
A GUIDE TO

Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services



Laurie A. Dinnebeil
& William F. McInerney

Foreword by Virginia Buysse

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by

Laurie A. Dinnebeil

and

William F. McInerney

University of Toledo
Ohio

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About the Authors

Laurie A. Dinnebeil, Ph.D., Professor and Judith Daso Herb Chair, ECE, Judith Herb College of Education, University of Toledo, MS 954, 4500E Gillham Hall, 2801 West Bancroft Street, Toledo, Ohio, 43606

Dr. Laurie Dinnebeil is a professor of inclusive early childhood education. She was a preschool special education teacher for 5 years before entering higher education. She has taught a range of undergraduate and graduate courses related to early childhood education and early childhood special education (ECSE) and has published extensively in the area of itinerant ECSE service delivery. Dr. Dinnebeil is a proficient grant writer, having secured more than \$6 million in national and state funding since the late 1980s. She is very active in the field of ECSE at the local, state, and national levels. Dr. Dinnebeil is a past president of the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Early Childhood and the Ohio Higher Education Consortium for Early Childhood Education. She is Associate Editor for *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* and serves on editorial boards for numerous academic journals related to early childhood education and special education. Dr. Dinnebeil is a 2002 Mid-Career Fellow for ZERO TO THREE. She also has college administrative experience as a department chair and associate dean for graduate studies and research.

William F. McInerney, Ph.D., Professor of Special Education, Judith Herb College of Education, University of Toledo, MS 954, 4500E Gillham Hall, 2801 West Bancroft Street, Toledo, Ohio, 43606

Dr. McInerney teaches graduate-level courses in the early childhood special education (ECSE) area. Throughout his career, Dr. McInerney has secured U.S. Department of Education–Office of Special Education Programs (USDOE-OSEP) funding to support graduate-level training of ECSE teachers and early intervention personnel. He has managed several grants that have focused on itinerant early childhood special education (IECSE) services and has coordinated, with his associates and the Ohio Department of Education, a statewide professional development program for IECSE teachers and their supervisors. He and his colleagues at the University of Toledo have presented their work at professional conferences and have consulted with school districts and state education agencies concerning the status and future of IECSE services.

Foreword

The early childhood world has evolved significantly since I first entered it as a preschool teacher in the mid-1970s. At that time, the vast majority of children with disabilities were served in self-contained classrooms with little or no access to peers who were typically developing. Back then, my role as a classroom teacher was to work directly with children to promote their development and learning and to partner with their families to address their priorities and concerns. Today, approximately one half of preschoolers with disabilities receive special education services in some form of inclusive early childhood program or home setting. This reality has created a new professional role in early childhood—the itinerant early childhood special education (IECSE) provider. The role expectations for an itinerant teacher differ dramatically from those of a classroom teacher, yet many professionals who assume this role may not be adequately prepared to work with other adults as a consultant, coach, or inclusion specialist.

Laurie A. Dinnebeil and William F. McInerney have produced an incredible volume that promises to be the single most reliable source on a topic that to date has received little attention—itinerant early childhood special education services. Although itinerant services (and related models such as consultation and coaching) are widely used in the United States to support high-quality inclusion of children with disabilities and their families, the policies and practices that define this approach are not well understood in the early childhood field. Dinnebeil and McInerney unpack the itinerant service delivery model, thoughtfully peeling back the layers to reveal its essential components in terms that readers from a wide array of backgrounds can understand and appreciate.

The authors address fundamentally important questions: Who are IECSE providers? What is the nature of direct versus indirect service delivery? What are the various roles that these professionals play? What does the process of implementing itinerant services look like? Perhaps the most valuable contribution that this volume makes is defining what it means to be an IECSE provider. Dinnebeil and McInerney debunk the myth that an itinerant professional is an expert who comes into an early childhood setting once a week for 60–90 minutes to provide “episodic and intensive intervention.” Instead, they paint a picture of an itinerant provider as someone whose goal it is to partner with another adult (a teacher, specialist, or family member) to support the use of evidence-based, child-focused interventions (e.g., embedded interventions, response prompting, modeling) that they plan and evaluate together. The authors rightly assert that any approach to providing services to young children and families must begin with a broader vision of the key components of an effective service delivery system—access, participation, and supports related to high-quality inclusion; tiered models of instruction and intervention; and implementation science. Drawing on their wealth of knowledge and experience on this topic, Dinnebeil and McInerney provide a step-by-step model of itinerant

early childhood service delivery, complete with all of the resources and forms for managing the logistics, caseloads, communication, and documentation that are needed to be effective. *A Guide to Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services* will become the go-to resource that professionals will want to keep handy as an essential text to working collaboratively with others in the context of inclusion to help each and every young child reach his or her full potential.

Virginia Buysse, Ph.D.

Senior Scientist

FPG Child Development Institute

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Preface

Itinerant early childhood special education (IECSE) is a service delivery model that supports the inclusion of young children with disabilities whose primary placement is a community-based program such as a private preschool, child care center, or Head Start classroom. Itinerant teachers, also called *inclusion specialists*, *early childhood consultants*, or other terms, visit children's community-based classrooms on a regular basis to provide individualized education program (IEP)-based services. The prevalence of itinerant services for young children with disabilities served in community-based programs is growing nationwide. Even though this service delivery model is used to support early childhood inclusion, the role of the itinerant teacher is poorly defined not only in policy but also in practice and research. IECSE teachers often perform their jobs without the benefit of a job description, and their supervisors rely on supervision practices that are based on the role of a classroom-based teacher. Without guidance from state policy makers and administrators, IECSE teachers are left to rely on their instincts and previous experience as classroom teachers to guide their day-to-day responsibilities. As a result, most itinerant teachers function in the role of direct service provider to children, providing individual or small-group instruction that addresses IEP goals and objectives. On average, they see a child once a week for an hour, pull the child aside, and "work on" IEP objectives. Essentially, they function as tutors, a role that severely limits their ability to effectively support the child's inclusion in the community-based program.

An alternative view to the itinerant teacher as direct service provider or tutor is the role of the itinerant teacher as consultant and coach. In this model, the primary function of the itinerant teacher is to work directly with a child's primary caregivers (classroom teachers, parents, paraprofessionals) in order to support inclusive practices. Itinerant teachers partner with their community-based colleagues to find ways to embed IEP-based instruction into the child's daily routine, provide information to their adult partners, teach adults how to use research-based instructional strategies, and provide emotional support to adults who doubt their abilities to effectively work with children who have disabilities. Many view the role of itinerant teacher as consultant or coach as "best practice" in early childhood special education. This recommendation is based on results of research focused on the effectiveness of school-based consultation and peer coaching practices. It is also based on the premise that learning opportunities should be distributed across the day and integrated into daily routines and activities that naturally interest children.

Early childhood special educators who function as itinerants need to have access to a knowledge base that will help guide their practice. Itinerant teachers generally feel ill prepared to work collaboratively with other adults. Due to a lack of knowledge and confidence in their abilities, they often resist accepting the role of "expert" in their work

with adults or children, even though parents and general education early childhood teachers regard them as the experts. This resistance often pushes them to retreat into the role of a tutor, where they can work safely and comfortably with children.

The field of early childhood special education desperately needs guidance about the role of itinerant teachers. Without a research-based approach to providing itinerant services to young children with special needs, itinerant teachers will continue to resist the role of consultant and coach and will continue to limit their professional responsibilities to those that relate directly to children.

The purpose of this book is to help early childhood special educators acquire the knowledge they need to function in effective itinerant roles. This book examines the critical roles of IECSE teachers including: 1) assessor, 2) consultant, 3) coach, 4) direct service provider, 5) service coordinator, and 6) team member. In addition, this book details a framework composed of the following features for the provision of itinerant services: 1) gathering baseline information, 2) planning for itinerant services, 3) providing itinerant services through triadic intervention, and 4) reflecting on the quality of itinerant services.

In addition, this book provides information helpful to itinerant teachers in managing the logistical components of their job (e.g., travel time, scheduling, completing paperwork). Chapters include many real-life examples that students and instructors may use to provide the necessary dialogue and reflection critical to meaningful learning. Finally, appendixes in the book contain varied forms and protocols that IECSE teachers may use to provide effective itinerant services.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the support that Dr. Lyn Hale has provided in coordinating U.S. Department of Education–Office of Special Education Programs (USDOE-OSEP) grants that have advanced the practice of consultation in early childhood special education (ECSE). The authors also recognize Ms. Margie Spino for her invaluable assistance with research related to the development of key content for this book. In addition, the authors acknowledge and appreciate the work of itinerant ECSE teachers and their colleagues who have inspired and challenged us, particularly our ECSE colleagues across Ohio. They are developing and refining the practice of consultation every day. We respect their skills and commitment, and value their good will in helping us move forward.

*To Doug, Elissa, Jeff, Mark, Megan, and Addison,
who mean the world to me.*

*To Betty and Bill Pollock,
loving parents who always put
their children first.*

—LD

*To my loving wife, Marcia,
and our wonderful daughters, Brigid and Shea.
And to the newest members of the family, Owen and Andrew.*

—WM

Introduction to Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society (Division for Early Childhood [DEC]/National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009. See also Appendix C.).

The purpose of this book is to discuss itinerant early childhood special education (IECSE) services, the different roles that IECSE teachers assume, the details of putting an IECSE service delivery model into place, and what the future holds for this aspect of early childhood special education. This book is grounded in a practical discussion of how the IECSE service delivery model functions at present and describes options for more efficient delivery of IECSE services.

Who Are Itinerant Early Childhood Special Educators?

Itinerant early childhood special education teachers work with young children ages 3–5 years. They travel to a number of different sites where they teach, consult, participate in meetings, coordinate children’s educational goals with other service providers, and partner with parents. The IECSE service delivery model necessitates having a qualified, certified early childhood special education (ECSE) teacher who is able to balance large caseloads with the demands of travel to different sites. The IECSE teacher may be asked to consult with teachers, related service providers, and other members of the individualized education program (IEP) team; plan professional development for program

and school staff; and participate in IEP meetings and other meetings about children with disabilities.

What Are Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services?

Itinerant early childhood special education services can be provided directly, with IECSE teachers teaching children in various environments; or on a consultative basis, with IECSE teachers working with early childhood education (ECE) teachers or ECSE teachers as consultants, coaches, mentors, and trainers. There are several options for delivery of IECSE services. The most common option is delivery of services to a child who is enrolled full time or part time in a community preschool program and receives no other services from the local education agency (LEA). An alternative option is the provision of services in the home of the child, when the child is not enrolled in any program outside of the home. Another option is provision of IECSE services for children who are enrolled in community child care programs part time and also receive IEP-focused services in an ECSE classroom on a part-time basis. More information about this topic is provided in Chapter 12.

Where Are Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services Provided?

Although interest in IECSE services continues to grow (see Figure 1.1), it is difficult to determine the number of children receiving these services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PL 108-446). The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) does not require state departments of education to report the number of children receiving itinerant services. They do, however, require reporting of the number of children served in different educational environments. In 2006–2007, the following educational environment categories were established:

- A child with a disability receives services in the general early childhood program at least 80% of the time.
- A child with a disability receives services in the general early childhood program 40%–79% of the time.
- A child with a disability receives services in the general early childhood program less than 40% of the time.
- A child with a disability receives services in his or her home.

One problem in interpretation of current enrollment data is the result of the recent (2006) redefinition of an *early childhood program* as “a program that includes at least 50 percent nondisabled children” (Table 3-RE5, Part B, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Implementation of free appropriate public education [FAPE] requirements, p. 2). This means that a child can be counted as being in a “general early childhood program at least 80% of the time” even if the child is in a special education classroom with

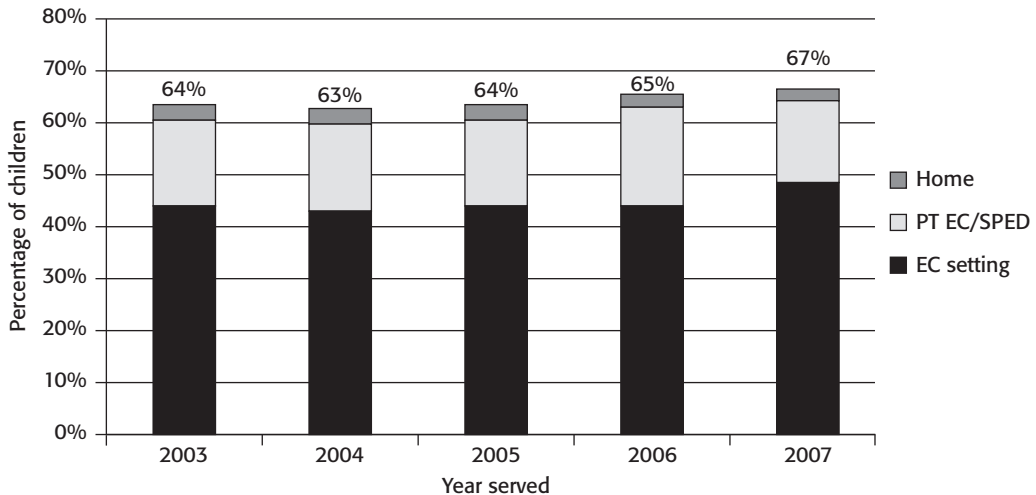


Figure 1.1. Percentage of children (3–5 yrs.) receiving IDEA Part B 619 services (2003–2007). (Source: <https://www.ideadata.org/default.asp>; Key: PT EC/SPED, part-time early childhood special education; EC, early childhood.)

an ECSE teacher that is composed of six children with disabilities and six children without disabilities. As a result, an estimation of the number of children who are receiving IECSE services nationwide is not available at present.

What Is the Current Spectrum of Itinerant Early Childhood Special Education Services?

IDEA 2004 (PL 108-446) requirements stipulate that children be educated in the least restrictive environment possible and that there shall be a continuum of placement options under this provision. This continuum of placement options—from education in a separate school to full inclusion in the general education classroom—is necessary to support the FAPE provision of IDEA in providing services to children with disabilities.

Placement and service options for young children with IEPs usually include the following:

- Placement in a separate or segregated prekindergarten (pre-K) school or early learning center
- Home instruction featuring home visiting consistent with the IECSE services model
- Placement in a self-contained pre-K classroom in a neighborhood school
- Placement in an inclusive pre-K classroom in a neighborhood school that may feature variable ratios of children with disabilities to children without disabilities
- Placement in an LEA-operated pre-K classroom in which proportional enrollment of children with special needs is maintained
- Placement in community pre-K programs in which the primary focus is children who are developing typically (this is the model in which IECSE consultation services are most viable)

These options are consistent with the traditional Cascade Model (Kavale & Forness, 2000), which is the frame of reference for many IEP teams in determining how restrictive a child's educational placement should be. The Cascade Model is a graduated reference for evaluation of the relative restrictiveness of placements. The Cascade Model is based on the extent of physical separation from peers that is necessary to meet the minimum requirements of the FAPE clause of IDEA, as identified in the IEP. As an example, the Cascade Model suggests that, without reference to the IEP, placement in a self-contained special education classroom, in a separate setting, is more restrictive than placement in a self-contained special education classroom in a neighborhood school.

Although home-based service delivery has been the staple of early intervention services for infants and toddlers (ages 0–3) since 1986, it has only been since 2000 that IECSE services have been embraced for 3- to 5-year-olds with special needs. Several factors have contributed to the rising profile of IECSE services. The continuing interest of professionals and parents in providing natural environments for students coupled with an increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood intervention have been primary factors. In addition, there also has been a growing interest in serving young children with special needs in community child care and preschool programs (Craig, Haggart, Gold, & Hull, 2000; DEC/NAEYC, 2009; DeVore & Bowers, 2006; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005; Walsh, Rous, & Lutzer, 2000). Finally, awareness of the inherent value of early inclusion experiences (Allen & Schwartz, 1996; Odom & Diamond, 1998) also has fueled interest in IECSE services.

Who Are Itinerant Early Childhood Special Educators?

The pool of practicing IECSE teachers is quite diverse. Many IECSE teachers hold bachelor, master, or advanced degrees in early childhood education, special education, or early childhood special education as well as other human services degrees (e.g., psychology, nursing, social work). Practicing IECSE teachers may be novice educators or mature professionals. Some IECSE teachers have had prior experience as classroom teachers in early childhood or early childhood special education programs, whereas others may have had experience as teachers in general education or special education classrooms. IECSE teachers may enter the field as traditional graduates of undergraduate teacher preparation programs; reenter the profession after brief or extended leaves of absence; enter the profession in response to layoffs or collective bargaining requirements; or be seeking a career change after years of classroom teaching in preschool or elementary, middle, or high school programs. These career path options have led to heterogeneity within the ranks of the IECSE teacher population. This heterogeneity has significant implications for the profession and the practice of IECSE intervention.

The Structure of This Book

The remainder of the chapters in this book address the following subjects:

- Chapter 2 addresses the differences between the direct services model of IECSE and the consultation model of IECSE. Because our position is that the consultation model

of IECSE is more desirable, a rationale will be presented for moving from a direct services model to a consultation model.

- Chapter 3 discusses the various roles that an IECSE teacher may have—direct services provider, consultant, coach, monitor and/or assessor, service coordinator, team member, and lifelong learner.
- Chapters 4–8 examine in more detail the IECSE teacher’s various roles as enumerated earlier in this chapter.
- Chapters 9 and 10 present several models through which IECSE services may be provided and the responsibilities of the IECSE teacher within these frameworks with respect to gathering information, planning for intervention, coaching, consultation, and evaluation of partner and child progress.
- Chapter 11 presents a case study in which the consultation model of IECSE service delivery has been successful.
- Chapter 12 reviews important logistics in providing IECSE services.

This sequence of content was developed to address policies and practices related to IECSE service delivery, examine models for more efficient and effective IECSE service delivery, review theoretical aspects of IECSE service delivery, as well as to address pragmatic aspects in delivery of IEP-focused instruction in community-based early childhood education programs.