

Early Intervention Exposure for OT, PT, and ST Graduate Students

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Terminology

- Occupational therapy – OT
- Physical therapy – PT
- Speech therapy – ST
- Early Intervention – EI

Background

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C services.
 - Purpose is to “Encourage states to expand opportunities for children under three years of age who would be at risk of having substantial developmental delay...” (IDEA, 2004).
- Provider shortages (Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association, 2024).
 - Most need in the fields of OT, PT, ST.
- Previously identified challenges (Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association, 2024).
 - Management, professional development opportunities, resources, increased number of families in need of services, low compensation.

Rationale

- Pre-professional training was not considered as a factor contributing to shortages in the Part C provider base in the 2024 Tipping Points Survey.
- Previous studies have concluded that STs, OTs, and PTs feel unprepared to work with infants and toddlers (Bruder & Dunst, 2005; Campbell et al., 2009; Francois et al., 2014)
- What exposure do STs, OTs, and PTs receive regarding the B-3 intervention system in the New England states?

Method

- Six New England States
- Compile a list of accredited Master's in Speech Language Pathology, Master's in Occupational Therapy, and Doctorate of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs.
- Search course titles and descriptions for key terms.
- Search departmental faculty profiles and research for key terms.
- Key terms: infant, toddler, IDEA Part C, early intervention, neonatal, lifespan.

Results – Speech Therapy

- 11/16 programs offer at least 1 course (69%).
 - Example course titles include language disorders birth to five; dysphagia; survey of communication disorders across the life span; aural rehabilitation.
 - An additional 2 programs offer electives.
- 7/16 have at least 1 staff/faculty member with early intervention experience (44%).
- 7/16 programs have research labs (44%).
- 2/16 programs offer an Early Intervention Certificate Program (13%).

Results – Occupational Therapy

- 10/18 programs offer at least 1 course (56%).
 - Example course titles include development, occupation, and performance in infancy and childhood; treatment planning across the lifespan; evaluation and intervention for children and adolescents.
- 3/18 have at least 1 staff/faculty member with early intervention experience (17%).
- No research noted in early intervention.
 - Limited available information on research labs

Results- Physical Therapy

- 7/21 programs offer at least 1 course (33%).
 - Example course titles include lifespan motor control; evaluation and intervention; pediatric physical therapy; management across the life span: pediatrics; principles of teaching and learning across the lifespan.
- 9/21 have at least 1 staff/faculty member with early intervention experience (43%).
- 1/21 conducts research on infants/toddlers (5%)
 - Limited available information on research labs

Discussion

- Limited course offerings related to the infant/toddler age group.
- No mentions of IDEA in any course description.
- Courses offered on school-based practice, acute care practice, and medical based practice.
 - No required courses for early intervention.
- Limited faculty and staff with experience in early intervention.
- Some Massachusetts schools advertise and offer an Early Intervention Certificate Program.

Limitations

- Missing course descriptions.
- EI may be embedded within courses without being part of the course description
 - Limited access to syllabi
- Inclusion of the term “lifespan”.
- Only one person analyzed departmental websites.

References

Bruder, M. B., & Dunst, C. J. (2005). Personnel preparation in recommended early intervention practices: Degree of emphasis across disciplines. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*(1), 25-33.

Campbell, P. H. , Chiarello, L. , Wilcox, M. J. & Milbourne, S. (2009). Preparing Therapists as Effective Practitioners in Early Intervention. *Infants & Young Children, 22* (1), 21-31. doi: 10.1097/01.IYC.0000343334.26904.92.

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Francois, J. R., Coufal, K. L., & Subramanian, A. (2015). Student preparation for professional practice in early intervention. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 36(3), 177-186.

IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (2025). 2024 Tipping Points Survey: System challenges and Opportunities.
<https://www.ideainfanttoddler.org/pdf/2024-Tipping-Points-Survey.pdf>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1432 et seq. (2004).