The Use of a Rubric as a Tool to Guide Pre-Service Teachers
in the Development of IEPs

Clarissa E. Rosas, Ph.D.
College of Mount Saint Joseph.

Kathleen G. Winterman, Ed.D
Xavier University

Abstract

The challenge of developing Individualized Education Program documents that are representative of a team decision making process and are in compliance with IDEA 2004 is well documented in the literature. One of the main objectives of IEPs is to serve as the foundation of a child's academic program. Inclusion of children with disabilities in the general curriculum requires active involvement of all members of the child's educational team. In an effort to instruct pre-service teachers in the development of compliant IEPs, this study investigated the use of an IEP Rubric to assist teacher candidates in the development of compliant IEPs. Results of the study indicate that the use of an IEP Rubric shows promise as an instructional tool to help in the preparation of preservice teachers.

The Use of a Rubric as a Tool to Guide Pre-Service Teachers
in the Development of IEPs

Segregated teacher preparation programs for general and special educators contribute to the barriers experienced with inclusion (Winn & Blanton, 2005). A small number of general and special education teacher preparation programs are unifying the training of general and special educators through overlapping courses and field experiences (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006; Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Wyland, Dorsch, & Bosma, 2006). Yet, few examples of inclusive teacher preparation programs exist and have a strong focus on Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and training (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997; Griffin, Jones, & Kilgore, 2007)**.** Studies such as Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997; Griffin, Jones, & Kilgore, 2007; Holdheide and Reschly, 2008 have focused on teacher preparation programs and training to support the inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education classroom, however such studies have failed to understand the role the IEP plays in the successful inclusion of students and how a student's IEP goals and services can determine if a student with special needs will be successful.

The challenge of developing IEP documents that are representative of a team decision making process and are in compliance with IDEA 2004 is well documented. While IEPs are to act as a product and process in guiding instruction of children with disabilities, often they are treated as artifacts rather than vital guiding documents that direct instruction (Lee-Tarver, 2006; Yell & Stecker, 2003).   The intention of IEPs is to serve as the foundation of a child's academic program. Inclusion of children with disabilities in the general curriculum requires active involvement of all members of the child's educational team. The use of an IEP as a roadmap that is meaningful and compliant which informs both general and special education teachers as they plan instruction for students with special needs is a paradigm shift. All members play a critical and active role in the development and implementation of the IEP. Under the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) the development of a child's IEP is no longer the exclusive responsibility of the special educator, the concentration has shifted to the general educator to not only play a key role in the development of the IEP but also the implementation in order to assure students' success (Lee-Tarver, 2006).

The literature indicates that IEPs are often viewed as artifacts that are produced by special education teachers in order to be in compliance with federal and state regulations (Rosas & Winterman, 2010). Use of an IEP by general educators to inform them on instruction planning has not been common practice. Teachers involved in the development of the IEP have a greater chance of integrating learning goals of individual students into an overall curricular plan. Explicit demonstration of how knowledge of specialized instruction can benefit the construction of a general education classroom stands a better chance of survival.

Building capacity of educators around IEP goals can directly enhance instructional strategies that allow all students to be successful within the classroom. In a study conducted by Rosas and Winterman (2010) they found that teachers' (N=951) perception of professional development provided by their school district that focused on how to address the needs of students with disabilities was not useful. Given this perception, educational teams should consider reviewing the IEP document as a training opportunity to inform general educators as to their unique and powerful role in the development of a student's IEP. School teams need to become more cognizant of the importance of providing ongoing training of their staff as to the significance of IEP document as mandated by IDEA. The annual goals of the IEP have increased odds of being aligned within the tiers of instruction when IEP development is integrated into how teachers use formative assessment, progress monitoring, and lesson planning.   Pre-service teachers often perceive that they were adequately prepared to instruct students with disabilities (Rosas and Winterman, 2010). Adequate perception of readiness to teach students with disabilities is unacceptable. Institutions of Higher Education are charged with providing competently prepared teachers to meet the needs of inclusive settings. Mere adequacy is not sufficient. One means to address this problem is the use of a rubric to standardize the development of IEPs.

Rubrics have gained popularity as an assessment tool to measure student performance based on set criteria. In higher education, rubrics are perceived as a means to

standardized grading in order to provide transparency through a common set of objectives (Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe, & Haynes, 2009). While rubrics have been found to be a reliable and valid assessment tool, it is also recognized as an important instructional tool to guide student learning. Isaacson and Stacy (2009) found that the use of rubrics clarifies expectations and minimizes subjectivity in the evaluation of student performance in the field of nursing, but also allowed students to objectify the subjective clinical experience. De La Paz (2009) found rubrics to be a "powerful teaching device" for creative writing instruction (p. 134). Reddy and Andrade (2010) studies suggested that rubric use was associated with improved academic performance. Jonnson (2010) reviewed empirical research studies on rubrics and concluded that not only do rubrics increase reliable performance assessment, but also shows promise in improving learning and instruction. One-third of all the empirical studies reviewed indicated that the use of a rubric resulted in some type of positive learning improvement. As a result of the review, Jonnson concluded that "rubrics support learning and instruction by making expectations and criteria explicit which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment. Thus, the use of a rubric shows promise to improve learning outcomes in addition to measuring the degree of attainment of outcome. Clearly defining objectives and standards is critical for student learning.

One of the fundamental goals of teacher preparation programs is to train educators in the development and use of IEPs in order to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. Historically, teacher preparation programs have not adequately prepared all teachers, both general and special education, in the development and use of IEPs (Winterman & Rosas, 2011). Both general and special education teachers frequently indicate that they do not have sufficient background knowledge necessary to develop compliant IEPs. The literature clearly documents the problem with non-compliant IEPs. In order for teachers to be able to write an effective and compliant IEP, they first need to identify the key components of an IEP. In an effort to instruct pre-service teachers in the development of compliant IEPs, this study investigated the use of an IEP Rubric to assist teacher candidates in the identification of key components of an IEP. The following questions led to this investigation:
1. Does the use of an IEP Rubric support pre-service teachers in the identification of key components of an IEP?
2. Do pre-service teachers perceive the IEP Rubric to be a useful tool in identifying compliant IEPs?

Methodology

Participants

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the use of an IEP Rubric as an instructional tool for training pre-service teachers. The participants of this study consisted of 84 teacher candidates (i.e. pre-service teachers) who were seeking licensure in special education or general education at two institutes of higher education in Southwestern Ohio. All participants were enrolled in a general special education course that was required for their program of studies. The curriculum for this survey course in

special education included the development of IEPs and its use in planning instruction for students with disabilities.

Instrumentation

The researchers, along with two other college professors from two additional IHE in Southwestern Ohio, initially developed the prototype IEP Rubric. The researchers of this study modified the IEP Rubric to consist of two ratings, yes or no, in an attempt to simplify the identification of key components of an IEP for pre-service teachers. The subheading/labels in the rubric consisted of the key component of the IEP as noted in IDEA 2004. The criteria for each key component of the IEP consisted of performance descriptors which are aligned with requirements for IDEA 2004. See Figure I for example of the IEP Rubric's subheading, rating and performance descriptors.

Procedures

As part of the normal course requirements, students enrolled at the two universities in the general special education course received extensive training by their college professors on key components and standards for meeting IDEA 2004 IEP requirements.   Through the use of explicit instruction, students were directed and coached on the use of the IEP Rubric to identify key components of the IEP. Teacher candidates were then instructed to independently inventory an IEP using the IEP Rubric to identify key components of the IEP. The instructors reviewed the completed IEP Rubric to determine the preservice teachers' accuracy in the identification of key components/standards of the IEP. Upon completion of the independent IEP assignment, students were asked to give their feedback with regard to the comprehension, clarity, usability and actual use of the rubric. Data was aggregated and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

This study addressed two primary research questions: (1) Does the use of an IEP Rubric support pre-service teachers in the identification of key components of an IEP? (2)Do pre-service teachers perceive the IEP Rubric to be a useful tool in identifying compliant IEPs? Table 1 addresses the first question by providing the percentage of students who accurately identified the key components of an IEP. As the data in the Table 1 indicate, overall the pre-service teachers accurately identified 93.6% of key components of the IEP. The most striking data was the percentage (19.3%) of IEPs reviewed that did not include or meet the requirements of key components of the IEP as noted in the rubric. Notations from some of the pre-service teachers regarding the IEP Rubric indicated that the IEP reviewed either did not include the requirement as noted on the IEP or was not included due to the item not be required due to the student's academic needs such as transitioning not being noted for a young child.

Table 1
Percentage of IEP Components Correctly Identified by Pre-Service Teachers

Key Area		Total	Standard	Standard

	Requirements/Standards	Percent Identified (n)	Met (n)	Not Met (n)
Student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance	Statement that explain the effect of a student's disability on his or her educational performance and involvement and progress in the general education curriculum	95.3% (80)	64.3% (54)	31.0% (26)
	Statement that clearly indicates actual performance in academic and functional areas (e.g. behavioral, communication).	94.0% (79)	60.7% (51)	33.3% (28)
	Statement of child's strengths and needs (present levels of academic achievement and functional performance). Sufficient details on level of functioning to develop goals.	95.0% (79)	85.5% (71)	09.5% (8)
	Present levels are prioritized based on student's needs.	95.3% (80)	64.3% (54)	31.0% (26)
Goals	Statement of measurable annual goals that include goals in *academic and/or functional areas*.	97.6% (82)	83.3% (70)	14.3% (12)
	Goals are written using specific, observable, and measurable terms.	98.8% (83)	89.3% (75)	9.5% (8)
	Goals describe skills that can realistically be achieved within one year.	98.8% (83)	88.1% (74)	10.7% (9)
	Goals are clearly connected to the statement(s) on the student's present levels of *academic achievement* and *functional performance*.	96.5% (81)	79.8% (67)	16.7% (14)
	Goals are listed in the order that reflects the priority of the needs of the student in the present levels section.	98.8% (83)	57.1% (48)	41.7% (35)
Benchmarks and short-term objectives for those students who take alternate assessments	At least 2 objectives written for each goal.	98.8% (83)	94.0% (79)	4.8% (4)
	Each objective includes a condition and measurable behavior.	98.8% (83)	95.2% (80)	3.6% (3)
	Specific criteria that match the skills being measured are written for each objective.	97.6% (82)	88.1% (74)	95.0% (81)
	Objectives are clearly connected to the present levels of *academic achievement, functional performance and g*oals, addressing student abilities and needs.	97.6% (82)	78.6% (66)	19.0% (16)
	Benchmark/objectives are listed in the order			

	that reflects the priority of the needs of the student in the present levels section.			
		98.8% (83)	77.4% (65)	21.4% (18)
Measure and Report Progress	Statement of how a student's progress toward meeting his or her annual goals will be measured	96.5% (81)	91.7% (77)	4.8% (4)
	Statement on when and how periodic reports will be provided to the student's parents.	94.0% (79)	82.1% (69)	11.9% (10)
	Statement lets the reader know that the reports are issued as frequently as students in general education receive their report cards.	89.2% (75)	70.2% (59)	19.0% (16)
Services to achieve goals	Statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student.	91.6% (77)	82.1% (69)	9.5% (8)
	Statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will enable the student to advance appropriately toward attaining his or her annual goals.	90.4% (76)	70.2% (59)	20.2% (17)
	Statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will enable the student to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.	94.1% (79)	67.9% (57)	26.2% (22)
	Special Education and related services and supplementary aids and services are based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable.	88.0% (74)	44.0% (37)	44.0% (37)
Least Restricted Environment (LRE)	Statement that students have access to the general curriculum	96.4% (81)	77.4% (65)	19.0% (16)
	Explain/rationale why a child is not participating in general education, curriculum	86.9% (73)	36.9% (31)	50.0% (42)
Accom-modations /District Tests	Accommodations match the services delivered in the classroom on a regular basis	82.1% (69)	61.9% (52)	20.2% (17)
	Accommodations derived from student needs (present levels of *academic achievement* and *functional performance*)	83.3% (70)	72.6% (61)	10.7% (9)
	The accommodations adhere to local and federal guidelines.	80.9% (68)	69.0% (58)	11.9% (10)

N=84

In the area of transition planning, 52% (n=44) reviewed IEPs that included transition. Overall 97.9% of the pre-service teachers accurately identified the key components of the transition plans in the IEPs reviewed. The most striking information was that 32.5% of the transition plans reviewed did not meet the requirements/standards as noted in the IEP.

Table 2
Percentage of IEP Transition Plan Components Correctly Identified by Pre-Service Teachers

Key Area	Requirements/Standards	Total Percent Identified (n)	Standard Met (n)	Standard Not Met (n)
Transitions beginning at age 16, coordinated activities that meet these criteria	Statement of quality of life goals: results-oriented, focused on improving academic and functional achievement, facilitate movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation	99.9% (44)	72.7% (32)	27.2% (12)
	Vision: based on the child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests	95.4% (42)	54.4% (24)	40.9% (18)
	Resources and Inter-agency collaboration: description of the course of study needed to reach stated goals, including instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.	95.4% (42)	65.9% (29)	29.5% (13)

N=44

This study not only investigated the use of an IEP Rubric as a learning tool to assist teacher candidates in the identification of key components of an IEP, but also examined if pre-service teachers perceived the IEP Rubric to be a useful tool in identifying compliant IEPs. Results of the survey on the use of the IEP Rubric suggest that the pre-service teachers did find the IEP rubric to be valuable. Using a 5-Point Likert Scale ranging from 1 through 5 (1= Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) the pre-service teachers

strongly agreed that the rubric was useful (*M* =1.69, *SD* = 0.69). Furthermore, results of this study found that participants strongly agreed that they would use the rubric in their practice (*M* =1.79, *SD* = 0.68).   Additionally, the pre-service teachers indicated that the rubric helped them identify components needed in an IEP (*M* =1.77, *SD* = 0.88), and moreover that the rubric ultimately will help students (*M* =1.95, *SD* = 0.70). The pre-service teacher participants agreed that they found creating an IEP to be difficult than they expected; however, the Rubric made it easier (*M* =2.24, *SD* = 0.86). In addition, the pre-service teachers agreed that they would recommend the IEP Rubric to other teachers (*M* =2.06, *SD* = 0.86). Table 3 provides a summary of pre-service teachers' perception of the IEP Rubric.

Table 3
Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of IEP Rubric
_____

Statement	Mean SD
This Rubric was useful.	1.69 0.69
I will use this Rubric in my practice.	1.78 0.68
I already use a tool like this.	4.76 1.01
I found the Rubric confusing to follow.	3.37 1.12
Rubric allowed me to see components needed in an IEP.	1.77 0.84
I will recommend that other teachers use this Rubric.	2.06 0.86
The Rubric will go on my to-do stack and be forever lost.	4.64 0.93
Using the Rubric was enjoyable.	3.03 0.86
I would make significant changes to the Rubric.	4.51 1.01

I found the Rubric a burden to use.	3.71	0.90
Creating an IEP is difficult for me, the Rubric made it easier.	2.24	0.86
This Rubric will ultimately help students.	1.95	0.70

5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree; **2** = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree

In addition to asking the pre-service teachers to rate their level of agreement to statements regarding the IEP, they were also asked to rate their reaction in the use of the rubric from 1 to 7 (1 = Very Positive, 7 = Very Negative) utilizing word pairs. As noted in Table 4, pre-service teachers had a positive reaction to using the rubric as noted by the positive rating of word pairs such as good ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 2.04$), valuable ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.07$), important ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.16$), understandable ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.62$), helpful ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.13$), effective ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.14$), and useful ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.02$).

Table 4
Pre-service Teachers' Reaction in Response to Using the Rubric.

Word Pairs	Mean	SD
Good to Bad	2.12	2.04
Valuable to Worthless	2.11	1.07
Important to Unimportant	2.02	1.16
Understandable to Confusing	2.85	1.62
Helpful to Not Helpful	2.34	1.13
Effective to Ineffective	2.29	1.14
Useful to Not Useful	2.06	1.02

N=84
7 Point Rating Scale: 1= Very Positive: 7= Very Negative

Discussion

For IEPs to be truly useful general and special education teachers need to collaborate in the development of IEPs; so, they are used as documents to guide instruction. When training tools such as an IEP Rubric are incorporated into pre-service teacher training for all teachers, it has the potential to improve instruction for students with disabilities. The practical importance of this investigation includes the opportunity for teachers of similar student populations to work together to build ideas and strategies to improve student learning while building their own capacity. Pre-service teacher candidates were provided

a unique look at how they teamed with colleagues to support children while provided the guidance of trained experts in the field to support their learning. Following the direct training, preservice teachers will be able to maintain their skills through their ongoing use of the rubric. The participating universities will be able to continue to train teachers though the ongoing use of the IEP rubric model where teachers can provide a train the trainer support to each other. In summary, the development of compliant IEPs is a job responsibility of all educators. Team implementation of collaborative practices during the IEP process can easily be integrated into the current practices as no additional funding or time is required. The use of an IEP Rubric shows promise as a tool that can assist teams in the development of IEPs that can be useful in planning instruction for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

Holdheide and Reschly (2008) believe improved integration of students with disabilities into the general education classroom can be achieved but mere physical presence alone does not lead to true inclusion. Students must be provided with access to effective curriculum dependent on the relevant competencies of both the general and special education teachers. Improved teacher preparation programs and professional development activities are necessary for realizing the goals of inclusive services—specifically, improving results for students with disabilities (p. 4).

The IEP Rubric offers a means for changing the current practices and provide for a truly just education for all students. Based upon the principal investigators' pilot study, an IEP Rubric shows promise in providing a level playing field in writing IDEA compliant documents by allowing participants to contribute as equal team members in the writing process (Rosas, Winterman, Kroeger, & Jones, 2009). The IEP rubric may serve as a reference tool to bolster the confidence of team members, especially those who have not had formal special education training.

References

Blanton, L. P., Griffin, C. C., Winn, J. A., & Pugach, M. C. (1997). *Teacher education in transition: Collaborative programs to prepare general and special education teachers.* Denver, CO: Love.

Brownell, M. T., Ross, D. D., Colon, E. P., & McCallum, C. L. (2005). Critical features of special education teacher preparation: A comparison with general teacher education. *The Journal of Special Education, 38*, 242–252.

De La Paz, S. (2009). Rubrics: Heuristics for Developing Writing Strategies. Assessment for Effective Intervention, 34(3), 134-146.

Griffin, C. C., Jones, H. A., & Kilgore, K. L. (2007). The unintended side effects of including students with learning disabilities for teacher educators. *Learning Disabilities, 14*(3), 195–204.

Holdheide, L., & Reschly, D. J. (2008). Teacher preparation to deliver inclusive services to students with disabilities (TQ Connection Issue Paper).

Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved March 4, 2011, from http://www.tqsource.org/publications/TeacherPreparationtoDeliverInclusive Services.pdf

Isaacson, J.J., & Stacy, A.S. (2009). Rubrics for clinical evaluation: Objectifying the subjective experience. *Nurse Education in Practice,* 9(2), Issue 2, 134-140.

Jonsson, A. (2010). The use of transparency in the 'Interactive examination' for student teachers. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *17*(2), 183-197.

Lee-Tarver, A., (2006). Are individualized education plans a good thing? A survey of teachers' perceptions of the utility of IEPs in regular education. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 33(4), 263-272.

Mansilla, V., Duraisingh, E., Wolfe, C. R., & Haynes, C. (2009). Targeted Assessment Rubric: An Empirically Grounded Rubric for Interdisciplinary Writing. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80(3), 334-353.

Reddy, Y. & Andrade, H. (2010). A review of rubric use in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *35*(4), 435-448.

Rosas, C., Winterman, K.G., Kroeger, S., Jones, M. (2009). Using a rubric to assess individual education programs. *International Journal of Applied Educational Studies, 4*, (1), 47-57.

Rosas, C., & Winterman, K.G. (2010). Teachers' perceptions on Special Education preparation: A descriptive study. *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)* 3, 119-128.

Ross, D. D., Stafford, L., Church-Pupke, P., & Bondy, E. (2006). Practicing collaboration: What we learn from a cohort that functions well. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*(1), 32–43.

Van Laarhoven, T., Munk, D. D., Lynch, K., Wyland, S., Dorsch, L. Z., Bosma, J. (2006). Project ACCEPT: Preparing pre-service special and general educators for inclusive education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*, 209–212.

Winn, J., & Blanton, L., (2005). The call for collaboration in teacher education. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 38*(2), 1–10.

Winterman, K., & Rosas, C., (under review). Examining the AYP Status for Students with Disabilities: Are Students with Disabilities Successfully Achieving State Standards?

Yell, M. L., & Stecker, P. M. (2003). Developing legally correct and educationally meaningful IEPs using curriculum-based measurement. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 28*(34), 73–88.

About the Authors

Clarissa Rosas is an Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Programs in Special Education at the College of Mount Saint Joseph. She has been a special education teacher, and an administrator at the district and school level. She earned a Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of New Mexico.

Kathleen G. Winterman is an Assistant professor at Xavier University. She served as a special educator and elementary principal for eighteen years. Her primary focus has been

best practices in early childhood, Autism, and teacher preparation. She earned her Master's degree in Special Education and doctorate of Special Education from the University of Cincinnati.

Figure I Sample of IEP Rubric IEP Rubric's Subheading, Rating and Performance Descriptors.

Criteria **Key Area (IEP Section):** *Student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance*	Score & Comments
P1: Present Levels are prioritized based on student's needs.	☐Yes ☐No
P2: Statement that **explain the effect** of a student's disability on his or her educational performance and involvement and progress in the general education curriculum	☐Yes ☐No
P3: Statement that clearly indicates **actual performance** in academic and functional areas (e.g. behavioral, communication).	☐Yes ☐No
P4: Statement of child's **strengths and needs** (present levels of academic achievement and functional performance).	☐Yes ☐No

Figure I is a sample of one section of the IEP Rubric. The rating consisted of yes or no as related to the IEP under review. The key area and performance descriptors for each area originated from IDEA 2004 IEP mandates.