To Understand and Support a Child with Special Needs

by

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Field Project

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Abstract

This field project seeks to investigate and utilize strategies, tools, and resources to better understand and support children with special needs. The reviewed articles share the importance of creating a classroom community that is respectful, caring, empathetic, and compassionate. The articles also report that meeting a child's needs requires teachers to know their students and know a wide variety of techniques, strategies, and resources to support a child with special needs. This project examines a case study of Kate, a kindergartener identified with special needs, and her teacher's implementation of strategies to support Kate's transition in her new classroom. Results show the positive influence of creating a strong classroom community and implementing a classroom plan that identifies pertinent background information and professional and classroom supports. Conclusions include the importance of learning about and knowing the individual students and identifying effective strategies to meet the changing needs of a child with special needs.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Identify the Issue

Whether teachers have a class of ten or a class of twenty-five, meeting each student's needs can be challenging. This is especially true when working with children with special needs. Some may come struggling to understand math concepts or grasp the strategies needed to comprehend informational text. Others may come with lots of energy, but not yet have the strategies or tools to channel that energy. Some may bring challenges that limit their ability to communicate or move safely around the classroom. Others may storm out of a room when something does not go their way or melt down into tears because that is the only way they know how to cope. Some may be a puzzle that is not figured out quite yet. No matter what challenges children bring as they walk into the classroom, each is a child of God. Each child is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, New International Version). Teachers have the privilege of sharing the wonderful news of salvation with them each day and helping them use their God-given gifts and abilities.

Importance of the Project

Many teachers, however, feel unprepared to meet the needs of this diverse and often challenging group of students (Brownell, Adams et al., 2006).

According to Rosenzwieg (2009),

Not only do general education teachers need to be knowledgeable and confident about different disabilities, learning needs and instructional strategies, but they also need to understand and be prepared to utilize the different types of adaptations and modifications that will be needed to address both curriculum and behavioral situations. (pp. 4-5)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, seven million public school students ages 3-21 receive special education services (2019). In 2016, 95% of the students that received special education services spent at least some part of their day in the regular education classroom, with a majority of 6-21-year-olds being in the regular classroom for more than 80% of the day (US Department of Education, 2018). Within WELS schools, over 1300 students receive special education services from public schools or private agencies and over 1400 students receive instruction modification (WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, 2018). Across America, classroom teachers face the challenge and opportunity to support a growing group of exceptional, diverse, and at-risk students. "The need for teachers who have both the knowledge and the ability to teach special-education students is more critical today than ever before" (Mader, 2017).

Project Goal

The goal of this field project is to investigate and utilize strategies, tools, and resources to better understand and support children with special needs. Identifying and utilizing these strategies, tools, and resources will support teachers in meeting the challenges and opportunities they face when working with children with special needs.

Literature Review

Introduction

Supporting children with special needs is challenging, and researchers have studied how to identify and support these and all children (DiTullio, 2014; Hemmeter, 2000; Jung et al, 2008). Understanding and utilizing this research is fundamental in identifying effective teaching practices that support these children as they work to navigate our classrooms and schools. The

following research focuses on building a classroom community and addressing academic, social-emotional, and sensory needs.

Building a Classroom Community

Building a classroom community is vital in supporting each child's learning and growth. According to Turner (2018), these environments are the backbone of elementary classrooms. Classroom communities promote inclusion and encourage students to learn from each other and help each other learn. (Watkins, 2005). These communities create a climate of trust, respect, and belonging, which promotes student learning (Bondy & Ketts, 2001). Morning meetings can be a place where classroom communities are built and strengthened; they become a place full of learning, safe, respectful, and challenging for all (Kriete, 1999). Building a classroom community also provides opportunities for students to develop trusting student relationships. Telling communal stories is another way to help students feel connected and become more invested; the stories also serve as an anchoring point as students learn to get along and navigate their classroom and school (Turner, 2018).

Teachers play a very important role in the creation of these classroom communities. Teachers can use their professional power to create a safe, just, inclusive, communicative, inviting, and caring classroom community - one that promotes academic achievement" (Krall & Jalongo, 1998, p. 84). Building these communities is an art and a science, where teachers need to respond, reset, tinker, rethink, and seek to strengthen it every day (Turner, 2018). Teachers need to be honest, be a role model, be flexible, be empathetic, be human, be kind, look beyond the classroom walls, and grow (Krall & Jalongo, 1998). Benn (2018) shares that teachers need to cultivate opportunities for engagement, teach for mastery and understanding, use compassionate

communication, recognize and affirm the best qualities in their students, and know how to read the room.

Benn (2018) further states,

> If we are truly going to establish respect and build rapport with our students, we must take the stance of *servant leadership*—where we put others' needs before our own in an effort to share power and facilitate opportunities for students (and colleagues) to perform at their highest potential. (p. 21)

Meeting Academic Needs

Creating a caring classroom community sets the stage to begin to meet a child's needs. For inclusion to be successful and meaningful for students with special needs, inclusion needs to be a part of the daily fabric of the classroom and students need to learn developmentally appropriate new skills within that context (Hemmeter, 2000). Teachers must learn about these students through assessments and differentiate instruction to meet their needs (DiTullio, 2014). The assessment process does not stop there. Teachers must select assessments that also monitor the student's progress by using tools that are sensitive to student change, are educationally meaningful, and are an efficient use of time (Stecker et al., 2008). To effectively support students with special needs, intervention plans need to be put in place. Teachers need to identify short-term objectives and target behaviors, analyze the skills necessary to reach the objective, identify natural learning opportunities, select strategies, ensure effective use, and regularly evaluate the plan's effectiveness (Jung et al., 2008).

As a part of this learning process, students must learn many skills and utilize a variety of strategies to help them in this endeavor. A wide variety of strategies are available to support

needs related to memory, intelligence, basic skills, language, motivation, study/organization, and social/emotional characteristics (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992). (See Appendix A for Scrugg's and Mastropieri's list.) Students must also learn that mistakes are part of the learning process. Teachers must create learning environments where students can safely take risks and fail, where a "challenging curriculum, differentiated instruction, cooperation, planned interdependence, and the direct teaching of listening, leading, and speaking skills" are woven into the fabric of the classroom (DiTullio, 2014, p. 40).

DiTullio (2014) also states,

> Educators should consider several important factors when designing a classroom that promotes resiliency development. These factors include having students develop trusting relationships with one another and adults, building competence, building confidence, creating opportunities for risk-taking, and creating engaging learning experiences that challenge students to think and problem solve. (p. 38)

Teachers must strive to find the balance between challenging their students, but yet creating lessons that also result in enough success to motivate them to continue (DiTullio, 2014).

Utilizing cooperative learning is one means of supporting and challenging students. Cooperative learning provides opportunities for higher-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions, and greater transfer of what is learned (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). This approach can be used to teach specific content, encourage active processing of new learning, and provide support and assistance (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Students must be explicitly taught the skills needed to work in these groups and know what those skills look like, sound like, and feel like (DiTullio, 2014). Students need to learn how to listen actively,

encourage one another, lead a group, engage in the learning process, and know what language to use (DiTullio, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Meeting Social-Emotional Needs

Meeting students' social-emotional needs are a vital component of every classroom, as well. This is especially true for students that receive special education services. According to Lewis (2006), "we have created the 'perfect storm'" by placing students with emotional-behavioral needs into more restrictive environments and limiting access to the general education curriculum or by placing them in general education with teachers who have limited training (p. 187). Students need the right type of supports. "If we remove the supports before students are ready, they'll crash" (Minahan, 2017, p. 46). Through reflection and observation, teachers can identify practices and strategies to support students' social-emotional development (Katz & Galbraith, 2006). Creating an intervention plan is one way to support a struggling child. To create an intervention plan, teachers need to interview key people, conduct observations, analyze data, and develop a positive behavior support plan that identifies new skills, necessary changes, and ways to respond to the behavior (Rao et al., 2003). Accurate thinking, persistence, help-seeking, emotional literacy, moral identity, perspective-taking, self-regulation, and collaboration are some of the skills and competencies that students need (Borba, 2018; Minahan, 2017). To support this development, social-emotional learning needs to be ongoing, meaningful, internalized, student-centered, woven-in, respectful, and lead empathetically (Borba, 2018).

According to Wigfield and Eccles (2002), there are four developmental steps to build these types of skills: observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation. When students learn these skills, they learn to recognize their triggers and signs and regulate their feelings before they go into overload (Borba, 2018). When determining where to start, teachers need to

meet students where they are independently and systematically introduce more skills and

strategies (Minahan, 2017). Teachers need to teach students that when they go beyond their

comfort zone to learn new or challenging concepts, their brains grow new connections, and they

get smarter (Dweck, 2006).

To help students grow in their social-emotional development, teachers can use a wide

variety of strategies and practices. Using children's literature, songs, and fingerplays provide

opportunities for children to explore issues, express their feelings, and develop relationships

(Figueroa-Sanchez, 2008). Chunking work into small pieces and providing sentence starters can

reduce anxiety and help with low initiation skills (Minahan, 2017). Using authentic pictures of

social interactions can be a valuable teaching tool to help promote social-emotional development

(Katz & Galbraith, 2006). Utilizing emotional check-ins, paired sharing, discussions, class

meetings, debates, cooperative learning, conflict resolution, perspective-taking, and class

mantras provide many opportunities to support a child's social-emotional development (Borba,

2018). Incorporating interactive modeling, intentionally utilizing language to engage learners,

using logical consequences, and applying interactive learning structures are practices that foster a

belief that "integrating academic and social-emotional skills creates an environment where

students can do their best learning" (Denton & Kriete, 2000; Responsive Classroom, 2019, para.

4).

Meeting Sensory Needs

Understanding a child's sensory needs is the first step in supporting a child that struggles

with sensory processing. Sensory needs can focus on touch (including pressure, temperature,

pain sensation), vision, taste, smell, and auditory, but also proprioception (body awareness),

vestibular (body position and balance), and interoception (input from internal organs) (Biel &

Peske, 2018). How a child notices and responds to sensory input can vary in frequency, duration, intensity, rhythm, complexity, and novelty, and each child has preferences as to the type and intensity of sensory input that they like and do not like (Wakeford, 2006). Most children can process this information easily, but some children struggle to regulate these inputs and may become overstimulated or under-stimulated (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). A child's threshold for the input and their response to the input provide information to describe their needs along a continuum of sensory seeking to under-responsive to over-responsive (Thompson & Raisor, 2013).

        "Only once you understand the why behind what your child is doing can you begin to really get a grip on what to do about it" (Biel & Peske, 2018, p. 61). Understanding a child's sensory needs can be complex. Some children may have a sensitivity to visual stimuli, but not proprioceptive, while others may seek out vestibular input, but not auditory. These differences mean teachers need to understand the function of the behaviors and find meaningful, appropriate replacement behaviors so children can meet their needs (Murray et al., 2009). It means that teachers need to create an environment and approaches that meet the child's needs (Murray et al., 2009; Thompson & Raisor, 2013). It means that teachers need to learn how to best scaffold as children change, grow, and need new supports (Snow, 2017).

        Children with sensory processing concerns need different scaffolds and approaches depending on the non-regulated senses involved and where they fall on the continuum of under-responsive to over-responsive. Children with under-responsivity are usually passive in their response to sensory input, are quiet, and often have difficulty paying attention in class (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). These children need intense and frequent sensory input so that they can register and respond appropriately (Murray et al., 2009). Active engagement and sustained

responses by using high-energy rhythmic activities, trampoline jumping, or stretching can be used to achieve intense and frequent sensory input (Murray et al., 2009).

Children who avoid sensory input often need a different set of strategies and approaches to help them regulate their sensory input. These children are often easily over-aroused, which leads them to be distracted, and will quickly reach their threshold for handling the input, which leads them to shut down or leave the situation to keep from becoming overstimulated (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). Anxiety and stress are common for sensory over-responsiveness, and these students may often chew on clothing or other things when they are having difficulty calming themselves (Murray et al., 2009). These children often need calm environments without extra noise or visual distractions, predictable routines and activities, social stories, visual schedules, and information taught in organized bits (Murray et al., 2009). Children with sensory over-responsiveness also benefit from learning self-regulation and new coping strategies and improving their self-awareness and communication skills (Murray et al., 2009).

Sensory seekers seem to always be in motion, have a high sensory threshold, and are active in their response to their environment (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). These children crave additional sensory input and often need activities that are movement-based, such as exercise, heavy work, fidget tools, or hands-on manipulatives (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). Many sensory seekers also have difficulty expressing what they want or understanding the expectations of the task (Murray et al., 2009). Sensory seekers benefit from the creation of a sensory-based activity routine, sometimes known as a sensory diet, which provides opportunities for them to meet their sensory threshold throughout the day (Murray et al., 2009). Providing these consistent sensory breaks and additional movement within the classroom allow these children to get the extra

sensory input they need (Thompson & Raisor, 2013). (See Appendix B for additional strategies for children with sensory needs.)

Summary

Understanding and supporting a child with special needs is complex and challenging. All children, but especially those with special needs, deserve a classroom environment that is supportive, trusting, respectful, inclusive, and caring. This community is cultivated through planning, tweaking, reflecting, and facilitating. Morning meetings and storytelling are some ways to build this caring and collaborative community. Teachers play a vital role in creating a respectful, caring, empathetic, and compassionate classroom community.

Meeting a student's academic, social-emotional, and sensory needs require teachers to know their students through observation, assessment, reflection, and communication. As teachers begin to understand their students, they can put strategies, approaches, and tools in place to better support them and meet their needs. Chunking information, cooperative learning, and strategy instruction can be used to support academic needs. Children's literature, explicit strategy instruction, and class meetings are ways to support a child's social-emotional development. Movement, a sensory diet, fidget tools, and predictable routines can be used to help a child with sensory needs. Understanding and supporting a child with special needs is a work in progress as teachers learn what will help them be their best.

Implementation

Introduction

Meeting the needs of each learner is vital for every student, but especially those with special needs. Identifying those needs is the first step in learning how to best support them. The

needs of each child will be different, and different classroom assessments will be needed to

determine what supports, tools, and resources will be needed. Kate (pseudonym) is a

kindergartener in a kindergarten through second-grade classroom. She was previously identified

as having sensory processing issues and received special education services in her preschool and

kindergarten readiness classrooms. She joined six other kindergarteners along with seven first-

graders and four second-graders in the classroom.

Procedure

The teacher began by reviewing available assessment data from previous classroom

teachers, Kate's individualized education plan (IEP), standardized testing data, and outside

professional documentation. This data provided important information and formed the

foundation of the initial understanding of Kate's social, emotional, academic, and sensory needs

(See Appendix C). To learn more about Kate, the teacher interviewed her parents at her home

visit and asked about her previous experiences at school, their perceptions, and strategies and

resources that may be helpful (See Appendix D). The teacher also interviewed Kate during the

first week of school to learn about what she likes to do, her family, and her friends (See

Appendix D).

Through observation in whole group, small group, and individual settings, the teacher

observed and interacted with Kate to learn more about her sensory needs, social interactions,

emotional regulation, and other non-academic skills she needed to help her be successful in her

classroom (See Appendix E). After Kate became comfortable with the classroom and its

routines, the teacher also began assessments within the classroom (see Appendix C). These

assessments focused on foundational academic skills needed in kindergarten in areas such as

phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, and number sense. Kate will undergo an IEP re-evaluation in April of her kindergarten year.

After working through assessment and observation data, the teacher created and implemented a plan to support Kate in the classroom (see Appendix C). This plan included areas to build upon (strengths), areas for growth (identified needs), resources, beneficial tools, and strategies that may help Kate. This initial plan was implemented over 30 days. A focus was placed initially on creating a classroom community that is caring, loving, accepting, helpful, and understanding to help Kate and her classmates. Strategies included utilizing cooperative base groups, creating opportunities to get to know and build relationships with the faculty, staff, and other students, using storytelling and read-alouds, and morning meeting, interactive learning structures, teacher language, and interactive modeling. Kate occasionally needed supports and tools to help her regulate her sensory needs. These included providing movement/sensory breaks, providing a variety of spaces for her to work within, using wiggly chairs, and heavy work.

Social and emotional strategies and supports included using read-alouds to teach skills that focused on maintaining attention, using appropriate voice levels, making friends, and taking turns. Other strategies included incorporating class meetings to teach and address concerns and including whole group instruction in areas such as identification, awareness, problem-solving, regulation, coping skills, a growth mindset, or friendship skills. When Kate needed academic support, small group instruction and opportunities for Kate to work with a partner were provided. Differentiated instruction strategies were also utilized, such as providing sentence stems, learning through manipulatives and play, and connecting to the student's interests.

Artifacts

Artifacts collected for this study include Kate's classroom plan (see Appendix C), parent and child interview notes (see Appendix D), and teacher observation notes (see Appendix E).

Results

Through assessment, observation, interviews, and reflection, the teacher was able to identify strategies, resources, and tools in order to understand and support Kate's needs (See Appendices C, D, and E). The teacher created and implemented a classroom support plan (See Appendix C). This plan included a summary of previous testing data, current classroom assessments, interviews, and observations. This information provided the necessary understanding to create a set of strategies, resources, and tools that would support and help meet Kate's needs. Based on the observation and interview data after the 30 days (see Appendices D and E), Kate received the support she needed to transition into her kindergarten classroom successfully and meet the growing demands within the classroom.

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Reflective Essay

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Introduction

Understanding and supporting children with special needs is multi-faceted and, at times, can require more from their teachers and caregivers. Identifying what each child needs and implementing effective strategies and supports is paramount in helping each child be the best that s/he can be (DiTullio, 2014). Teachers need to embrace the challenges and rewards of working with children with special needs and see the possibilities and opportunities for growth and learning.

Conclusions

To understand and support a child with special needs is a complex process because each child is unique and has different needs. Kate's transition into her kindergarten classroom went smoothly. The teacher sought to understand Kate and her needs through assessment, observation, reflection, strategy implementation, and tool and resource utilization. Kate was a part of a classroom community that met her where she was at and understood she needed different supports to help her be her best. Kate's academic, social-emotional, and sensory needs were met by utilizing small group instruction, increased wait time, directions given in smaller steps, different work spaces, and social stories.

Kate is one of many children who, through understanding and support, can thrive in their regular education classroom settings. Each child has strengths that can be nurtured and areas that can be cultivated. Assessments, observations, and other tools provide needed information to understand where a child is at and what they may need. This information lays the foundation for creating and implementing a plan that meets each child's needs and provides the necessary supports for them to find success, grow, and learn. By implementing and refining the needed supports, Kate and the many other children like her can do their very best.

Recommendations for Teaching Children with Special Needs

What I learned from Kate prompted me to think about what every teacher needs to do to meet the needs of all children, but especially those with special needs in the regular education classroom.

Be well-informed.

The number of books, articles, resources, webinars, and conferences about education and special education are numerous. There is much to learn about social-emotional learning, sensory development, academic development, self-regulation, motor development, effective teaching strategies, collaborative learning, classroom communities, and many other facets of education. As professionals, the importance of learning, reading, and researching is vital. The breadth and depth of educational topics can be daunting, but finding ways to learn about the development and needs of a child with special needs is worth the effort. Finding colleagues to share, discuss, and learn with makes the journey less overwhelming. Collaborating with the child's special education team members and other medical professionals provides a wealth of knowledge and unique perspectives as to how to best support the child's needs.

Be reflective.

The ability to look, to see, to notice, and to recognize, but, most importantly, to reflect is vital in supporting a child with special needs. It is the skill of taking all the assessment data from special education testing, from classroom assessments, from observations, from medical tests, and from day-to-day observations to form a picture of who the child is, where they are at and what they may need for support. Teachers need to identify practices and strategies that will support the development of new skills, necessary changes and ways to respond the child's needs. There is the science of reviewing data, but reflection is also an art. When does the strategy work? When doesn't it work? How does the child respond to new environments or content? What helps the child maintain a growth mindset when facing challenges? Where is the child finding success? How can new learning and strategies be built upon that success? What interventions should be placed in the child's plan? How does the teacher's intervention support or hinder the child's

growth? Why does the child find success in some areas but not others? Why does the strategy work one day but not the next? What is the function of the behavior? What are replacement behaviors that can be used so that child's needs can be met? Asking these and many other questions begin the process of reflection, the ability to assess what has and is happening and begin to think about what could and should happen next.

Be adaptive.

The needs of every child, including those with special needs, change as they develop new skills, explore new settings, integrate new strategies, address new challenges, and delve into new experiences. Teachers need to learn how to best scaffold as children change, grow and need new supports. Determining the appropriate time to withdraw supports to build independence or focus on a new skill or strategy requires teachers to know their students, understand where they are and where they need to go, recognize what strategies and supports will be most effective, and adapt to meet the ever-changing demands and needs.

Be resilient.

Understanding and supporting a child with special needs can be challenging. The intensity and severity of their needs can be daunting and difficult to see how they can be supported in the classroom setting. Children work to develop resiliency to meet the demands of learning, and teachers need to build resiliency to meet the challenges they may face in the classroom. Being resilient, the ability to "withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions," is especially needed when working with children with special needs (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Building that resiliency can be difficult at times, but putting in place techniques and strategies can provide the needed support. Some ways to build resiliency include maintaining

perspective, finding a professional passion, embracing change, laughing, avoiding complaining, developing a professional support network, and taking risks (Harris, 2012).

Be curious.

Curiosity is what drives learning. It is what drives teachers to read more about a topic, to learn more about a child, to implement a new strategy, or find a better way to reach that child that is struggling. It is what pushes teachers to try something they have never done before, to seek out resources and support, or to do something they never thought they could. Curiosity does not come without its challenges. Having a strong support system to encourage, to ask questions, and to celebrate successes with and continuing to learn and grow is vital to the teacher and child's success.

Conclusion

Teachers have the responsibility and opportunity to do all they can to understand and support every child by being well-informed, reflective, adaptive, resilient, curious, and brave. It is by growing as teachers that they better understand, support, and teach the children in their care. Through reflection, teachers can see where they have come from and where they can go. By adapting to their needs, teachers can set them up to continue to grow and succeed. By being resilient, teachers do not give up and see each day as a new opportunity to understand and support every child. Through their curiosity and bravery, teachers can see the possibilities and be willing to take that first step and the many other steps that will follow. By creating a place where children's academic, social-emotional, and sensory needs are met, teachers create a place where each child can thrive using the gifts, talents, and opportunities God has given them.

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Appendix A

Instructional Strategies for Mainstream Success

Memory Strategies	Social/Emotional	Affect/Motivation	Intelligence
• intensify instruction for later recall • use external memory systems when appropriate • use mnemonic instruction • promote effective encoding	• direct appeal, proximity • reinforce positive classroom behavior • use peer mediation • utilize support personnel • teach social skills	• create a positive, caring classroom atmosphere • use attribution training • establish goals for learning • consult support personnel when necessary	• ensure that presented information is similarly meaningful to all learners • provide additional time to learn • attend to developmental requirements of the content • measure achievement at later, rather than earlier, stages of acquisition • use variable from the "effective teaching" literature • employ discovery learning, inquiry, or constructivist approaches judicially
Language	**Basic Skills**	**Study/Organization**	
• allow sufficient time for responding • assist students in developing listening skills • integrate language activities into regular instruction • support special services in language training	• employ parents as tutors • employ peer mediation • use teacher effectiveness variables • teach cognitive strategies • de-emphasize textbook approaches where appropriate • modify the demands of the class as necessary • intensify special education	• provide structure • be explicit with all assignments • teach general study techniques • teach test-taking skills **Attention** • modify the rate and presentation of the curriculum • direct appeals • proximity • reinforce attending • teach self-recording strategies	

Effective mainstreaming strategies for mildly handicapped students (Scruggs & Mastropieri,

1992)

Appendix B

Strategies for Students with Sensory Needs

Low Registration	Sensory Sensitivity	Sensation Seeking	Sensation Avoiding
- Keep children alert by letting them know that adults are nearby. - Make eye contact when talking to children, and wait for their responses after asking questions. - Vary your voice level and facial expressions to help these children stay alert. - Encourage children to work in groups. They may need extra encouragement to socialize. - Use a variety of activities to keep children active in the classroom. - Have these children sit in the middle of the classroom, which offers more stimulation to help them focus. - Provide many activities and experiences that require movement. For example, have children leapfrog to the door and skip to the bathroom.	- Monitor your volume and speed of talking and your activity level. - Avoid strong scents, such as perfumes, lotions, and room sprays. - Maintain predictable routines. - Provide short breaks, such as using the bathroom, stretching, or going to the library, to help prevent sensory overload. - Provide a quiet area for children to go to when they start to feel overwhelmed. Make sure an adult can supervise this area. - Place these children at the beginning or end of the line to maintain a predictable routine. - Discuss ways for children to communicate	- Give children active jobs, such as taking notes to the office, erasing the board, and helping arrange the desks. - Encourage friendships with peers who are physically active and can help direct these children's energy into purposeful activities. - Let children stand, move, and pace around in the classroom. Have them sit on an exercise ball while doing work at their desks. - Let children use a fiddle toy during activities that do not provide a lot of sensory input. - Use lots of kinesthetic and hands-on activities. - Have children sit in the back of the classroom to provide them with lots of visual stimulation and decrease the likelihood that	- Monitor your voice and your activity level to avoid overwhelming them. - Maintain predictable routines. - Post an overview of the day's schedule to let children know what to expect. - Give children time and space to recover when they feel overwhelmed. - If children work in groups, place these children with a small number of peers. - When moving toward these children, approach them from the front instead of from behind to avoid startling them. - Keep the classroom as calm and organized as possible. Bright colors or lots of objects on the walls are distracting to these children.

| | their needs and distress.
 • Avoid touching these children. For example, use verbal reinforcement for positive behavior rather than a pat on the back.
 • Help prepare children for transitions, such as cleanup time. | they will distract their peers.
 • Use positive behavioral interventions. For example, redirect children by having them go around the room and help organize materials. | • Provide many opportunities for children to make simple choices. This helps them feel in control. |

Adapted from Meeting the Sensory Needs of Young Children (Thompson & Raisor, 2013, p. 42)

Appendix C

Kate's Classroom Plan

Child's Name: Kate
Parent's Name(s):
Summary of IEP Data and Goals: *Data from 5/16/16:* "There are concerns regarding Kate's gross and fine motor skills, sensory, social skills, and following directions. Kate is not cooperative, even when given choices. She is strong-willed and may be defiant." In the Battelle Developmental Inventory, Kate's motor score falls in the significant delay range. Her adaptive, personal-social, and cognitive scores fall in the below-average range. Kate struggled with walking backward and jumping forward with two feet. She struggled to use the pad of her fingertips to grasp a pencil, scribble linear or circular patterns, and imitate markings. In the Sensory Processing Measure – Preschool, Kate exhibited moderate to significant difficulty in all sensory processing areas in the home setting according to parents (social interaction, visual processing, auditory processing, touch processing, body awareness, balance, and motor planning) Kate qualified in the category of developmental delay for her motor and social skills. It was recommended that Kate attend the early childhood special education morning sessions. Kate's IEP goals for the 2019-2020 school year: 1. Kate will increase her social/behavioral skills from following 1-step directions, needing reminders to stay on task, and playing independently TO following 2-step directions, needing minimal reminders to stay on task, and engaging in play situations with peers by August 2020. 2. Kate will increase her gross motor skills from completing SMART positions and engaging in independent gross motor activities TO participating in a group gross motor activity and using her strength in a variety of activities by August 2020.
School History: Kate attended a school readiness program at Public School A during the 2017-2018 school year. She attended the K-ready program at Public School B during the 2018-2019 school year. Kate is currently attending Lutheran School C in kindergarten.
Summary of Classroom Data: *Data from September 2019:* <u>Academics:</u> Kate recognizes all upper- and lower-case letters and knows their corresponding sounds. She can rhyme; count syllables; identify initial, medial, and final sounds; and blend and segment sounds. Kate counts using one-to-one correspondence, recognizes numbers to 10, and counts to 59. Her drawing during writing is detailed and precise. When she writes, she consistently writes the first and last sound. <u>Social/Emotional:</u> Kate is building friendships with the other students in the classroom. She initiates and holds conversations with others. She occasionally maintains eye contact during conversations. Kate occasionally needs reminders to look at the person talking. She asks

questions during conversations and in classroom lessons. At times, Kate needs support in interacting appropriately and calmly in social interactions.

Self-Regulation: Kate occasionally needs reminders to keep her hands to herself and listen when someone is talking. Kate needs additional time and reminders during transitions. She is often one of the last students to clean up or move to the carpet. When redirected, Kate follows the directions given.

Summary of Additional Data and Information:
Kate was observed three times by a licensed counselor at her home. Parents shared that there were observed tendencies toward ADHD and mood disorders. Parents shared that the mood disorder tendency may be linked to the meltdowns observed. Parents were uncertain about the psychologist's familiarity with a child who has sensory under-responsiveness.

Kate completed a working memory assessment at a state college by speech pathology students.

Strengths: Kate is a kind and caring kindergartner. She recognizes all upper- and lower-case letters and their corresponding sounds. Kate initiates play with others and converses with other students and adults.

Areas of Focus: Kate could benefit from a focus on maintaining focus within small and large group instruction. Kate could also benefit from a focus on transitions and initiating tasks.

Classroom Supports:
- flexible seating (wiggle chairs, floor work)
- headphones
- movement and sensory breaks, including
  - heavy work options
  - SMART positions
  - weight-bearing activities
- sensory diet (as needed)
- use of visuals, music, and movement to encourage retention
- social stories
- fidget tools
- warnings before transitions
- increased wait time
- break directions into smaller steps

Outside Supports:
Kate receives special education services on a consultative basis from the special education teacher and occupational therapist from Public School B.

Kate has been assessed by and is working with a licensed clinical counselor. Parents are currently working to provide consent for the counselor and school staff to communicate.

Appendix D

Parent and Child Interview Notes

August	November
• Her mother shared Kate's educational history and IEP evaluation (see classroom plan). • Her mother shared concerns about Kate's social interactions (observer vs. participant). • Her mother shared concerns about Kate's executive functioning and ability to process information quickly. • Kate indicated she is excited for school to start. • Kate indicated she is excited to play with her friends and learn lots of things at school.	• Her mother indicated that the transition into kindergarten is going smoothly. • Her mother shared the academic growth observed in reading. • Her mother asked about Kate's social interactions at school. • Her mother shared assessment data and reports from the clinical counselor and speech-language pathologist. • Kate indicated that she enjoys school and playing with her friends. • Kate shared that she likes to read and listen to stories. • Kate shared likes to play on the tire swing at recess with her classmates and use the K'nex pieces.

Appendix E

Classroom Observation Notes

September	November
• Kate often requires more time to transition from one activity to the next in comparison to her peers. • In large group movement settings, Kate sometimes takes longer to become involved in the activity in comparison to her peers. • Kate regularly initiates conversations with her peers. • Kate occasionally uses eye contact during conversations. • During small and large group instruction, Kate participates in conversations and answers questions when prompted. • During small and large group instruction, Kate needs reminders to keep her eyes on the person talking and focus on the task in front of her. • Kate, at times, needs reminders to use a calm voice when interacting with peers.	• Kate occasionally requires more time to transition from one activity to the next in comparison to her peers. • Kate, occasionally, needs additional time to become involved in an activity in comparison to her peers. • Kate continues to initiate conversations with her peers regularly. • Kate needs reminders to use eye contact during conversations. • Kate can consistently hold her attention on the task or instruction for 10-minute increments. • Kate, at times, raises her hand to participate in large and small group conversations. • Kate, at times, needs reminders to include all her friends while playing. • Kate, at times, needs reminders to use appropriate language.