association (ASHA)	[H]onor their responsibility to achieve and maintain the highest level of professional competence and performance...[E]ngage in only those aspects of the professions that are within the scope of their professional practice and competence, considering their certification status, education, training, and experience.
Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)	Developing relationships with families based on mutual respect and actively involving families and individuals with exceptionalities in educational decision making.
Division for Early Childhood (DEC)	[P]romote adherence to and model the DEC Code of Ethics, DEC Position Statements and Papers, and the DEC Recommended Practices
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	When we have evidence that an agency that provides services intended to ensure children’s wellbeing is failing to meet its obligations, we acknowledge a collective ethical responsibility to report the problem to appropriate authorities or to the public. We shall be vigilant in our follow-up until the situation is resolved.

After a minute, Carol said in an attempt to lighten the mood “at least we are doing a good job with supporting Maria at school so she has a better chance for school success later down the road!”

In planning for the upcoming IEP meeting the team:

1. Contacted the interpreter service to involve them in planning for the meeting,
2. Created a chart that describes Maria’s strengths and needs as well as the family and system challenges,
3. Discussed with the interpreter the idea that they would like to create an eco-map with the Garcia’s to identify challenges and supports,
4. Decided as part of the agenda to specifically discuss ideas with Maria’s parents and most importantly solicit their input.

Table 2

Maria and her family: Strengths, challenges, formal and informal supports, and solutions

Strengths	Challenges	Supports	Solutions
Family's commitment to child	Spanish speaking	Interdisciplinary IEP team	Develop a list of community based interpreters as well school system interpreters who are available to assist the team and family on a regular basis.
Hard working	Rely on public transportation only	Other children from their community attend the same school. Many of the parents drive and have a car.	Develop a list of neighbors who would be willing to help the family with accessing school more regularly
	Few external supports for family	A church that has primarily a Spanish speaking congregation and Spanish speaking priests is in their community and has a reliable outreach program	Ask the family to identify supports in their community or church who they could rely on as a support. Assist the family in reaching out to the church to determine what types of support they could provide.
	Team has limited alternatives to engage families	An interdisciplinary team with members who are aware of the	The Service Coordinator will reach out to the

		<p>family’s challenges and are sensitive to their needs</p> <p>There is a MIECHV home visiting program with Spanish speaking home visitors in their community. The program uses the HIPPA curriculum for kids from 3-5 years of age</p>	<p>family and make an effort to develop a stronger relationship with the family. For example, make a home visit with an interpreter</p> <p>With the Garcia’s permission the SC will reach out to the MIECHV program and arrange for the Garcia’s to be enrolled. This home visiting program may help to engage the family.</p>
	Father has little employment flexibility		

Discussion Questions

1. What is the responsibility of the school system in regard to children whose parents may be undocumented immigrants?
2. Discuss alternative strategies the team can take to engage the Garcia family in the IEP process. What would your team do?
3. From the information provided create an ecomap that describes the families supports and challenges
4. What kind of activities, programs, or initiatives, etc. does your system have in place to support providers to support families with complex needs?
5. How would you apply your primary professional association’s Code of Ethics in working with this family?

6. In what professional development did this IEP team engage and/or plan to engage to more effectively partner with this family? What other professional development content and opportunities might be relevant?