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Perspectives of appropriate educational support services for non-English speaking families of deaf and hard of hearing children: the ideal and the real
"A Literature Review"

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Perspectives of Appropriate Educational Support Services for Non-English Speaking Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children: The Ideal and the Real “A Literature Review”

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Introduction

It is widely recognized that children with special needs require considerably more help in and out of the classroom in order to achieve access equal to that of children without special needs. A series of laws in the United States has been established to focus on the needs of special needs children (for example: Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA – of 1990), and these laws have a significant impact on children who are deaf or hard of hearing (hereafter, deaf). The IDEA (P.L. 101-476 & 105-17), for example, has opened the way for public education programs providing free and appropriate schooling in the “least restrictive environment” (Meadow-Orlans, 2001).

The least restrictive environment (LRE) was intended to be a safeguard against the “one size fits all” approach in determining educational placements for special needs children. Horne (1996) defines LRE as the “environment where the child can receive an appropriate education designed to meet his or her special educational needs, while still being educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate” (section 8-3). While open to interpretation, most often the deaf child is placed in the public school classroom with hearing children; if the child is not successful in that environment despite additional services, the child is then placed in a more exclusive educational environment, such as a school for the deaf.

Some of the explicit yet informal goals of the IDEA as noted by Horne (1996) include:

1. Strengthening the role of parents;
2. Ensuring access to the general curriculum and reforms;
3. Giving increased attention to racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity to prevent inappropriate identification and mislabeling;
4. Encouraging parents and educators to work out their differences by using non-adversarial means.

While passage of the IDEA intended to prevent the educational system from overriding the parent decision-making process, it must also be acknowledged that parental involvement in the child’s educational process may be limited due to effects of other factors such as minority status, socioeconomic status, educational background, or cultural/linguistic background. Professionals are also seen to have a major impact on the parent decision-making process. This combination will be discussed in detail throughout this literature review.

Demographics show us that deaf minorities are on the rise. A 1997 analysis of 30 years of data from the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth (hereafter, Annual Survey) showed an increase in the number of deaf Hispanic/Latino youth from 9% in 1977-78 to 18% in 1996-97 (Holden-Pitt & Diaz). Five years later, the 2001-2002 Annual Survey showed an increase to 22.8% Hispanic/Latino deaf youth (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2003). The numbers for Hispanic/Latinos shown in the Annual Survey match closely the numbers shown for Hispanics in the public schools, which have jumped from 6% in 1973 to 15% in 1997 (Ballantine, 2001). Compared to the 1996-97 Annual Survey, the 2001-2003 Survey showed fairly consistent numbers among other deaf minorities groups, including Asian/Pacific Islander (4.2%) and Black/African American (15.9%). At the same time, researchers have shown us time and time again that white middle-class professionals dominate the field of deaf education (e.g. Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1993; Cohen, Fischgrund, Redding, 1990; Yacobacci-Tam, 1987; Jensema & Corbett, 1980).

The fact that “expectations and teaching styles of U.S. public schools are based on white, middle-class values” (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002, 45) emphasizes the impact of white
middle-class professionals on the field of deaf education. Because of this value set and the belief in the superiority of these values (i.e. ethnocentrism), immigrant children may suffer "definite disadvantages" (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 45). These definite disadvantages suffered might arise as a result of a tendency of Caucasian American educators to maintain ethnocentric attitudes; to "have little sensitivity to or awareness of the differences among cultures, creating barriers to communication between school and home" (Yacobacci-Tam, 1987, 47) due to the belief that the "American way" – as perceived by Caucasian Americans – is the "right" way. Another aspect of American ethnocentrism is the general attitude that everyone must use English fluently. As a result, when school personnel come into contact with a culturally and/or linguistically different family, frustrations may arise and cause professionals to make "inappropriate assumptions based on behavioral observations rooted in Western thought patterns" (49). Cohen, Fischgrund, and Redding (1990) note when school personnel poorly understand a child’s cultural needs and background, the opportunity to learn is limited and thus achievement is expected to decrease as an outcome. Such issues as these are mirrored throughout all of education as well: other researchers have shown how teacher expectations of students directly affect student performance, including instances where the expectations stem from cultural norms (e.g. Pena, 1997; Cooper & Moore, 1995; Bamburg, 1994).

An anecdotal account from Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) effectively illustrates this conflict. Crago and Eriks-Brophy discuss a situation in which a Caucasian speech therapist was working with an Inuk mother and her profoundly deaf 18-month old son. Throughout the session, the therapist attempted to teach the mother how to interactively talk with her son during play, to which the mother responded, "I just can’t talk to my son in that way. It doesn’t feel right" (124). The therapist failed to realize that the mother’s culture, Inuit, does not accept the
kind of parent-child interaction that was being fostered during the therapy session. The inability for the therapist to understand why it didn’t “feel right” for the mother to interact with her child was a result of the lack of knowledge of the language socialization practices of the Inuk mother’s culture. While this serves as an example of situations that occur between culturally different parents and educational professionals, it also shows us however important the IDEA goals may be, the manner in which professionals approach these goals may not be the same for parents who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In these situations, cultural sensitivity and knowledge is necessary to help work out the differences between professionals and parents in a non-intimidating way. With the demographics of today’s students and staff in deaf education, there is clearly potential for cultural conflict between families and professionals of the same sort as illustrated by Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993). What’s more, these conflicts between parents and professionals may affect how the ideas of IDEA are achieved, if at all.

This review will explore different research studies and literature reviews within the context of the four IDEA goals (strengthening the role of parents, ensuring access, attention to diversity, and non-adversarial conflict resolution) noted earlier. As we proceed through these four areas, we will keep in mind two questions:

1. What factors contribute to differing perspectives of appropriate educational support services by professionals and non-English speaking families of Deaf and hard of hearing children?

2. What is the effectiveness of the different educational programs set up in response to the issue of educating minority deaf students?
While this review focuses on non-English speaking students and their families, special focus will be placed on Hispanic students and their families as representative of non-English speaking families because of the rising numbers of Hispanic deaf students in education.

**Strengthening the role of parents**

The “education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by strengthening the roles of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home” (Section 601(c)(5)(B) of IDEA, as cited in Horne, 1996). While studies show the importance of integrating parent needs in implementing support service programs (e.g. Bernstein & Barta, 1998), other studies show us that groups outside the “norm” (diverse in terms of culture, linguistic, and even socioeconomic) have different needs for supporting their child (e.g. Meadow-Orlans, Mertens, Sass-Lehrer, & Scott-Olson, 1997; Kluwin & Corbett, 1998). The need for new perspectives in order to academically support minority deaf children is supported by research studies that look at non-English speaking minority families (e.g. Gerner de Garcia, 1995; Steinberg, Davila, Collazo, Loew, & Fischgrund, 1997; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002).

Bernstein and Barta (1988) express concern that professional attitudes may overpower the parent desires in terms of the types of intervention services available for their child. Professionals, the researchers say, reach a point where they feel “they alone have the ability to determine how best to meet parental needs” (235). But however valuable the experiences of these professionals are, the parent wishes should not be ignored. Bernstein and Barta asked – what are parent perceptions of issues in relation to professional perceptions? How helpful is intervention? Finally, are parents are satisfied with professional treatment? With the answers to
these questions in mind come possible strategies to strengthen the role of parents in their child’s educational process. While Bernstein and Barta’s survey results showed similar parent/teacher perspectives concerning the ranking of importance of issues throughout the four developmental stages, it was found that parents tended to place more importance on certain items than professionals did. Specifically, parents placed more emphasis on topics related to interpersonal communication and education than on technical categories such as audiology, deafness, hearing aids, and speech.

Bernstein and Barta (1988) concluded that the critical need is for professionals offering programs to parents and families to take into consideration specific needs and situations of the families they deal with. An improved system is needed for assessing the practical needs of each parent at the time the information is needed. Allowing for more parent participation into what will be included in the intervention program will lead to less frustration and more overall program compatibility. While the recommendations made by Bernstein and Barta seem appropriate based on observations of educational systems, the author wishes to point out the small sample group of parent respondents to the survey, with only 47 questionnaires out of the 53 received were usable in the study. Of this group, only six parents labeled themselves non-Caucasian or non-Hispanic, leaving the author wondering how representative the sample of the population was.

Meadow-Orleans, Mertens, Sass-Lehrer, and Scott-Olson (1997) wanted to know how the demographic changes in America presented in the 1996 Annual Survey has affected the existing role of families with deaf children and the support service network. The survey asked a variety of questions that anticipated a more complete and well-rounded perspective on parents’ perception of support services. The goal of the survey was to collect information on the age of
diagnosis of hearing loss and age intervention began; available intervention approaches that were recommended and accepted by parents; level of program participation by mothers, fathers, and other family members in various population subgroups; parental satisfaction with services received; sources of support and levels of family stress; and parents’ assessments of children’s social and communicative progress (279). The population sample for this study included only parents of children who were 6-7 years of age so as to provide homogeneity of information related to diagnosis and available intervention services. 1,147 questionnaires were sent to 137 participating programs in 39 states; however, only 404 (35%) were returned. The researchers reported that the returned surveys, however small the number, represented a diverse population, closely matching the Annual Survey results for 1996 with a few exceptions: California and Texas were somewhat underrepresented while Utah and Maryland were somewhat over represented.

While the overall respondents indicated favorable evaluations of intervention programs and placed teachers on the top of a “sources of help” list, it was also noted that parents from minority groups and those with no college training reported that their children showed more behavior problems and less language progress, and gave more negative responses to questions regarding the impact of deafness on their families (Meadow-Orlans et al., 1997, 278). Non-White mothers and those with mixed-race marriages also evaluated services more negatively compared with White mothers. Non-white mothers, especially those with lower educational levels, reported receiving less support from all sources. Through discussion of the results, Meadow-Orlans et al. (1997) suggested that special attention should be given to minority-group parents with lower educational levels to improve the quality of access to services.

Kluwin and Corbett’s (1998) literature review shows the various factors that limit the academic success of students from different subgroups within America. Among the limiting
factors is the effect of race on academic achievement; later diagnosis of ethnically and linguistically diverse deaf children; the frequent misplacement of the diverse children in inappropriate educational settings; and poorer access to social services. Other researchers (e.g. Gerner de García, 1995; Kluwin, 1994; Cohen et al., 1990) also observed these factors noted by Kluwin and Corbett (1998). The effects of these delays on the deaf child continue throughout his/her entire educational career (e.g. Kluwin & Stinson, 1993) and affect the child’s access to the general curriculum. Kluwin and Corbett also noticed a contradictory phenomenon in which some groups of parents were highly supportive of their deaf child but uninvolved with their child’s school program, sometimes ignorant of the formal educational process for whatever reason, which is then discussed throughout the study. Kluwin and Corbett’s study focused on those parents less likely to respond to usual contacts from the school program in order to determine the characteristics of this group, the nature of involvement if not with the school, and if there was a relationship between involvement or noninvolvement and the characteristics of the parents. Kluwin and Corbett also present some potential approaches for meeting parent/caretaker needs in terms of supporting the deaf child’s academic success.

The researchers carried out a qualitative study in which they targeted a sample group of 105 parents – 41% African American, 38% Hispanic, and 21% “Other” (European, Middle Eastern, and Asian) – through phone and in-person interviews. Questions for the interviews consisted of three components: family background, family resources, and parent involvement; all of which were drawn from questionnaires used by previous researchers (Shonkoff, Hauser-Crum, Krauss, & Upshur, 1992; Dunst & Leet, 1987; Welton, 1981; Butler, Henderson, Gifford, & Williams, 1992) to maintain a level of reliability across a diverse group of people, thus drawing a more accurate picture of the underrepresented group the researchers were attempting to study.
As shown in other research studies discussed in this literature review, mothers were usually the main contacts during the course of the study (e.g. Gerner de García, 1995; Steinberg et al., 1997). Through data analysis, five subgroups emerged from the original sample: younger high school dropout mothers; older high school dropout mothers; older high school graduate mothers; mothers who did some college work; and older respondents (Kluwin & Corbett, 1998, 429). When analyzing the results from the perspective of these groups, different behavioral patterns began to emerge:

1. Younger dropout mothers did not visit the classroom or participate in the IEP process, but would read school-generated materials;
2. Older dropout mothers did not read school-generated materials and had low degrees of involvement in other ways;
3. High-school educated mothers showed a high degree of interest in the classroom and participated in the IEP process, but behavior varied in such a way researchers could not see a clear trend (often depending on socioeconomic level of family);
4. College-educated mothers reported participation in all forms of contact with the school program; and
5. Senior caregivers showed preference for reading materials but clearly disliked the IEP process and visiting the classrooms (Kluwin & Corbett, 1998, 430).

While the sample group consisted of at least 79% parents from minority groups, the sub groupings recognized by Kluwin and Corbett (1998) could mirror that of the general population in America, not just limited to minorities.

Because parent perceptions of their own life situations varied among groups, Kluwin and Corbett (1998) state that support services cannot be made standard for all, which is definitely the
preventive measure behind the LRE principle of the IDEA law. The authors make three major suggestions for improvement of support services and bringing educators closer to accomplishing the ideal goal of strengthening the role of the parents. For both groups of high school dropout mothers, consideration needs to be made for a stronger social support system to overcome financial and educational limits; consideration also needs to be made to set up counseling in order to help parents better understand how to deal with the school system. Due to the lack of sufficient time and economic resources to devote to the child’s educational needs, high school graduates would benefit from different community resources, thus recruitment of community members such as religious leaders can provide support to these parents instead of solely through the social support agency. For the older caregivers, support programs need to respect their experience and position within the community while providing the caregivers with the information they need to respond to the child’s needs. Table 1 (see Appendix) provides a summary of the subgroups, their behaviors, and recommended support services. While Kluwin and Corbett do not give specific examples alongside their suggestions, they suggest a more widespread effort of the community to provide education and support to the parents, such as recruiting community members to serve as a community resource for parents that often do not have the time or money to focus on their deaf child. Through these efforts come the increasingly stronger roles of parents/caregivers of deaf children.

While the results and suggestions of the Kluwin and Corbett (1998) study apply to a more general population of parents and caregivers, they could very well apply to parents from non-English speaking families, especially in terms of counseling to learn how to deal with the school system as well as recruiting community members to provide an additional resource outside the
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school system and social support agency. Indeed, as Gerner de Garcia (1995) writes in her study discussed later in this paper:

By failing to consider the actual language dynamics of linguistically diverse families, schools may perpetuate the lack of integration of these families into the school as well as do little to foster communication between deaf and hearing family members. The school may look at linguistically diverse parents only as needing services and may be unable to consider what they can contribute. Such a view works against the empowerment of parents and inhibits them from becoming partners in the education of their children. (p. 246)

Thus an improved support system set into place gives parents, and schools as well, more support in effectively providing an education for the child.

Ensuring access to general curriculum and reforms

The second IDEA goal to be examined here is access to general curriculum and reforms. Barrera (1993) discusses the tendency of educators to ignore linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom and how this has a negative impact on non-English speaking children. Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) discuss language socialization and how it has an impact on the relationship between professionals, such as speech therapists, and the parents who don’t speak English as a first language. Both researchers show how misconceptions on the part of professionals can cause a barrier to access to general curriculum and reforms for the child.

As shown in other articles discussed throughout this literature review (e.g. Gerner de Garcia, 1995; Blackwell & Fischgrund, 1984), Barrera (1993) points out the tendency of educators to give little attention to the linguistic and cultural differences and their integration as
resources into daily practice. A discontinuity between the culture of the home and the American culture, as reflected by the school, results in challenges for young children, especially those with disabilities, who are still in the process of mastering home cultural values and language. These disabilities constrain in some way the children's abilities to achieve mastery of the values they are trying to internalize. Also discussed by Barrera is the issue of the absence of culturally responsive and nonbiased materials that allow the child to respond authentically to the learning process. This issue has also been noted by other researchers such as Gerner de Garcia (1995), Fischgrund (1984), and Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) in which children are inappropriately labeled or misplaced because of their inexperience with school materials and the cultural expectations of the school towards the child. Without an adequate bridge between the home culture and the school culture, the child is not given the tools to succeed in the academic environment.

Barrera (1993) offers key variables for educators to think about when considering the impacts of the child's sociocultural context and developing more appropriate instruction to bring the child closer to the general curriculum. These key variables affecting the child include: the child's level of acculturation; characteristics of home and community environments; preferred learning and interactive behaviors; the child's and family's linguistic and sociocultural experiences and resources; language history and usage patterns; and the child's linguistic and metalinguistic proficiency. While all of these variables are important in bringing attention to the issue of understanding racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and reducing the amount of inappropriate identification and mislabeling, we will only look in-depth at the fourth variable: the child's and family's linguistic and sociocultural experiences and resources.
Like Gerner de García (1995), Barrera (1993) encourages interaction between educators and the families in order to better understand the relationship of the child with his/her family in the home environment and the activities done at home. This would allow the educator to better integrate classroom activities with home activities to allow the child to become more comfortable with different routines. Through these improvements comes improved access to the general curriculum and less incidents of mislabeling and inappropriate identification for the linguistic minority deaf child.

Keeping in mind the influence of linguistic diversity mentioned by Barrera (1993) on the potential misplacement of the deaf child with inappropriate services, we look again at Crago and Eriks-Brophy’s (1993) description of an Inuk mother not “feeling right” when interacting with her deaf son presents an anecdote that better explains central concept of language socialization and its importance to the assessment and intervention with multi-cultural populations. Language socialization describes the interdependence of society’s role in language use and the role of language in assimilation into a culture. The central concept of language socialization is “communicative competence” as defined by Hymes (1972, as cited in Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1993): the social rules of language use in a particular society, determining the discourse structure of social interchanges, is just as effective as the grammatical rules underlying language structure that determine the form of these interchanges. Thus bringing together the importance of both social rules and linguistic rules in determining the interaction between people in a particular society.

With education professionals coming mostly from a mainstream middle class background, comes the common misunderstandings and assumptions about the proper “role and status of the child, about appropriate behavior for adults and children, and about the nature of
communication interchanges which apply in the culture from which they come” (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1993, 125). The combination of assumptions by educators and the culturally different child produce biased outcomes of language assessment. Remembering the anecdote above, we see the misconception of the therapist’s expectations that the Inuk mother should interact with her child in a specific way not accepted in her culture, which believes children should listen and observe the older society members. In this context, the therapist’s suggestions for play interaction to help improve her child’s speech was inappropriate and would not reflect or “pass along” the mother’s culture to the son.

Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) outline nine dimensions for professionals to consider when interacting, assessing, and/or intervening in the child’s communicative environment, for the sake of brevity only four will be outlined here:

1. Mode of communication determines how much of the communication between the child and people in his/her environment is verbal or nonverbal, and how nonverbal cues such as silence and eye gaze are defined.
2. Amount of talk determines how much the children talk in conversations depending on the participants and the context.
3. Conversational structure determines who initiates, maintains, and/or ends interactions and attention-getting and turn-taking strategies used by members.
4. Some relevant social norms determine the cultural beliefs about how language is learned by young children, what activities or uses of language is considered play, fun, or humorous, what are the conventions of male-female communication, and how does the culture define and view “handicapped.” (126-127).
As is indicated in the above outlined points, Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) stress the need for educators to acknowledge their own limitations and assumptions based on cultural perceptions, from which comes the need to develop collaborative relationships with parents and cultural representatives. The importance of understanding the cultural and linguistic relationship between the deaf child and his/her family plays a critical role in removing assumptions on the part of the educators. It is the opinion of the reviewer as a future educator, through the use of the suggestions made above, educators will become more aware of ways to integrate varying cultural patterns into the educational program and assessment of the child.

**Giving attention to diversity to prevent inappropriate identification and mislabeling**

The third IDEA goal discussed in this review is to avoid inappropriate identification and mislabeling by giving attention to diversity. While this topic has become the central theme of the entire review and discussed through other goals, it is the opinion of the reviewer to explore this goal in isolation more in-depth.

Labeling ethnic groups under one umbrella term – “Asian,” “Black,” “Hispanic” – fails to show the diversity within each group. People classified as “Hispanics” vary in sociocultural and even linguistic backgrounds, from country to country within the western hemisphere. These countries vary in culture, political system, and even in the dialect of Spanish used. How can we define services to aid these families if we fail to understand the individual differences of each cultural group? Yacobacci-Tam (1987) stresses the need for professionals to take into account the child’s spoken language/dialect at home, the sign language (if any) used at home, and the child’s knowledge of English and ASL in order to properly evaluate the abilities of a minority deaf child. The level of acculturation into the mainstream culture is also important, as cultural
attitudes affect perceptions on issues surrounding deafness and the appropriateness of support services. While Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984), Barrera (1993), and Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) discuss the overall issues of ethnic, linguistic, and racial diversity, studies by Gerner de García (1995), Steinberg et al. (1997), and Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) present in-depth studies of families belonging to different ethnic groups (specifically Hispanic and Asian) and their relationships with the deaf children. Themes that arise in reviewing these four studies as well as throughout this review, include: considering needs of parents including educational counseling and support; supporting the child's linguistic and sociocultural needs in school; and facing stereotypes held by educators regarding specific groups different from their own.

Blackwell and Fischgrund's article (1984) centers on the impact of cultural differences on the relationship between the child, family, and school. According to the research by Blackwell and Fischgrund, children are affected by cultural differences in three ways: the etiology of their deafness, the age of identification, and how effective early intervention services address their needs. Children from different cultural backgrounds may become deaf for different reasons: for example, geographically specific epidemics may cause post-lingual hearing loss with different effects that might lead to additional handicaps, all of which may lead to the need of different forms of educational support such as wheelchair access or enlarged print for those with vision difficulty. Later identification of children from non-English speaking homes tends to be affected by such variables as living environment (rural/urban), parent age and education level, as well as availability of medical services.

Availability of foreign language interpreters also has an impact on the success of intervention services for families. Later on in this section, Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) discuss the effect of awareness of cultural needs by interpreters and educational programs on the
success of intervention services. One example of awareness of cultural needs given by Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) is in the case of Hispanic parents needing to personally interact with the person intervening on the behalf of their child who becomes their central reference point for anything related to their child’s needs. Therefore, having an interpreter act as an intermediary between educators and parents may result in lack of compatibility to parent needs. As stated by other researchers mentioned earlier in this paper, is the tendency of professionals to become frustrated with families due to lack of understanding by parents in their role in the intervention process.

Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) stress the importance of professionals’ understanding of the child’s families in the context of history, society, and culture in the assessment of the child’s educational needs. These contexts influence the child’s language acquisition process in addition to the child’s social understanding and conduct. The cultural responses of families to their current situations (living in the US, attitudes towards English, as well as their views on deafness) influence the success of parent training activities. A successful educational program is able to understand and utilize the strengths of the family such as family structure, religious belief system, community support system, and cultural value system.

Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) separated the impact of the cultural differences between the school and the child into three categories: the child/parent response to the demands of school, the program’s choice of languages, and the implementation of a bilingual/bicultural program in a school for the deaf. The last category will be discussed in more detail further on in the paper due to its impact on non-English speaking families. In the first category, demands of school on the child and parent include conventional learning behaviors, regular attendance, homework, parent involvement, and IEP process – all of which may be unfamiliar to a child and
his/her parents who have never been exposed to a U.S. school environment before (e.g. Barrera, 1993). The second category concerns the program’s choice of languages, which has its basis in the historical context of deaf programs being designed for the effects of hearing impairment on language learning, not for the effects of a different home language on the competency skill in the school language (Fischgrund, 1984). Because the child might already be exposed to some form of the home language, there needs to be a clear distinction between English as a second language (ESL) activities and language activities used to develop the English language in congenitally deaf students from English-speaking homes, in order to better make the transition from the home language and the school language.

In a school for the deaf that has been designed to support language acquisition hindered by hearing impairment, bilingual support brings its own issues. Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) show how educators untrained in bilingual education may respond to an older student from a non-English speaking home that has never before attended school; the educators may respond in a manner which reflects their misunderstanding of the language acquisition process, the nature of bilingualism, and the role of culture in the learning process and curriculum. Blackwell and Fischgrund then present the same situation from the point of view of experienced bilingual educators. These experienced educators showed a more complete understanding of the sociocultural factors discussed so far in this study (see Table 2 in Appendix A) and were better equipped to present a more balanced and appropriate view toward curriculum planning. A common misconception repeated in this comparison is discouragement of use of the home language will lead to the child’s perception of his/her family and culture as different and inferior from the school culture based on the mainstream American culture (supported by Fischgrund, 1984; Gerner de García, 1995). However, bilingual educators in this comparison continue to
emphasize the use of the home language as a knowledge base on which the child learns the school language (such as English or ASL/English).

As the result of the misunderstanding of sociocultural factors discussed in the article, children from non-English speaking homes are often misplaced in programs that do not reflect the child’s true learning potential. In order to buffer such issues surrounding bilingual deaf children, it is suggested that curriculum planning for students who enter school later should include high-interest content (as opposed to utilizing only information the student already knows); represent new material in ways that allow students to “establish simple syntactic grammar utilizing basic semantic relationships” (Blackwell & Fischgrund, 1984, 164); introduce complex grammar gradually into an expanding conceptual framework; and use a mixture of experiences that combine hands on (enactive), illustrative (iconic), and linguistic (symbolic) strategies.

Gerner de Garcia (1995) noticed a shortage of ethnographic studies that looked at Hispanic deaf children in their home environment and family communities, and carried out such a study of three families with deaf children. The study was an attempt to “better understand the sociocultural environments of Spanish-speaking homes with deaf children and, by doing so, expand our understanding of deaf children from linguistically diverse families” (224). The diverse backgrounds of these three families allowed the researcher to get a better overall view of the various factors that can affect a Hispanic family with deaf children – the only shared variable was the fact the children attended the same school for the deaf. In the Alvarez family, the oldest son was hard of hearing, and his family did not use sign language in the home (he taught his siblings signs when asked); the mother did not feel it was necessary to learn sign language to communicate with her son since he was able to speak and understand Spanish, a trend that was
also noted by Steinberg et al. (1997) in their study of Hispanic families in Philadelphia to be discussed further in this paper. The second family, the Blanco family, had two older daughters and a younger son who was deaf; the mother already knew Puerto Rican sign language, which she learned from a deaf sister and grandfather. In the Castillo family, the youngest child of three children, a girl, was profoundly deaf from meningitis; before moving to the United States, the daughter attended an oral school for the deaf in Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic.

Gerner de García (1995) collected data on these families through interviews, field notes, participant-observation, and videotaping of the families at home. It was important for the purpose of this project to study family communication in the home environment of the deaf child surrounded by family members in order to get a better picture of the dynamics of communication in the varying trilingual (Spanish, English, and ASL) environment.

While Gerner de García’s (1995) study only looked at three families with different profiles and thus should not be used to over generalize about Hispanic deaf children and their families, the study does provide a unique insight into some of the sociocultural factors that affect family interaction and communication with the deaf child. For example, in the Alvarez family, as the eldest in his family, the hard of hearing son was expected to assume the role of interpreter for his Spanish-speaking mother. The mother would not admit her son had a hearing loss and that his hearing loss affected his language access in any way. Furthermore, despite his weak Spanish, the son assumed the role of teacher for his younger siblings in Spanish and in English. In the Blanco family, the son, this time the youngest of his family, was accommodated for in every way including the use of sign language and visual attention-getting strategies, except in the fact that no one interpreted for him during family interactions. His older sisters constantly
interpreted English into Spanish for the mother, as befitted the oldest child’s responsibility, but no one facilitated communication for the deaf son during these interactions.

Other sociocultural factors include the struggle for the Castillo family to learn English in order to survive in the US – they used a mixture of Spanish and English in the home, and in the struggle to learn English, they did not deem it important to learn sign language to meet the needs of the deaf daughter. Despite the fact she learned Spanish at an oral deaf school in the Dominican Republic, her academic program at the school for the deaf in the US did not accommodate for her unique linguistic capabilities and encourage multilingual capabilities. As a result, the daughter felt that sign language was not as important as learning to speak English and that Spanish (her first language) needed to be sacrificed in order to master her new language (English).

While Gerner de García (1995) stresses the importance of not over generalizing the results of her study to apply to all Spanish-speaking families, she does stress the importance of educators taking into account different factors when assessing the needs of a non-English speaking deaf child. She suggests schools must:

- Include the input of linguistically diverse parents regarding the role they will assume in the school so that parents can become partners in their deaf child’s education.
- Provide support for immigrant families that recognizes everyone’s needs along with the deaf child in their adjustment to the new cultures and languages; this includes providing interpreters/translators who are readily accessible to parents.
- Recognize and validate what the family does during their interaction with the deaf child and attempt to work with (instead of against) those current family dynamics.
- Provide opportunities to interact with Deaf adult models that share the ethnic, linguistic and/or cultural experiences with the family through workshops etc.
- Consider the family as a system during attempts to get information about the deaf child’s language and behavior at home.
- Recognize the importance of English literacy for everyone, not just the deaf child; encourage families to view closed-captioned television to improve English literacy.
- Provide sign language classes in the home language and consider other approaches for fostering effective communication with the child.
- Encourage parents to set up peer support groups based on shared linguistic and cultural experiences.

Keeping these tips in mind, pragmatic examples of how these tips can be applied in real life schools would be beneficial for emphasizing Gerner de Garcia’s (1995) points, especially with the focus of some schools for the deaf on the development of ASL and English in a bilingual environment. Consideration must be given to multilingual and multicultural environments that support all languages while accomplishing the overall school and state goals.

Like Gerner de García (1995), Steinberg, Davila, Collazo, Loew, & Fischgrund, (1997) noted that qualitative research into Hispanic families and their perceptions had not been examined in depth. Steinberg et al. were interested in the cultural perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about deafness in Hispanic families: these areas of information are often overlooked by professionals working with families in this ethnic group, which comprises the majority of minority groups in America. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in order to gain better insight into the Hispanic population’s perceptions and beliefs about deafness by exploring the experiences and responses of Hispanic families in discovering and adjusting to a
child’s hearing loss. The nine Puerto Rican families interviewed had children enrolled at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, a day program in Philadelphia. While the mother was the principal informant in all interviews, two fathers, two grandmothers, and one aunt also provided information. Interviews were conducted orally through a Spanish-speaking interpreter with six families and in English with three families.

Six of the nine families interviewed by Steinberg et al. (1997) referred to God in explaining why their own child was deaf. Most families in the study viewed deafness positively or neutrally rather than as a punishment, negating the prevalent view in Hispanic culture that children were born with disabilities because their parents were sinners (Gerner de García, 1995). Some were skeptical about the medical explanation of the etiology of the child’s deafness.

Seven out of the nine mothers felt grief at time of diagnosis, some explained that these feelings described their initial reactions but that they had “learned to deal with” their children’s deafness. Mothers reported being responsible for attending to the needs of the deaf child. Seven of the nine families reported making no distinctions between the deaf child and the other children in the family. None of the parents reported receiving help from the extended family with their deaf children.

In regard to community perceptions of the deaf children, parents described to Steinberg et al. (1997) situations in which the child seemed to have lost his or her individual identity in the community. An example of this loss of individual identity was the practice of referring to the child without using his or her name, causing parents to feel that the child’s own identity became secondary to the disability. Mothers reported that the Hispanic individuals they encountered viewed deaf Hispanic children with pity. Family members interviewed also conveyed sentiments of pity through the language they used to refer to the child. Six of the nine families interviewed
attached the diminutive -ito (masculine) or -ita (feminine) when referring to the deaf child: sordito, pobrecito (little deaf one, poor little one) (211).

Steinberg et al. (1997) reported what seemed like contradictory perceptions within the families of communication with the deaf child. Eight of the nine families reported that communication with their deaf children did not present a problem; four respondents reported that their deaf children were able to understand spoken language, both English and Spanish. While four of the nine families reported that the child could speak without difficulty, some parents did acknowledge communication difficulties. Each of three mothers spontaneously reported that her deaf child experienced behavioral problems, which she attributed to the fact that the child could not successfully communicate with the family (also supported by Meadow-Orlans et al., 1997). In addition to speech, all families mentioned the use of sign language even though most families admitted to have little knowledge of signs.

Many of the families interviewed by Steinberg et al. (1997) were highly satisfied with the services available for their deaf son or daughter, which resulted in the permanent stay in the U.S. for most of the families despite a desire to go home. The free health-related services provided for the deaf child were also determining factors in keeping the families from moving back to Puerto Rico. Despite low confidence of some of the families in their English skills, none of the families reported difficulty in accessing medical services on the mainland for a deaf son or daughter.

Implications of the Steinberg et al. (1997) study shows that community education and sensitivity training should be components of programs that serve the Hispanic deaf community, and that increased awareness of cultural needs and concerns is necessary to improve the services for Hispanic deaf children and their families. We have seen these implications reflected by
various researchers throughout this review: Kluwin and Corbett’s (1998) emphasis on community support, Gerner de García’s (1995) emphasis on cultural and linguistic understanding on the part of educators, and Blackwell and Fischgrund’s (1984) emphasis on removing professionals’ stereotypes regarding bilingual education.

The researchers (Steinberg et al., 1997) acknowledged the need to replicate the study with a variety of other Hispanic populations to determine if perceptions were standard within the broader Hispanic community, or if the sample group from Puerto Rico in this study was unique in that respect. It was also noted that there was no opportunity to determine whether the role of God curing the deaf child would have an effect on the family’s acquisition of sign language skills and determination to access other vital information.

The author of this review wonders about the generalizability of the sample group in the Steinberg et al. (1997) study because literature shows that the family is considered the most important aspect of Hispanic life; however, in this study, none of the participants reported reliance on their extended family for support for their deaf child. The important question in response to this fact is if the child’s deafness resulted in this “estrangement” from the extended family network. Another aspect not examined in the Steinberg et al. study is best summed by Wolbers (2002) in which she discusses the trend of Hispanic parents to report an overall feeling of satisfaction with the special education program and entrusted the school to make decisions about their child’s education. The contradiction is that “schools often strive to build parent relations that encompass joint decision making” (45) which conflicts with Hispanic parent beliefs in the role of educators to be fully responsible for their child’s education.

Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) wanted to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and feelings of parents in the Hmong ethnic group about deafness and their child’s educational
Appropriate Educational Support Services

As an impoverished group struggling with acculturation, the Hmong (from the Southeast Asian country of Laos) parents have been found to value education for their children despite lack of education themselves, however they did not know how to get involved with their child’s education and needed support from the school. Through semi-structured interviews of seven Hmong families with deaf children attending public school in St. Paul, Minnesota, the deaf children themselves, and their teachers, five categories of data were found:

1) Parent response to hearing loss;
2) General parent perspectives on education;
3) Parent knowledge of their child’s educational program and parent rights;
4) Parent satisfaction with child’s program; and
5) Parent perceptions on their involvement with the school and participation in their child’s education.

Through analysis of responses to questions in the first category, it was reported that almost all the parents, after the initial grief over their child’s hearing loss, came to have positive and open relationships with their deaf child, involving them in family activities. While the parents reported they did not have a problem with their child using amplification, all the teachers reported that the parents did not enforce or support the use of amplification. The students themselves stated embarrassment towards their hearing loss and did not want to be seen wearing any form of amplification; they only wore hearing aids or FM systems in school because their teachers asked them to (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002).

Regarding parent perspectives on education (category two), the interviews showed that the Hmong parents valued education for improving the lives of their children, and emphasized English-language literacy skills. The Hmong parents “equated education with future
independence and job opportunities” (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002, 47). Parents did not report having specific educational goals, which was acknowledged by teachers that reported the parents did not talk about specific goals related to the IEP. Teachers noted that parents had the tendency to talk about general life goals such as a successful future, having a better life, and being able to live independently. The researchers also noted that despite the emphasis on education to improve quality of life, the parents did not expect their deaf child to succeed as well as their hearing siblings because of their hearing loss. While the parents felt they have an important role in their child’s learning process, they said they lack the basic knowledge to support their children.

Regarding parental knowledge of their child’s educational program and parent rights (category three), the interviews revealed the parents’ lack of understanding of the United States education system as well as special education. Parents felt that special education was “extra help” their child needed, they didn’t understand that special education was a legal right under the IDEA. The parents also confused IEP meetings with parent-teacher conferences, and relied heavily on the teachers to form any opinion about their child’s academic ability. None of the parents seemed to have specific knowledge about their child’s progress (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002).

Regarding parental satisfaction with their child’s educational program (category four), the interviews showed general satisfaction on the part of the parents in their child’s educational program, and did not feel changes were needed. Parents felt that the school environment was supportive and comfortable when they attended school events. The deaf Hmong students reported the same attitude about the school, that they were treated well by teachers. However, the parents were unanimous in their feelings about the uselessness of written communication,
sent home from school. The written communication was always in English, never translated in Hmong, a language in which all the parents were functionally literate. While the parents were happy with accommodations the schools made for them, they mentioned that their "inability to communicate immediately and directly with educators was a problem" (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002, 48). They were dissatisfied with the skill of some of the interpreters; they felt that the interpreters knew so little about what they were translating and that "little understanding was conveyed of the special education issues being discussed" (48). These perspectives regarding interpreters have been reflected by Blackwell and Fischgrund (1984) and discussed previously in this review.

Regarding the last category (five) of parents’ perceptions of their own involvement with the school and their child’s education, parents agreed unanimously the importance and value of participation in their child’s education. Parents also stated they wanted to be involved more and participate as much as they could, but the biggest barrier to achieving all of the above was their lack of knowledge and skills in general academic areas as well as not being skilled in English. None of the parents volunteered at school or called the school directly – when contact with the school was required, they relied on interpreters. Because of their inability to read and write English, the parents were not able to participate with their child directly with homework, however most of the parents in the study enlisted relatives to help their children with homework. Parents also reported that their lack of knowledge and skills prevented them from participating directly in school activities.

Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) conclude their study by stating the need for educators to help Hmong parents understand special education so that they can follow through their roles in their child’s educational progress. This point is emphasized again by the fact that most of the
parents in the study reported did not understand their rights – no one had educated them about these rights despite the continual exposure to parent rights during meetings, attached to IEPs. Wathum-Ocama and Rose concluded that the parent rights were discussed or recorded in a language not accessible by parents with limited knowledge and understanding of the English language, let alone the language used in legalistic English which is hard enough for most people to understand. While Wathum-Ocama and Rose stress the importance of the role of educators in helping the parents, it is the view of the reviewer that educators have enough on their hands with different students on their IEP caseload. The reviewer wonders about community resources available to this group of Hmong parents such as peer groups or an advocacy center.

**Encouraging non-adversarial conflict resolution**

In her interpretation of the IDEA and how it applies to deaf students, Johnson (2000) explains the principle of procedural safeguards as the right of the parent to be involved with the IEP process, whether it be as a supportive participant of the IEP as suggested by educators, or as a parent who does not agree with educators’ goals for their child. Simply put, the IDEA gives parents the right to due process in situations when they do not agree with educators regarding their child’s IEP. The IDEA allows for allocation of funds to provide parents with free legal costs during the process of appealing the educators’ decision for their deaf child. However, the IDEA encourages use of mediation and impartial hearings before going to court as a way of encouraging non-adversarial conflict resolution. According to Emerton (2003), mediation and impartial hearings offer more informal settings in which information is exchanged and parties are given encouragement to shape their own agreements resulting in cooperative problem solving and a more positive result for all parties involved. However, the question of educating the
parents about their rights and about the legal process before they even arrive at this point is an important one.

As we have seen in Wathum-Ocama and Rose's (2002) study, educators may do all they can to meet the needs of the parents as defined by the IDEA, but one thing lacking is providing the initial education to the parents about the complicated legal process of the U.S. educational system, especially the legal ramifications of the IDEA. In the Wathum-Ocama and Rose study, Hmong parents thought that special education was merely "extra help" like tutoring, instead of a legal right defined by the IDEA; IEP meetings were considered to be parent-teacher conferences instead of the more formal meetings as required to set educational goals for the deaf child.

Johnson (2000) writes that notices given to parents regarding parental procedural safeguard rights must "provide a full explanation of the (procedural safeguards) provided by IDEA and its Implementing Regulations. However, once parents receive notice, it becomes their burden to make sure that they understand it." This is where we see the breakdown of the connection between parents and educators in the Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) study. In other situations, it is easy to see where breakdowns may occur: educators and administrators may not take responsibility to ensure parent understanding of the IDEA procedures, and parents may feel intimidated by the professionals because they feel limited by their English skills and in their understanding of the legal procedures surrounding IDEA (e.g. Grant, 1993). The result is the tendency of parents to shrug off all responsibility of their child's educational process to the educators who understand more about the IDEA process; in turn, the educators become frustrated with the parents because of their seemingly apathetic attitude towards involvement with their child's education.
Meadow-Orlans and Sass-Lehrer (1995) also discuss how differences in cultural values can influence relationships with professional support teams. For example, they discuss how language and communication styles are “deeply embedded in cultural contexts, and views regarding acceptable communicative interactions between parent and child may vary from family to family” (p 325). The perceived roles and behaviors of adults and children and the "nature of the communication interchange" (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1993) may also cause conflict between professionals and parents. Yacobacci-Tam (1987) goes as far as to label ethnocentrism a huge problem in U.S. education. The various researchers reviewed in this study have all emphasized the need for understanding cultural/linguistic diversity, while only few have suggested that parents themselves need to learn how to cope with the educational system (e.g. Kluwin & Corbett, 1998; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002).

Another important barrier for non-English speaking parents preventing understanding of the IDEA process is the language barrier that affects immediate action on the part of both the parents and educators. If parents do not have an initial relationship with the school or parent advocate, the parents may not feel inclined to attend meetings or to communicate with the school. For parents who work more than one job or have huge family responsibilities, spending the time to initiate contact with the school may not be worth the time and effort.

Understanding the legal implications of the IDEA/IEP process requires time and patience in order to interpret the complex legal wording of the law, two things that may not be available to parents who have limited time and financial resources. They want someone who understands the legal process to explain to them about the process in regard to meeting their child’s educational needs. In this respect, any “interpretation” of the law and resulting process must be regarded warily: simply converting the legal process into “simple language” may result in the
leaving out of important information or an incorrect interpretation of the material because the middle person may deem it “too confusing” for the parents. Ideally, interpretation should be made clear for each individual set of parents as opposed to “one size fits all” explanations. However, this individualized approach requires time, resources, and money; all of which according to Emerton (2003), may be ideal and wished for, but “these are difficult times” (8).

Summary/Conclusions

In summary, this review has sought to examine four of the goals set up by the IDEA (strengthening the role of parents, ensuring access, attention to diversity, and non-adversarial conflict resolution) through examination of research studies on non-English speaking families (e.g. Gerner de Garcia, 1995; Steinberg et al., 1997; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002) in addition to needs of parents in general (e.g. Bernstein and Barta, 1993; Kluwin & Corbett, 1998). From the review, it becomes apparent there are three major groups that play an important role, either directly or indirectly, in the process of providing an appropriate education for the child: parents, parent advocates/support groups, and professionals.

In the conclusion of their study, Wathum-Ocama and Rose (2002) made the following statement: “Parents who are knowledgeable about their child’s disability, educational progress, and special education services are likely to be proactive” (50). However, parents are not alone in this endeavor: parent advocates/support groups play an important role in providing parents with the education and counseling necessary in achieving an active role in their child’s educational process. The roles of parent advocates and parent groups may need to expand to provide nearly full-time support in terms of legal help, educational counseling, and peer support groups to allow parents more involvement with their child’s educational process. Advocacy groups also foster
access to community resources for both parents and professionals, especially in a school whose staff population may not reflect the student population. Of interest to this reviewer is the determination of strategies that will effectively meet the linguistic and sociocultural needs of the child in the classroom in addition to preventing professionals’ stereotypes and misconceptions about non-English speaking families that may affect the child’s educational process. It is essential to provide resources for teachers and teacher training programs that prepare teachers for exceptional diversity in the classroom ranging from non-English speaking immigrants to deaf children with differing learning needs (visual as opposed to aural), which may also be provided by community groups.

The reality of equal access for all children in the United States has yet to catch up with the ideal expectations of the implemented laws. As we have seen throughout the review, ideal expectations have been established through the IDEA and its goals, but individual cultures of professionals and parents affect how these goals are carried out or perhaps not carried out at all. However, with the outlining of several themes among different groups involved with the deaf child’s educational process, the suggestions made in this review opens the door for future investigations of the issues raised in this review. Other suggestions in this review also may be aimed towards educational programs in ensuring that parent needs are met in their community, especially for non-English speaking families.
### Appendix

**Table 1: Responses of educators inexperienced in bilingual education compared to responses of experienced bilingual educators.**

*(Adapted from Blackwell & Fischgrund, 1984)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions from the Inexperienced</th>
<th>Responses from the Experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the reasonable expectations for a child who has “no language”?</td>
<td>Children with no formal education may appear to have “no language” but further assessment in the child’s home language may reveal different linguistic strategies the child uses depending on cultural mannerisms; therefore the child does have some degree of competence in their home language.¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Would the acquisition of two languages be difficult, especially for deaf children who have a hard enough time learning one language?</td>
<td>The involvement of a second language does not make the language process more difficult – bilingualism is as natural a phenomenon as monolingualism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shouldn’t efforts be focused on teaching the child English and discouraging the home language?</td>
<td>“The attempt to discourage the child’s use of [the home language] will only cause negative feelings and most likely will work to the child’s disadvantage in the acquisition of English” (160).²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parents should be encouraged to speak only English to their child; the home language will only confuse the child and hinder the acquisition of English.</td>
<td>Parents with limited English knowledge could lead to hesitation to use the language and would not present a proper language model for the child. “It is not the presence of a second language that confuses deaf children but rather their lack of awareness that two languages are involved in their lives and their not knowing when a particular language is being or should be used” (160).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Educators should begin by working on the English vocabulary for things already familiar to the child.</td>
<td>Content already familiar to the child might prevent new learning from happening – by introducing unfamiliar vocabulary along with the familiar (to provide a knowledge base), the child is motivated to categorize and symbolize the unfamiliar through comparison and contrast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A program for older children with no formal language should contain only a minimum of academics to prepare child for vocational training, which includes a life-skills component.</td>
<td>Deciding to take this approach in all situations has the appearance of warehousing – “placing the student in the program not because it is the best choice but because no other curricular approach is available” (161) even in the case of a child with the ability to handle a much wider range of subject matter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹² See also Gerner de García, 1995; Fischgrund, 1984.
Table 2: Subgroups of underrepresented groups, their behavioral patterns, and suggested interventions.  
(Adapted from Kluwin and Corbett, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Behavioral Pattern</th>
<th>Suggested Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger high school dropout mothers</td>
<td>Did not visit classroom or participate in IEP process; read school-generated materials</td>
<td>Provide social support system to overcome educational and financial limits, and counseling for parents to better understand how to deal with the school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older high school dropout mothers</td>
<td>Did not read school-generated materials; low degrees of involvement in other ways</td>
<td>Same as that for younger high school dropouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older high school graduate mothers</td>
<td>High degree of interest in the classroom and participated in IEP process but lacked sufficient time or additional economic support to devote to child’s needs</td>
<td>Recruiting community members (e.g. religious leaders) to serve as community resources for parents lacking sufficient time or additional economic support to devote to child’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers who did college work</td>
<td>Participated in all forms of contact with the school program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older respondents</td>
<td>Preferred reading materials but disliked IEP process and visiting classrooms</td>
<td>Implementation of programs that respect seniors’ experience and position in the community while providing the new information they need to respond to the child’s needs, such as peer groups set up within the school or community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Appropriate Educational Support Services


March 14, 2003

Dear Dr. Stinson:

I am enclosing a thesis proposal entitled, “The Paradox of Providing Appropriate Support Services for Non-English Speaking Families with Deaf Children: A Literature Review.” I wish to inform you and anyone else on the thesis approval committee, that this is considered my “Plan B” for the thesis. When I submitted my project proposal in December, the initial plan was for me to perform a research study (on the above topic) during my student teaching placement at University High School in Irvine, California.

During my eight-week experience at University High School, the survey and proposal had been presented to the administrators of the central Orange County office, and approved. However, it was also suggested to me by the administrators that I have the survey translated into Spanish as most of the parents in my sample were of Hispanic origin. It was also suggested to me for the best interest of getting a complete and representative sample that I meet with some parents face-to-face with a Spanish-language interpreter due to the fact that some parents are illiterate, even in their native language of Spanish.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and a meager student budget, I was unable to do the above suggestions. I felt that this research study would be more effective, and the results of more interest, when more resources (including time and translation services) were available to do so. This literature review is intended as an in-depth view of this topic with a focus on the voices of the “non-representative” samples – immigrant or ethnic parents of deaf children. This review is also intended as a springboard for a large-scale research study in the future.

Please keep in mind while reading my thesis proposal that it has been composed in a short period of time since the change of plans. I have followed the guidelines for writing a literature review as closely as possible while keeping in mind that this is also a proposal; as this kind of work takes more time than I had in order to meet the deadline, this is a pure rough draft and is not finely honed into a smoothly written thesis.

Thanks again and please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Regards,

Kate Groves

cc: Greg Emerton, advisor

kmg1225@rit.edu
The Paradox of Providing Appropriate Support Services for Non-English Speaking Families with Deaf Children: A Literature Review

Master’s Project Proposal

Submitted to the Faculty
of the Master of Science Program in Secondary Education
of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

By

Katherine M. Groves

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

Rochester, New York

Approved:

March 14, 2003

Greg Emerton

John Albertini

Gerry Bateman
Abstract

Introduction to Topic:

The United States’ educational system was set up as a unified force by the national government with the goal of creating homogenous standards among different groups of people: rich and poor, working class and children of academics, fourth generation Americans and recently arrived immigrants. Indeed, in the U.S. Constitution, the First Amendment calls for the freedom of speech, and as Meiklejohn (1965) so aptly puts it, “the primary purpose of the First Amendment is, then, that all the citizens shall, so far as possible, understand the issues which bear upon our common life. That is why no idea, no opinion, no doubt, no belief, no counter belief, no relevant information may be kept from them” (as cited in Siegel, 2002, p259). The collective American belief in the U.S. Constitution as a guideline by which all citizens should live by has been integrated into core educational goals: to provide guidance in the development of an individual’s well-being and identity, equality of opportunity for all students to learn and achieve, and providing the child with the tools to acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding; all of which qualities will come together and mold the child into a functioning member of the collective society. Without the First Amendment among other Constitutional rights bestowed upon us, the U.S. would have a more difficult time creating more homogenized standards by which we educate our children and mold them into members of democratic America.

Under these auspices, special needs children need considerably more help in and out of the classroom in order to achieve equal access to education as a non-special needs child, as deemed necessary by our Constitutional right. Support services have been
presented as a way of providing such equal access for deaf students into the “mainstream” educational system; however the conundrum of the student from a non-English speaking family lies in providing services in an appropriate way to the family as well as the child.

Changes in demographic characteristics of the general population have occurred in the past few years, with a population increase of immigrants. However, the increasing number of foreign-born children in public schools is disproportionately reflected in the increasingly number of non-native children in deaf programs (Schildroth and Hotto, 1993), possibly due to the economic disadvantage which “places them at greater risk for repeated middle-ear infections and poor medical care” (Cohen, Fischgrund, & Redding, 1990). With the increasing number of foreign-born people settling on U.S. soil, comes the proportionately increasing number of foreign-born children entering the educational system. What arises is the question of compatibility of existing social services, as pertaining to educational needs, with the needs and concerns of this unique group of people. Without clear understanding of cultural implications on different groups’ perceptions of deafness and what is needed for a deaf child, the U.S. educational system will not be able to provide as equal an access to that particular deaf child as opposed to a deaf fourth generation American child born to college-educated parents.

Justification and Implications of this Review:

Research in this area has been limited in many ways by the individual focuses of researchers, and some focuses are lacking in attention, such as perceptions of parents belong to specific ethnic and language groups within American society. This literature
review is a broad overview of the topic of support services and how different sociological aspects affect perceptions and thus affect the effectiveness of support services for groups of people not part of the “mainstream.” The in-depth look at the topic will serve as a precursor to a future large-scale research study that will attempt to answer many of the questions presented in the paper.

As a teacher of the deaf, I have worked with students who come from non-English speaking families, whose parents are immigrants often unable to speak English or without a strong formal education. By law, the deaf child has a team of support service providers, of which the parents are a part. However, these parents were not as involved with their child’s education as other parents partially due to the fact they don’t speak English fluently enough to interact with the support staff, and also due in part to the fact that many of these parents have different cultural beliefs in regards to raising their child who happens to be deaf. Unfortunately the ethnic diversity of the professionals in the field of deaf education is limited to the Caucasian group, which may or may not understand the cultural needs and perceptions of the ethnically different immigrants, as well as not understanding the implications of such cultural needs/perceptions on the deaf child.

One parent’s comment in a survey conducted by Gregory, et al (2001) noted, “the deaf child needs the support of their family. The availability of information to parents and carers so they can help is essential” (p 64). With the failure to communicate with the parents or understand parent culture, how can the child be given the tools same as a child born in America to upper middle-class and college-educated parents? The Meadow-Orlans, et al (1997) study revealed results in a survey in which “parents of minority groups and those with no college training reported that their children showed more
behavior problems and less language progress, and gave more negative responses to questions regarding the impact of deafness on their families” (p 278). How can we as educators of the deaf as well as those that care about deaf issues, help even out the playing field for such a growing number of students and families in this time in American history?

**Thesis**

*What is the Paradox?*

Although the educational system of the United States has been designed with the aim of including every child, there are many children that are often excluded from the system because of the inability to determine a placement (appropriate services) for that child. Among those “excluded” include children from a fast growing minority of recently arrived immigrants. The paradox presents itself in the fact that, as a nation of immigrants, the United States has struggled with the issue of providing appropriate education and services to the children of newly arrived immigrants belonging to non-Western cultures.

Differing demographics of the U.S. population is leading to changing needs for appropriate services for parents of deaf children and different perceptions for such factors that influence the educational decision making process; whether or not my child shall use speech or sign, whether or not my child will use cochlear implants, and most importantly, whether or not my child should be integrated into regular education classrooms or if my child should be enrolled in a school for the deaf.
In the Babbidge Report (1967), Homer Babbidge wrote, “Our efforts heretofore in
the field of education of the deaf has been unfortunately outside the mainstream of
American life” (as cited in Rose, 2002, p217). This statement still holds true today:
approximately 90% of all deaf children are born to hearing parents who are members of
that mainstream American society Babbidge mentions in his report. To add to this fact
are the changing demographic characteristics of the general population today showing
increasing numbers of immigrant families, affecting not only the overall student
population from non-English speaking homes, but also the student population of deaf
children coming from non-English speaking homes. A survey carried out by Meadow-
Orlans, et al (1997), found that “parents from minority groups and those with no college
training … gave more negative responses to questions regarding the impact of deafness
on their families. This suggests that program personnel may need to increase their
intervention efforts for these subgroups of special education consumers” (p 1).

In such a small field outside of the mainstream, how do you produce services that
adequately meet the needs of this diverse group of American parents and children? What
is the parental perception of what is necessary in the decision-making process of
educational placements for their deaf child? According to a study performed by Kluwin
and Corbett (1998), it was found that parents with enough demographic differences such
as educational and economical levels tend to report different perceptions of their own
situations. This would also hold true for parents with different cultural backgrounds. If
we understand better what parents feel and think about issues important in the
educational decision-making process, the implications are widespread: improved support
services matching closely with parent expectations, more effective parent-
teacher/administrator communication, and overall, a more effective educational system for the deaf child.

Meadow-Orlans and Sass-Lehrer (1995) discuss how differences in cultural values can influence relationships with professional support teams. For example, they discuss how intensive questioning and visits by a stranger to the home of an immigrant may be considered rude (Barrera, 1993, as cited in Meadow-Orlans and Sass-Lehrer, 1995). They also discuss how language and communication styles are “deeply embedded in cultural contexts, and views regarding acceptable communicative interactions between parent and child may vary from family to family” (p 325). Perceived roles and behaviors of adults and children and the "nature of the communication interchange" (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1993, as cited in Meadow-Orlans and Sass-Lehrer, 1995) may also cause conflict between professionals and parents.

The highest number of negative comments for a category are recorded for attitudes towards deafness in schools and society, which incorporated all the material relating to negative attitudes in society towards deaf people including deaf awareness and the small number of references we received to a ‘medical model’ of deafness. Interestingly, the second highest figure for negative comments appears for the category which refers to low expectations of deaf pupils. Thus, both the negative attitudes held by school and society as a whole and low expectations were deemed to be a major obstacle to the success of deaf children. (Gregory, et al, 2001)

Major Ideas and Themes to be Considered:

“It is, of course, possible to argue that this is not a representative sample... the process could exclude those with poorer literacy skills.” (Gregory et al, 2001) As many quantitative studies are comprised of surveys conducted to receive a representative sample of the society as a whole, not enough qualitative studies are being conducted to attempt to get a feel for the representative voices of those not often a part of the
representative sample, such as the immigrant parents or parents who may be functionally illiterate? The non-representative people are a part of the group whose voice is necessary for understanding how to improve support services for their deaf children.

What are parent perceptions, and how do they pertain to the topic of support services? Parent perceptions include perceptions of quality of support services, communication with child, child wishes/needs, cultural perception of deafness, and educational goals. Without satisfaction of the parents, the key to the deaf child’s success, the framework provided for the deaf child will be missing a strong foundation with which to succeed as learners.

Studies have shown different viewpoints regarding perceptions of the quality of support services as well as how extensive the services are for the parents of the deaf child (Gregory et al, 2001; Kluwin and Corbett, 1998).
References


