RESEARCH ARTICLE

"We Are Here for the Kids": A Case Study about Including Children with Disabilities in Head Start

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A substantial number of children with disabilities are enrolled in Head Start and it is therefore important to understand how they are included in this context. The inclusion of children with disabilities in eight classrooms across one Midwestern Head Start program is examined in this exploratory case study. How Head Start teachers plan and adapt activities with the needs of all children in mind, how they collaborate with others on behalf of children, and how children with disabilities participate in inclusive classrooms is described. Findings were presented in four cross-case themes: 1) Planning for Children, 2) Adapting Activities for Children with Disabilities, 3) Including All by Facilitating Peer Interactions, and 4) Connecting in a Community. Implications for practice are presented.

Keywords: inclusion, Head Start, collaboration, peer interactions

As the largest provider of preschool education in the nation, Head Start's mission has been to improve the school readiness of low-income children since 1965. School readiness in Head Start means "children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning and schools are ready for children" (United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 2011). Head Start takes what can be described as a "whole child" approach to school readiness, promoting children's development through educational, health and nutritional services. The program also engages parents in their child's learning by helping these adults with their own educational and literacy goals with the idea that doing so will contribute to children's school readiness (Miller, Farkas & Duncan, 2016).

In recent years, Head Start's emphasis on school readiness has intensified. Recent research demonstrates many Head Start children continue to fall behind their peers in readiness at kindergarten entry. Findings from the national longitudinal study Family and Child Experience

Survey indicate that although children participating in Head Start made gains on several measures of readiness, they continued to score below national norms on a number of early academic areas when entering kindergarten. The Head Start Impact Study indicates that Head Start children continue to lag behind their peers by about one-third standard deviation in important early literacy and numeracy skills (Miller et al., 2016).

Head Start has also been a major provider of early childhood special education (ECSE) to children with disabilities. In 1972, Congress mandated that at least 10% of the program's national enrollment consist of children with disabilities. The program recognized that Head Start teachers would need training in competencies for teaching children with disabilities and offered it to teachers by establishing a "nucleus of 14 resource access projects" jointly funded by Head Start and the Office of Education's Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (Zigler & Styfco, 2011). Head Start did not place children with special needs in self-contained classrooms and implemented inclusion before appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities was mandated (Zigler & Styfco, 2011).

Within a few years of the Congressional mandate, 13% of Head Start's enrollment consisted of children with disabilities. In 2006, the Head Start regulations required all programs to have a disabilities service plan and a designated service disabilities coordinator to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families. Programs were charged with arranging for or providing special education and related services for eligible children unless services were already being provided by another agency (Miller et al., 2016; USDHHS, 2011). The enrollment of children with disabilities in Head Start has continued to increase throughout the program's history. Barton, Spiker, and Williamson (2012), examining the data from the Head Start Family and Children Experiences Survey 2000 (Zill, Kim, Sorongon, Herbison, & Clark, 2006), suggested that 8% of the children in this large nationally representative Head Start data set had an IEP and a third met the criteria for a disability or developmental delay.

In 2009, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) released a joint position statement on inclusion. The statement emphasized the value of preschool inclusion for creating "a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning" (DEC & NAEYC, 2009, p. 2). For children with disabilities, research highlights the developmental benefits of being educated alongside more competent peers, particularly in language development and social competence (Hanusek, Kain, Markman, & Rivkin, 2001; Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek 2014; Rafferty, Piscitelli, & Boettcher, 2003). Families and practitioners note that two of the most valued characteristics of inclusive early childhood settings are the need to ensure that children with disabilities are active participants in the classroom and that early childhood programs provide accommodations and adaptions to meet the needs of children with disabilities (Hurley & Horn, 2010). Clearly, what is required are classrooms in which children with or without disabilities have opportunities to actively interact with one another (Diamond & Hong, 2010).

Coordination among various service providers for children with disabilities in Head Start is an essential part of the process. Federal law mandates that children with disabilities are entitled to services that address their learning needs from a variety of specialized professionals, including special educators, speech and language pathologists, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, psychologists, and health care professionals. When early childhood teachers and specialists work together as a team outcomes for children with disabilities in preschool settings are likely to improve (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron & Bae, 2004). Yet, the research also suggests

that preschool teachers and various specialists often struggle to work together. Recently, McDonnell and colleagues (2014) conducted a large nationally representative survey of Head Start teachers (n=254). The majority of the teachers reported that nearly a quarter of their class consisted of children with disabilities who were receiving special education or related services. They also responded that they did not work with a special educator on a regular basis. Further, Muccio and colleagues (2014) examined the perceptions and practices of Head Start educators and found a substantive gap between what supports were considered necessary and what was provided for successful inclusion.

It is important to note that successfully including children with disabilities in inclusive Head Start classroom has as much to do with teacher values as it does with policy and practice reform and practitioners in many preschools sometimes struggle to collaborate (Brown, Knopf, Conroy, Googe, & Greer, 2013; Butera, Friesen, Horn, Palmer, &Vaiouli, 2016). Specialists may be burdened with large caseloads and have little time to collaborate and consult with teachers so that children are provided ongoing support (Dinnebeil, Pretti-Frontczak & McInerney, 2009; McDonnell et al., 2014). The roles and responsibilities of each professional may also be unclear (Katz, Maag, Fallon, Blenkarn & Smith, 2010).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the evidence that a number of children with disabilities are enrolled in Head Start, it is important to understand how they are included in this context. The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework emphasizes the key role of the teacher in ensuring the progress of children with disabilities. In the current study, we sought to examine the inclusion of children with disabilities in a Head Start program. The following questions provided a focus for the study:

1. How do Head Start teachers plan and adapt activities for children with disabilities in their classrooms?
2. How do children with disabilities participate in activities and interact with peers and adults?
3. How do teachers collaborate with other professionals about the needs of children with disabilities?

METHODS
Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Elmwood Heights Head Start (EHHS)[1], a program familiar to the researchers from previous research. The program serves about 450 mostly Caucasian and English speaking children and families across six rural counties in a Midwestern state and includes 10-20% children with disabilities. After obtaining approval from the university Institutional Review Board, the EHHS program director was contacted and asked if they were willing to participate. After consultation with the program coordinators at each center, EHHS agreed to participate and center coordinators were provided with a recruitment script to contact all potential teacher participants from their center. Names of eight teachers from three different centers interested in

participating were obtained. Researchers contacted teachers through email to set up a time to meet and provide more information about the goals of the study.

TABLE 1
Teacher Demographic Information

Teacher	Education	Teaching Experience (in years)	Teaching Experience in the Current Classroom
Juanita	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	6	3
Cathy	Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education	8	2
Laura	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	10	6
Martin	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	14	9
Hannah	Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education	10	< 1
Lynn	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education Bachelor's Degree in Music	12	9
Roberta	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	22	<1
Kim	Bachelor's Degree in Child Development	13	9

Note. All names and some identifying details have been changed to protect anonymity.

Participating teachers were experienced and had worked with young children for at least 6 years. Demographic information for all teachers is presented in Table 1. Teachers were asked to describe their classroom, including the number of children in total, the number of children who were English language learners (ELL) or with identified disabilities, and children they considered of concern (Table 2). Although most children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were identified as having speech and language delays, most teachers noted their concerns about children with challenging behaviors.

TABLE 2
Classroom Information

Teacher	Number of Children	English Language Learners	Children with identified Disabilities/ Disability Category	Special Education Services for Children with Disabilities	Additional Children of Concern (no IEP)
Juanita	14	3	Speech or Language (1) Developmental Delay (1)	Developmental PreK half-day (3)	Developmental Delay (1) Attention Difficulties (2)
Cathy	13	2	Speech or Language (2)	Speech Therapy/ once a week (2) Developmental Support/ once a month	Physical Limitations (1) Speech or Language (3) Developmental Delay (2) Attention Difficulties (1) Challenging Behavior (2)
Laura	19	N/A	Speech or Language (3) Developmental Delay (2)	Speech Therapy/ once a week (5)	Challenging Behavior (1)
Martin	18	N/A	Speech or Language (6)	Developmental PreK half-day (2) Speech Therapy/ once a week (4)	Developmental Delay (2) Attention Difficulties (2) Challenging Behavior (2)
Hannah	17	N/A	Speech or Language (4) ASD (1)	Developmental PreK half-day (1) Speech Therapy/ once a week (4)	Developmental Delay (3) Attention Difficulties (6)

Lynn	16	N/A	Speech or Language (3)	Developmental PreK half-day (2) Speech Therapy/ once a week (3)	
Roberta	17	N/A	N/A (One child in the process of being evaluated)	N/A	Speech or Language (1) Attention Difficulties (1) Challenging Behavior (1)
Kim	18	N/A	Speech or Language (2)	Developmental PreK half-day and Speech Therapy/ once a week (2)	Attention Difficulties (1) Challenging Behavior (1)

Data Collection

To address the research questions, we employed an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2008). Case studies are particularly suitable for providing "in-depth descriptions and analyses of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). In our study, we specifically focused on EHHS as a bounded system and aimed to describe how the needs of children with disabilities were addressed. Based on the literature, we anticipated uncovering challenges the teachers faced as they attempted to address the needs of all children. We believed they would encounter difficulties collaborating with other professionals and we wanted to deepen our understanding of the nature of the challenges. We anticipated that program level factors would influence how teachers worked with children and their families. We aimed to interpret our findings within the larger context of EHHS.

We conducted an initial classroom observation together to develop an observation protocol and ensure that we were systematic and reliable in collecting observational data about classroom activities. In subsequent classroom observations we used a semi-structured observation protocol to capture classroom events related to how teachers provided instruction (e.g., large group and small group activities, individual work with children), how children with disabilities participated in activities and interacted with peers and adults (e.g., whether children actively engaged and sustained attention, whether they played with other children), and any observed instances of collaboration between professionals (e.g., specialist visits to the classroom). Over the course of the Spring semester, two researchers conducted classroom visits on days with typical classroom activities that were mutually convenient for teachers and researchers. We each spent one full day in each classroom, collecting running field notes and expanding on them shortly after each observation. We collected approximately 7 hours of observation in each classroom for a total of about 55 hours of observation.

An individual interview with each teacher was conducted with both researchers at a location and time that was convenient to teachers (often the center after or before teaching), shortly after observations were completed. Interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded with teachers' permission. Questions were intended to gather teachers' perspectives on how they planned and adapted activities for children with disabilities in their classrooms, how they facilitated children's interactions with their peers and how they collaborated with other professionals and families (see Appendix A). Also, we asked specific questions about what we had observed in our classroom visit in order to understand the teachers' thinking. For example, we asked teachers to explain their perspectives about specific observed events in the classroom.

Data Analysis

As data collection ended, all interviews were transcribed. Data was analyzed using a reiterative process that identified recurring themes (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2008). As part of the process, we identified examples across the data of how the teachers planned and adapted activities for children with disabilities, how children participated in the classroom and how teachers collaborated with other professionals. Individually, each researcher coded data across observations and interviews and identified 4-5 themes for each teacher. We then compared our analyses and sought agreement with one another by describing how we understood the data, coming to consensus. We wrote individual case narratives for each teacher (see Table 3) and collapsed individual case study themes into four cross-case themes presented in this paper: 1) Planning for Children, 2) Adapting Activities for Children with Disabilities, 3) Including All by Facilitating Peer Interactions, and 4) Connecting in a Community.

TABLE 3
Example of the Coding Process for an Individual Case and the Cross-Case Analysis

Teacher	Individual Case Study Themes	Cross-Case Themes
Juanita	*Facilitator of Child Interactions* • Juanita joins children in free play and models initiating play with others • She suggests children play with other another	Including All by Facilitating Peer Interactions
	Keeping Individual Needs in Mind • Juanita engages children with speech and language disabilities in conversations at meals • She plans weekly lesson with children's IEP goals in mind	Adapting Activities for Children with Disabilities
	Numbers Matter • Juanita has several children with significant learning challenges and they are not all identified • Juanita also has English Language Learners in her class and she struggles to meet their needs	Planning for Children and Connecting in a Community
	Struggling to Collaborate • Juanita has difficulties collaborating with other professionals on behalf of the children with disabilities in her classroom • She has difficulties having her voice heard in IEP meetings • She lacks time and resources	Connecting in a Community

FINDINGS

Planning for Children

During interviews, all eight of the Head Start teachers explained the importance of helping children acquire academic readiness skills to support success in school given the diversity of children in their classroom. Hannah reported using the "kindergarten readiness sheets" given to parents by the local school district. She planned activities that taught numbers and letter recognition as part of readiness. Lynn and Laura made flashcards from the program's screening tool to teach children letter sounds and counting. All of the teachers we observed helped children practice writing their names, another item on the kindergarten readiness sheet.

Despite the focus on readiness instruction, Head Start teachers considered recruiting children's interest for the learning activity important. Activities were based on what the teachers "knew the kids would like" or what was "fun" for the children. Teachers referred to the time of the year, approaching holidays or special events to plan what the children would do. In early Spring, Cathy complained about how the weather made it difficult for the children to go outside

and have fun. She went on to say that she ended up using the circumstances to "do something fun. The Easter bunny came [while they were out of the room] and we copied the patterns of his footprints in the mud outside our window". Juanita also placed a high priority on engaging children in learning and planned activities based on children's interests. During one visit to her classroom we found the children thoroughly engrossed in a sticky form of clay. Juanita explained that her own daughter had brought it home from school and she immediately asked "the teacher for the recipe. I knew they'd love it." Juanita also planned activities related to a popular Disney movie when many of the children reported having seen it.

Laura's efforts to plan activities based on children's interests were often spontaneous, but she was purposeful in commenting on what children were doing during free play. During one observation, Laura watched as Jimmy and Albert built a road of blocks for their toy cars. When the boys explained that the trucks were going home she used the opportunity to explain that trucks sometimes "had a garage which was a truck's home." Later that day, Laura pulled a book about trucks from a shelf and asked the children where cars and trucks were sometimes kept. Both she and Albert laughed when he shouted, "A garage!"

In interviews, teachers explained that they used the children's IEPs to plan daily activities. Lynn described how she thought about this in planning a Math lesson:

> So, this child has an IEP where we are working on learning her colors … Then, I am going to put that [in], "Sort jellybeans into colors" Everybody else may be working on adding or subtracting, but we are working with … jellybeans. So you have to individualize [for] each. We are required to have a goal for all of the students with IEPs at least in one to two sections [of the lesson plan].

In another interview, Laura told us that she uses IEPs to set weekly goals and fits them into the lesson plan. She reported feeling confident that "You can take almost any goal and put it into any activity I am doing and figure out a way to meet it. All teachers should be able to. It all overlaps." As an example, she described how she might work on a student's speech goal by reading books emphasizing the sound the student was working to articulate better (e.g., Super Silly Sammy for /s/).

The Head Start teachers in the study also planned activities with individuals other than the children in mind. During several observations, planned activities centered on art projects to be sent home. During one observation in Juanita's room, Tiffany, the assistant teacher, spent much of the day melting crayons after shaving them in small pieces. The children were invited to sprinkle the shaved crayons on wax paper and then watched as she cut wax paper hearts with the melted crayons inside. Without any explanation, Tiffany wrote the children's names on the final projects and proceeded to display them on the window. After one child said, "I wanted to write my name" Tiffany had the child write her name on the card next to where she had written it. At the end of the activity, Tiffany asked the children "Does that make you feel happy?", and pointed to the pretty colorful hearts on the window. None of the children responded.

Adapting Activities for Children with Disabilities

As was evident in observations and interviews, the Head Start teachers in our study differed from one another in how they planned activities for children with special needs. In some instances, the

teachers demonstrated that they considered the needs of all children in their classroom. In other circumstances, it was not clear how the needs of children with disabilities were acknowledged.

"If you want them to be better you have to believe."   One of the children in Martin's classroom recently transferred in from another Head Start center. Ronnie had delays in language development and Martin found him difficult to manage when he did not understand directions and struggled to learn the classroom routine. Martin used a variety of strategies to keep Ronnie engaged, often working with him in a small group or pairing him with another child who could help him participate. We observed him simplifying activities for Ronnie and some of the other children while he was reading a storybook. For example, he explained that Little Red Riding Hood is "a little girl taking soup to her grandmother who is sick". He also used laminated pictures and a felt board to illustrate the story putting the board close to Ronnie and a few others. In the same lesson, it was clear that Martin was also adapting the reading for children with more advanced language skills, asking them why it was important for Little Red Riding Hood to stay on the path.

Juanita and Laura also addressed the individual needs of children with disabilities in their classroom by adapting activities. Juanita's classroom included two students with language delays who were learning English as a second language. Juanita and her assistant teacher made sure to engage both girls in conversation especially at mealtimes and they also prompted language interactions between the girls and other children during free play and at recess. Juanita was aware of the IEP goals and objectives for the girls, but she reported that she did not find them helpful in guiding her planning. "They are not always realistic" she told us. "Some are very vague." Asked about her participation in the children's IEP meetings she explained that, although she attended meetings when she was invited to, she was seldom asked for input and had little opportunity to help write IEP goals or objectives which were already written before the meeting.

In an interview, Laura explained that she thought Colin's behavioral problems may be related to "sensory issues" although she was not sure about this. However, having read about "sensory issues" on the internet, Laura provided Colin with activities that might help him overcome these challenges, including shaving cream and finger paints at a table where he worked by himself with the materials while the other children were engaged at various centers. A few other children also participated in this activity.

Laura was convinced that children with challenging behaviors can be helped to learn new behaviors and develop appropriate interactions with peers and she thought that it was her role to teach them. She explained, "If you want them to be better you have to believe they can be better." As she reflected, Laura said, "We just put a smile on and say 'Hi, I'm glad to see you today, I missed you.' and try to start fresh every day and try not to expect misbehavior." In classroom observations, this attitude was evident in Laura's purposeful public praise of Colin. When a child lost her name tag, Laura commented, "Colin is very good at finding things. Ask him to help." In her interview, Laura was clear that she wanted to have a positive influence in the development of the children, commenting "That's why I am here, because I want to make a difference."

"The tip of the iceberg."   Other teachers in our study showed little evidence that they were adapting activities considering the needs of specific children. The teachers acknowledged the importance of doing so when we interviewed them, but they seemed uncertain about what to

do and we saw few of the strategies they described in interviews. In several instances, teachers reported feeling uncomfortable making adaptations to activities that might single children out. Cathy explained that a child with a developmental delay "doesn't really get a lot of accommodations because he wants to do what everyone else does." Pausing for a moment, she went on to explain that, "In free play, we just try to keep support staff closer to him in case he needs help with a social situation or something like that". Roberta explained in the interview that she believes children are different from each other and that it is important to accept their differences. She noted that she tried to explain this to both children and parents.

In some cases, children with disabilities were assigned to an assistant teacher who tried to help them participate in classroom activities, sometimes adapting activities on the spot. Jamie, the assistant teacher in Hannah's class, spent most of her time supervising Becky. Despite Jamie's supervision, Becky wandered around the room during our observations, dumping objects into the aquarium and smearing paint on herself at the painting easel. Becky screamed occasionally especially when she was redirected to an activity. Jamie often tried to engage Becky in activities with little direction from Hannah, who explained in her interview that she did not know what to do for Becky and that she "has gotten worse" this year.

In some classrooms, there was little evidence that activities were adapted for children with special needs and they sometimes were excluded from activities. In Roberta's classroom, Alice came late one morning visibly upset. She proceeded to hit and kick other children while at circle time. Roberta attempted to correct her asking her to "sit on her bottom", but Alice screamed "I don't want to". Roberta had the assistant teacher take her to the library area for time out. The teachers did not interact with Alice again until the end of the activity.

Roberta did not report needing additional skills to support the learning of children with special needs in her classroom. Cathy and Lynn also reported feeling competent in addressing the needs of children with special needs. Martin reported that his previous experiences helped him. "I was doubtful of myself, but I learned I could do it." However, other teachers explained that they lacked sufficient experience to know what to do. Hannah and Juanita seemed to think that additional training was important. Hannah explained that she "got the tip of the iceberg" from taking an introductory course in special education in her early childhood education degree program. "I know about autism - what it is. I need to know what to do. I've never been taught that."

Including All by Facilitating Peer Interactions

Classrooms we visited throughout the study differed both in the numbers of children with identified disabilities and the degree to which children's disabilities required that teachers adapt or modify classroom routines and activities. The eight classrooms also differed in how peer interactions were supported. Some teachers appeared to be more aware of potential difficulties children with disabilities might experience in initiating and sustaining interactions with peers than others.

"We have to teach them." In Juanita's classroom, Jimena, an ELL with a speech and language impartment, had difficulty joining her peers in play and frequently watched from afar as children played in centers. Observing this, Juanita entered the children's play herself. When another child was playing with a toy video camera in dramatic play, Juanita gave Jimena a

microphone and suggested that another child pretend to videotape them as they pretended to report the weather.

Several children in Martin's classroom had behavior problems which negatively impacted their interactions with peers. In his interview, Martin emphasized that clearly stated and consistently applied rules were important in his classroom. During observations, we noted that classroom rules were posted and Martin referred to them often, pointing to the posted rules while reminding children about keeping their hands and feet to themselves. He explained to us that children need to be helped to understand why their behavior causes problems with "their friends":

> I also like to make the children work it out. I don't believe in making them say they're sorry. I try and show them what they have done. I tell them "You need to ask if they are okay. Is there anything you can do?' They are not sorry at this age. They want to yell at each other. I say "Talk to them so you can see how they feel."

Laura's classroom included several children with behavior problems and speech and language delays. She was especially concerned about Colin's temper tantrums because she thought Colin showed little remorse when he hurt other children and that this impacted his peers' willingness to play with him. When Colin was upset, she tried to help him identify the problem and find a solution. She explained that, "We use a book with pictures of kids from last year. It talks about respectful hands and respectful feet. What choices are respectful?" During one afternoon observation when the children seemed to be having difficulty following classroom rules, Laura called the children to the circle area and they all read the "respect" book together. This reminder about respecting the space of others seemed to help and the children returned to free play. In her interview, Laura commented "They don't know what respect is, we have to teach them."

"They are just not going to play with him."   While both Laura and Martin were actively engaged in trying to help children get along with others, not all the teachers in the study were observed supporting positive peer interaction. In Hannah's classroom, Becky appeared to have little direct interaction with her peers. In regard to Becky, Hannah commented in her interview, "I wish we had more time for her. It's hard integrating her with 16 other kids when you don't have that extra person." She explained that she sometimes asked a few selected peers to play with Becky or provide her with help in classroom activities, but she found it difficult to maintain this intervention. In the interview, Hannah commented:

> I don't think they interact much with her because she doesn't try to interact with them. […] Becky likes to eat flowers, and so she'll be eating a flower and you'll have one of the kids say "Ms. Hannah, Becky is eating a flower". So, you could tell they're watching out for her in their own ways. Same with the scissors. If you see Becky with scissors, someone's always "Ms. Hannah, Becky has scissors" or "Ms. Hannah, Becky is writing on her face with a marker." So they're watching her, they know everything that she is not supposed to be doing and they let you know, but I don't see a lot of interaction with her.

During our observations, we did not see Hannah take an active role in supporting peer interactions. She explained in her interview that children in her classroom refused to play with

peers who did not initiate, show interest, or were aggressive, such as Becky or Jarrod, another child with challenging behaviors. One day we observed Jarrod ripping Patty's costume, causing her to cry, and other children to protest his behavior. The assistant teacher, Jamie, responded to this by instructing, "Hey Patty, tell Jarrod why you are sad, what made you sad and have Jarrod apologize". Patty continued to cry without approaching Jarrod. When asked to comment on this situation in her interview, Hannah described her approach to managing children's behavior as "more of letting them try to figure out the conflict."

Similarly, in Cathy's classroom, Lyle is visibly rejected by peers. Within a few minutes, each child playing in the sandbox leaves when Lyle comes to play. Cathy is aware of Lyle's difficulties interacting with peers and she talked about her approach to helping him in her interview: "We try to help him use his words to make more social interactions with his friends and he has made some progress with that, but there are some kids in the classrooms who have decided that they are just not going to play with him." In the two days of observations, we noted only one instance when Lyle engaged with peers in putting a puzzle together while the teacher assistant facilitated the activity. However, during the rest of the observations adults moved from group to group to supervise children rather than engage with them or facilitate interactions during their play.

Other Head Start teachers worked to understand the needs of children with disabilities. Like Martin and Laura, Kim was proactive in helping children learn classroom routines. In her interview, Kim chuckled as she thought about a child with a disability she had taught in the past and commented, "she really has improved a lot […] She gave me a run for my money, but she also taught me a lot […] I think she also made my patience level a little better, because with her you just had to fly by the seat of your pants sometimes."

Connecting in a Community

The Head Start teachers in our study sought help from each other as they planned for the children in their classrooms. They met during the program's planning day when the children did not attend, asking one another for ideas and sharing materials on an ongoing basis. In interviews Kim explained that "Lynn and I collaborate well together to do curriculum planning." while Lynn reported, "I may be stumped, but Kim may have some idea that is really cool." Most of the teachers planned activities with their assistant teachers, sharing ideas and the preparation workload.

In several of the classrooms, children with disabilities were enrolled in the school district's developmental preschool program for children with disabilities as well as Head Start. Lynn explained that knowing how some of the children in her classroom had benefitted from dual enrollment, she was quick to make referrals of other children when she had concerns about a child's development. She explained, "I think interacting in both environments helps. I have a little girl who is now two days here and three days there. I got her dually enrolled and in speech. I really pushed. Walked mom through the paperwork."

Unlike Lynn, other Head Start teachers in the study were reluctant to make referrals to school district programs. Juanita had worked previously in an ECSE classroom and she did not think very highly of it. She told us that she had trouble establishing ongoing contact with the ECSE teacher who taught several of her children in the afternoon and she explained that "I'm just not sure what they do over there." Under these circumstances, she was reluctant to make

referrals even when she thought a child might need extra help. Laura expressed similar opinions of the special educators in her school district and reported that she was relieved that she had no dually enrolled students this year. She chuckled, "I think they're sending them to us instead." Laura thought the school district was especially likely to send children with behavior problems to Head Start. When the child in question had been in her classroom for a few weeks, Laura told us she said "Now I know. I know why she's here."

Many of the teachers reported collaborating with one of the program's two disabilities coordinators, Leanne Hanson or Jessica Johnson, to plan how to address the needs of children who were of concern or identified as having special needs. According to the teachers, however, Leanne had recently been assigned other administrative tasks in the program and she lacked sufficient time to offer much support. Making her accessibility more problematic was the fact that Leanne had recently been assigned an office in a different building. Cathy and Juanita reported that Leanne sometimes observed children of concern and made suggestions. She also attended team meetings for children who were dually enrolled in Head Start and the school district programs.

Jessica, on the other hand, was described by the teachers as more frequently involved in helping teachers meet the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms, particularly in the classrooms where her office was located. Lynn found Jessica's presence at team meetings quite valuable and commented that "she is 110% for the kids." Others in the center explained that she provided them with materials and suggestions about how to support the children with special needs in their classrooms and they also said that she checked in about children's progress. However, other Head Start teachers not located in the center where Jessica's office was, were less enthusiastic about her help. Hannah and Roberta reported that she came and observed a child and "conducted a walk-through" but did not provide any specific suggestions. Laura and Martin were uncomfortable with how Jessica interacted with them. Martin explained that "she's not a people person. She is very critical..."

We noted during several classroom observations that other adults were also observing in the classroom. When we asked about this, teachers reported that these individuals were from the community's mental health program. Laura explained "We have a contract with Rupert Center. A behavior therapist comes two times a month to help us." Several of the teachers were not sure that the help from the mental health center was especially useful, explaining that there was considerable turnover in personnel and they never could be sure who would come. They also reported that they did not often get any feedback from whoever had visited about what they were doing.

The opportunity to share information and discuss challenges children presented was important to the relationships Head Start teachers had with other professionals. Many of the Head Start teachers in our study told us about Sylvie, a speech and language therapist from the school district assigned to work in their program. The teachers appreciated that Sylvie was available for consultation and appreciated how she worked in the classrooms. We observed her working in more than one of the classrooms where she worked on children's speech and language goals while participating in group activities. The teachers reported that she often left materials to help them continue to support speech and language objectives. Martin reported, "She comes in and has lunch with us. She will work in the classroom and she always has good ideas for what to do."

Sylvie was one of the few school district employees reported to have a good relationship with the Head Start program in our study. Particularly troubling to most of the Head Start

teachers was their working relationship with the ECSE of children who were dually enrolled. Juanita's frustration about lack of communication with the school district program were shared by Lynn who reported that she only was able to talk about the progress of a child with an ECSE from the school district if "I call her." She doubted if it was worth the effort at times, reflecting that "those teachers don't have a good feeling for the whole picture. Sometimes I walk out of a case conference shaking my head." Asked if they visited the ECSE classrooms of the children dually enrolled, several teachers reported doing so, although they reported that they did not feel welcome and the visits were seldom reciprocated. Laura expressed concern about how Colin would fare when he entered kindergarten next year. Nevertheless, she did not refer him for services outside of Head Start. She was concerned about "setting him up for failure" and felt that the school system was unlikely to "listen to me."

Juanita explained the problem from her perspective, reflecting that, "everyone needs to be on the same page…we always ask for their input on things… but there just is no collaboration." Martin expanded about what most of his fellow Head Start teachers made clear in their interviews:

> I really wish the school system would see us as teachers. In the past, we have tried to tell them about the kids we are sending on to them. Often, they just don't listen. Then, too many times, they come back and tell us we were right. Schools see us as a day care center. And we do have wrap around services. But, also, we know our kids and families.

All of the Head Start teachers in our study described the importance of working with families of the children in their classrooms, especially when the child or family in question faced challenges. In an interview, Hannah anguished about how to discuss a mother's death from drug overdose with a child. Laura also explained that she understood the struggles some families experienced: "I was there where they are now. We were poor. My children are […] in college and they are good kids… And now I don't have to worry about whether I will be able to pay for the electricity." Like Laura, Kim related to the experiences of families of the children she taught. Kim told us she thought that her own experience informed her about how she could help families. She told us:

> I really try to connect with all my families when I go on home visits and throughout the year. It's a question of reaching out to the whole family, I think. I went on a home visit recently and was talking to the mom about her older child who is still having trouble with the alphabet. I gave her a packet to help her help her child.... I got her connected with our disabilities coordinator who helped her work with the school system […]. That family also has a baby with special health needs- she's on a g-tube. So, I asked her if she was referred to early intervention. She wasn't. I think because low-income families often don't know what to ask. I gave her the information about how she could get some help.

Whether the Head Start classroom was full or half-day was often described as influencing the interactions Head Start teachers in our study had with families. In full day classrooms, teachers reported having more time to get to know the children and more frequent opportunities to interact with parents since they picked up their children from the classroom rather than from the bus. Martin described his full-day classroom community as resembling a family, "they're

more like brothers and sisters. I mean we're together eleven hours a day so, you know… we fight and argue, and make up."

Hannah explained that she was new to Head Start and needed to spend a significant amount of time learning about her new responsibilities. She worried that this interfered with her opportunities to get to know families. She viewed her half-day assignment as making this more difficult for her. Roberta was also new to Head Start and had worked in day care for over two decades. She commented, "Little things are big here. Like hand lotion. There's a way to use it. And the paperwork. It's a lot of work." There was evidence that the paperwork and procedures were problematic for more experienced teachers as well. Laura who had worked for the program for a while felt she never could stay ahead of the expectations, explaining that she was "bad at time management." Martin explained: "I'm bad at end of the month paperwork. It's due by the second but on the seventh I'm still working on it. It gets worse when I'm trying to do home visits. It's a mad house. Our working parents often don't know their work schedule and I have to reschedule." The Head Start teachers also reported that other administrative procedures were problematic and interfered with their ability to respond to the needs of all the children.

DISCUSSION

Observations and interviews in our study revealed that Head Start teachers understood the importance of addressing individual needs and they were well-motivated to teach so that all children learned. They planned activities with the children's interests in mind and were concerned about providing children's work to parents. Teachers differed in the extent to which they made adaptations to support the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms and how they facilitated peer interactions. In some cases, teachers were observed working with children in small groups, simplifying activities, and focusing on children's specific areas of need. For example, Martin both simplified and expanded the storybook reading for the children in his classroom and Laura provided Colin with sensory activities during station time. In other instances, however, observations did not demonstrate that children's specific needs had been acknowledged in the lessons, as was the case with Lyle in Cathy's classroom. Given the central role of planning accommodations and adaptions to meet individual needs, it is of concern that not all children were actively included in lessons (Hurley & Horn, 2010).

Teachers also differed in how they facilitated peer interactions in their classrooms. Some teachers, like Roberta, felt uncomfortable singling children out. Roberta explained in the interview that she believes children are different from each other and that it is important for both teachers and children to accept differences and treat one another with respect. While teaching children to accept differences is important and should be fostered early in life, we note that acceptance alone resulted in little peer interactions. It should be noted that teachers must facilitate peer interactions, as Juanita did for Jimena. In the absence of such facilitation we observed little interaction between children with disabilities and their peers. Along with teaching children to appreciate differences, it is essential that teachers ensure children with disabilities have access to activities and are supported in their participation, central features of early childhood inclusion (DEC & NAEYC, 2009).

Teachers' expectations for children with disabilities may also influence the learning opportunities they provide in the classroom. When teachers believed children were likely to learn because they were provided with appropriate support, they were persistent in their efforts to

teach them. This was the case for Colin in Laura's classroom. No doubt, teachers' skills and experience in working with children with disabilities influenced how they adapted activities to individual learning goals. Our data suggests that some teachers, such as Kim, recognized the impact of children with disabilities in their classroom on their own learning and appreciated the opportunity. These teachers seemed aware of their need for additional teaching skills to address the various needs of the children with disabilities in their classrooms, such as Hannah. Their awareness corresponds to the findings of Muccio et al. (2014), who described how Head Start teachers reported needing additional professional development and support to enact high-quality inclusive practices. It is of note that other teachers, such as Roberta, seemed unaware that they might benefit from help. It is imperative to ensure that teachers working in inclusive early childhood settings engage in self-reflection about their teaching and are provided with adequate training to provide quality learning environments for all children. Professional development is also needed to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to effectively include children with disabilities. In addition, assistant teachers in our study often served an important role in supporting children with disabilities. They also would benefit from professional development to facilitate their work.

Across the interview and observation data collected there was evidence that external factors worked to facilitate or often interfere with how the Head Start teachers planned activities to address the needs of children in their classrooms. Teachers reported using each other as a resource and collaborated to plan curriculum. Yet, teachers differed in the extent to which they found the program's disabilities coordinator to be of support. While some, such as Lynn, benefitted from the collaboration, others, including Martin and Laura, found it difficult. This finding is consistent with Hunt et al. (2004) who pointed out the importance of early childhood collaboration between teachers and other professionals. Considering that disability coordinators are the primary resource for teachers regarding children with disabilities, it is important to understand how to foster better collaborative relationships within Head Start programs. It is was also of concern that there was little opportunity for the teachers to benefit from the expertise of the mental health consultants who came regularly to observe some children, especially considering the teachers identified these children as most troubling. The experiences of the teachers in our study was not unique. Collaboration and consultation with specialists is acknowledged as problematic in the literature (Dinnebeil et al., 2009; McDonnell et al., 2014).

The relationship between the Head Start program and the school districts who received the children from them was often strained. Teachers explained that ECSE teachers had visited on occasion and some maintained contact by telephone, but in most instances the Head Start teachers felt that communication was ongoing only if and when they made the effort to maintain it. Teachers also believed they were given a minimal role in IEP meetings where the children's learning needs were being discussed and IEP documents were not viewed as helpful. In other instances, the lack of collaboration with the school system made teachers be reluctant to refer children for evaluation. When collaboration was successful, the opportunity to develop trust seemed important. Sylvie, the speech pathologist, was appreciated for her willingness to consult with teachers on how to address children's individual needs beyond her direct work with the children. The fact that Sylvie ate lunch with them was not lost on the teachers who generally felt like the school system did not treat them like professionals. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that any suggestions for supporting children would be taken seriously by the teachers. Since collaboration between key stakeholders is considered "a cornerstone for implementing high-quality early childhood inclusion" (DEC & NAEYC, p.2), it is imperative that Head Start

programs and school districts prioritize communication and collaboration about teacher and others serving young children with disabilities.

The Head Start teachers reported in interviews that they lacked time to collaborate with others. The amount of paperwork they needed to complete and the program procedures they had to learn interfered with their planning for children. During observations, we often noted that teachers spent considerable amount of time with clipboards in hand completing paperwork instead of interacting with children. Other administrative issues were problematic and interfered with the ability of the program to support the teachers' efforts to plan for all children, according to the teachers. In our observations, we noted that children with special needs were not distributed across the program evenly. Further, severity of disability made a difference in terms of the time the teachers needed to spend to accommodate specific needs. In Hannah's classroom, for example, the assistant teacher, Jamie, was unavailable to help because her time was consumed with making sure Becky's behaviors did not interfere with the safety of all the children, including Becky herself. Many children in the Head Start classrooms we observed demonstrated significant needs, although not necessarily identified with a disability. As Barton, Spiker, and Williamson (2012) point out, and was the case in our study, many more children in Head Start may require additional support.

It became clear in our study that children with disabilities were not evenly distributed across classrooms in the program. Some teachers had many children with very significant needs while others had only a few whose special needs were mild. Juanita explained to us that children were placed depending on the bus routes. As Gallagher and Lambert (2006) pointed out, the percentage of children with disabilities in a classroom is associated with the quality of the classroom environment. Therefore, it is important to understand how Head Start programs might better organize the assignment of children with disabilities to classrooms to provide better learning environments for all children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Our study focuses on the needs of Head Start teachers in one program. There is no reason to believe that all Head Start programs are similar. However, lessons learned from our study may be applicable to other Head Start programs in similar circumstances. Our study demonstrates the need to better equip Head Start teachers with the skills needed to teach children with disabilities. Teachers need to understand how to address individual needs, how to plan instruction, and how to facilitate interactions with peers for children with disabilities. It is also important to better understand how collaboration on behalf of children with disabilities can be improved. Teachers in our study reported some struggles to collaborate both within and outside of the program. Within the program, there was room for improvement in collaboration between teachers and disability coordinators. It might be important to consider geography in assigning support personnel, including a special education coordinator. Collaboration with others outside of the program was also difficult at times. Classroom teachers need to be more meaningfully included in IEP meetings, as is required by IDEA. In the absence of active participation from general education teachers, IEPs may provide little guidance for teachers on how to provide regular support for children with disabilities in their classrooms, as was the case with several of the teachers in our study.

Teachers were concerned about many of the children in their classrooms who did not have IEPs and for whom they did not receive any support. The release of the revised Head Start Learning Framework, which includes a requirement to provide necessary support for children who do not receive services through IDEA, is a promising new direction. It will be important to follow on whether these children are better served given the new regulations.

Early childhood programs should work to eliminate the impact of outside factors on the provision of services for children with disabilities. For example, to establish the most effective ratio of children with disabilities in each classroom depends on consideration of the needs to adapt activities and routines. Placing children in classrooms based on other considerations, such as bus routes, is unlikely to result in the best outcomes for children and teachers.

LIMITATIONS

Our study has several limitations. First, while case studies provide an in-depth description of issues that may be important in a specific context, they are not designed to provide generalizable findings. The conclusions we draw in this study should be interpreted with care. Second, the Head Start program we studied was a convenient sample, although, from our perspective we have no evidence to believe the program was atypical. Third, it is probable that our presence in the classroom influenced the behaviors of both teachers and children, even though we tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. Lastly, as with any qualitative study, we interpret our findings in the context of our own biases. However, in order to avoid misinterpretation of observed events, we were purposeful in sharing some of what we observed with the teachers and gathering their perspectives. Further, we regularly checked in with each other by sharing notes and deliberating about emerging themes.

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APPENDIX A
Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do you feel, overall, about the progress of the children with special needs in your classroom over the course of this year?
2. In general, how do you adapt classroom activities to meet individual needs? (include large group activities, small group, free play, transitions)
3. How do the children in the classroom interact with children with disabilities? What do you think helps this relationship? Give us an example. (prompt about teacher involvement)
4. How do you help children resolve behavior problems?
5. How do you monitor children's progress? (How are you using data to inform instruction?)
6. How do you collaborate with others to provide support for the children with special needs? (SLPs, developmental preschool teachers, the disabilities coordinator, others?)
7. How do you collaborate with the families of children with special needs?
8. From your perspective, how could collaborative relationships be improved? (with SLPs, developmental preschool teachers, the disabilities coordinator, parents, others?)
9. How do you manage your own time so you can effectively address individual needs? (focus on planning)
10. How confident do you feel about teaching the children with special needs in your classroom? What about your teacher assistant?