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Forming collaborative parent-teacher relationships to increase parental involvement

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**FORMING COLLABORATIVE PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS
TO INCREASE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

by

Amelia N. Owen

**An Independent Study Project
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of:**

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Abstract: This document reviews and summarizes the importance of parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement in education. Both benefits and barriers will be discussed. Strategies and plans are provided as suggestions for teachers working with diverse populations. The importance of collaborative relationships and parental involvement are discussed for parents and teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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Introduction

As school populations become more diverse, educators are faced with meeting each child's individualized educational needs. Educators must work with a collaborative team to determine appropriate goals so their students may become successful. As Marion (1979) noted, "Historically and legally, the function of education in this country has been vested in state educational agencies and chiefly delegated to local school districts; but in reality, the family is the primary educator" (p. 1). As the two most proximal participant groups in a child's education, parents and teachers must work together to determine these goals.

Each student brings a unique parenting or guardianship scenario to the table: involved parents, disinterested parents, single parents, working parents, adoptive parents, and relatives serving as the primary guardian. Regardless of each student's parental situation, educators should seek a partnership with parents to increase the student's overall achievement ("Building positive relationships," 2014). Parents know their children better than professionals do (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994) and can provide insight on their child's needs, strengths, and interests. Educators hold knowledge of the child's academic and social performance in the classroom. Parents and teachers have the ability to make complementary contributions towards a balanced perspective of the child's education (Adams & Christenson, 2000). It is important for educators to understand the benefits of parental involvement so they are encouraged to invite parents to collaborate throughout their child's education (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). When these collaborative relationships are formed, the child has a better chance to thrive in school. However, forming and maintaining these parent-teacher relationships can be challenging. This literature review serves to address the benefits and barriers of parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement as

well as provide teachers with suggestions to alleviate those issues. An exchange of views on the topic's relevance to the field of deaf education will be discussed.

Defining Parental Involvement

Each parent possesses different values, beliefs, cultures, home situations, views on education, socioeconomic status, and an immeasurable amount of additional differences. Despite these differences, parents and teachers share a common responsibility: the child. Although we can assume that these individuals share a responsibility, we cannot generalize each parent's ability or desire to participate in his or her child's education. However, legislation such as the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act of 2001 has brought awareness to the benefits of parental involvement and seeks ongoing participation of students' parents. "The legislation ensures that parents have the information they need to make well-informed choices for their children, effectively share responsibility for their children's schools, and help those schools develop effective and successful academic programs" (p. 1).

NCLB's ultimate goal is for parents to make decisions and take an active role in their child's education. However, parent involvement can be perceived differently for each individual family. A parent may feel his involvement extends to ensuring his child makes it to school safely and consistently (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Laroque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) explain that others may wish to expand their parental involvement by helping with homework, volunteering at school, attending school functions, or taking on leadership roles in the school. Due to this variability, "Parents cannot be viewed as a homogenous group because they do not participate in the same ways; some have more of a presence in the school than do others" (p. 115).

Parent involvement can be viewed on a sliding scale with varying definitions for each family. For the purpose of this literature review, parent involvement can be generally defined as

“any investment made by parents or caregivers towards their child’s education” (Larocque et al., 2011, p. 116).

Although there is no single way to interpret parental involvement, many parent involvement models and paradigms have been developed over time. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) conceptualized a broad parent involvement model, which places emphasis on parent-initiated involvement in behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal dimensions. Eccles and colleagues (see review in Eccles & Harold, 1996) developed a more narrow parent-initiated involvement model, which incorporates dimensions including: monitoring, volunteering, involvement, contacting the school about child progress, and contacting the school to find out how to give extra help. Epstein (1995) conceptualized a model, which focuses on school-initiated parental involvement involving six dimensions: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Although these models offer important information individually, professionals can benefit from a multidimensional model that includes some or all of these elements with an understanding of what is feasible. Conoley (1987) discusses parental involvement in the form of levels, which can be applied to a variety of families and contexts. Level One is a foundational level where basic information is shared between home and school. Level Two involves home/school collaboration in which parents and teachers determine feasible roles and methods for communication. Level Three entails active involvement of parents in the school. Finally, Level Four stresses the reciprocal education of parents and teachers. Each model and paradigm of parental involvement activities has the ability to fall under these four levels, with Level Four representing a collaborative relationship that is growth-fostering for both parties.

Traditional parent involvement paradigms have been created over time to set standards for what is expected from parents. Unfortunately, these standards place more emphasis on school success indicators learned through academic readiness activities. Activities such as reading at home and practicing numbers and colors are presented in the home as well as school. Even though these traditional paradigm activities have shown positive effects towards a child's academic success, they are not validating additional family experiences that may improve the child's overall well-being. For example, a single, working mother may be involved in her child's education differently than a stay-at-home mother. A working mother may ask a grandparent to attend parent-teacher conferences and help with homework after school. That same mother may come home to spend all of her free time engaged in language-rich activities with her child. A traditional parent-involvement paradigm may not always account for these differences in family resources or contexts. Consequently, parents may be viewed as uneducated, unsupportive, or uninvolved because they did not meet the traditional standards of parent involvement. Therefore, parents and teachers must work together to develop practical parent involvement strategies that will validate their individual situations and the child. When educators envision these diverse models and paradigms of parental involvement, they are valuing what each parent has to offer (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement benefits parents, teachers, and students almost cyclically. Regardless of whether the parent is involved at home or in school and regardless of how one defines involvement, positive effects have been shown for each individual.

When parents are involved in their child's education, students demonstrate higher efforts, concentration, and school attendance. Students become more interested in learning, seek more

challenging tasks, persist in academic challenges (Kalin & Šteh, 2010) and possess higher educational aspirations (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). Students with involved parents also exhibit positive emotional gains. For example, students are more likely to have fewer discipline problems, more positive social and self-regulatory skills (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992), a higher self-esteem, and more motivation (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

Parents involved in their child's education have reported an increase in self-confidence in their parenting skills (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004) and a personal efficacy for helping their children learn (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). This positive sense of efficacy is then relayed to the child; encouraging positive academic consequences (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994) and supportive parent-child relationships (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). When parents are involved in their child's education, they develop more positive attitudes towards the school and its personnel; increasing the likelihood of future involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002).

Teachers demonstrate a better understanding of their students' lives when parents are involved (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004); allowing them to feel more comfortable experimenting with new ideas and activities (Miretzky, 2004) that are student-oriented rather than text-oriented or curricular (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Teachers who implement parent involvement strategies are more likely to be perceived by parents as high in teaching ability as well as hold high personal levels of efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002).

Defining “Collaborative” Relationship

We cannot state that parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships are synonymous. However, we may be able to assume that they are dependent on one another. Kohl and colleagues (2000) stated that when teachers reached out to parents and openly communicated with them about parental involvement, parents were more likely to become involved at school.

Conversely, parent-teacher relationships were improved when those parents became more involved in their child's education (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). The quality of these parent-teacher relationships may ultimately affect the parent's level of involvement in the school and his or her endorsement of the school in general (Kohl et al., 2000).

Parent-teacher relationships not only foster individual growth and opportunities for learning (Miretzky, 2004), but they provide mutual support so that goals at home and at school are reinforced consistently (Adams & Christenson, 2000). When there is communication and collaboration between these parties, educational interventions have a greater probability for success (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992).

Every parent and teacher will have a unique relationship with one another. However, the purpose of this relationship is not necessarily to extend a friendship. Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007) declare, "Research in the field of home-school relationships recognizes that children are educated in the home and in school." Therefore, state and federal agencies are seeking more collaboration between parents and teachers. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which specifically states, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (US Department of Education, 1994). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education requires that beginning teachers meet the federal standards of collaborating with parents to support student learning and well-being (Morris, Tayler, Knight, & Wasson, 1995).

So how does one define this collaborative relationship? Adams and Christenson (2000) define Vosler-Hunter's view of parent-teacher collaboration as a situation where "Parents and teachers share joint responsibilities and rights, are seen as equals, and can jointly contribute to

the process.” Parents and teachers of children with emotional and behavioral disabilities used this concept to develop key elements of collaboration: mutual respect for skills and knowledge, honest and clear communication, open and two-way sharing of information, mutually agreed-upon goals, and shared planning and decision making.

Teachers have reported that forming these relationships with parents is one of the most difficult tasks they are faced with in their jobs (Vickers & Minke, 1995) and that they have received little to no training on how to effectively work with parents (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Luckily, parents and teachers have reported their desire to work and communicate collaboratively but seek guidance with how to do so (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Harry and Kalyanpur (1994) reinforce the idea that it is the teacher’s responsibility to initiate these collaborative relationships. Strategies to develop these high-quality relationships will be discussed with the hopes of increasing parental involvement.

Collaborative Relationship Qualities

As previously mentioned, Vosler-Hunter’s concept of collaboration inspired the creation of the following key elements of quality parent-teacher relationships: mutual respect for skills and knowledge, honest and clear communication, open and two-way sharing of information, mutually agreed-upon goals, and shared planning and decision making (Adams & Christenson, 2000). These elements will be broken down to three subcategories of focus including areas in mutual respect and trust, communication, and decision-making.

Mutual Respect and Trust

The Merriam Webster Learner’s Dictionary (n.d.) defines respect as “a feeling of admiring someone or something that is good, valuable, important, etc.” and “a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important and should be treated in an appropriate

way.” Characteristics of respect can be difficult to pinpoint, which may create misconceptions of both parties. Some parents view teachers as “all-knowing” professionals who should take the lead (Crozier, 1999) while other parents may be eager for collaboration. Some teachers have reported parents’ lack of confidence in their professional competence (Veenman, 1984) while parents feel neglected when providing knowledge and suggestions to teachers. When interviewed in Miretzky (2004), both parents and teachers stated their feelings of insignificance and desire for their contributions to be recognized and appreciated by the other.

Educators and parents provide unique contributions towards the education of a child. Therefore, this mutual respect of one another’s skills and knowledge is imperative to forming collaborative relationships. In order to develop this atmosphere of respect and trust, teachers should use a welcoming tone of voice and present information in parent-friendly language (Voltz, 1994). This is particularly important for parents of students with disabilities as the language can be overwhelming, abstract, scientific, and new (Larocque et al., 2011). When parents have questions, teachers should provide realistic, straightforward answers in a timely manner (Voltz, 1994). If the teacher does not know the information, she should respond honestly and report back to the parents consistently. When teachers respond to situations consistently, trust; a vital and fundamental component of collaborative parent-teacher relationships, can begin to develop (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

In parent-teacher relationships, trust can be defined as “confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students” (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 480). Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) hypothesized three hierarchical levels of trust—predictability, dependability, and faith. Predictability is achieved when an individual responds

consistently to a situation. The parents will begin to trust the teacher when her behaviors are consistent and predictable. Next, dependability is achieved when the individual's previous behaviors are shifted towards personal traits after that individual proves their behavior is responsive towards the other's needs. Parents begin to attribute trustworthiness to the teacher's character. Finally, faith is established when the parents trust that the teacher will act consistently with their needs in mind during any given situation. Although parents tend to show more trust for teachers than teachers do for parents (Adams & Christenson, 1998), teachers and parents should seek a mutual feeling of trust and respect to communicate effectively when building their collaborative relationship (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005).

Communication

Vickers and Minke (1995) state the necessity of bi-directional communication of information and feelings in collaborative parent-teacher relationships. The focus of bi-directionality is that both parties are actively involved in collaborative discourse to improve the parent-teacher relationship (Miretzky, 2004). Parents and teachers have voiced their desires to gain and share information with one another to improve their relationship and the overall education of the child (Adams & Christenson, 2000). However, when asked if parents and teachers felt as if this bi-directionality of communication was being achieved, many disagreed. Kalin and Šteh (2010) surveyed 1,690 parents to discuss their views on parent-teacher mutual discussion. More than 30% of parents stated that teachers play the active role, providing their opinions or suggestions; placing parents in the passive role. The 467 surveyed teachers agreed, with 91.7% of teachers stating their role as the active participant. This poses the question: Who is doing all of the listening? Only 3% of the teachers put themselves in the role of listener when parents took an active role by providing their opinions and suggestions. It is probable that

teachers perceived themselves as the active provider of information but when asked what parents would change about teachers, a frequent response was that they should listen more.

Peck, Maude, and Brotherson (2015) express the necessity for teachers and parents to remain mindful in order to learn from one another. In order for communication to be honest, open, and bi-directional, teachers must resist the impulse to respond quickly. When one allows parents to speak freely, one recognizes that they are capable decision makers who know their children's strengths and weaknesses. If and when parents actively seek the teacher's advice, they are acknowledging the teacher's role as the support system.

This communication, whether through physical interactions, telephone calls, emails, or a written document is essential to the parent's involvement (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). Although it is easy to latch onto the quantity of interactions, it is more important to focus on the quality of those interactions, as it is a stronger predictor for positive outcomes (Kohl et al., 2000). Parents need information to be involved in their child's education, so frequent and positive check-ins and updates are necessary for the collaborative relationship (Davis & Yang, 2009).

At the beginning of the year, parents and teachers should determine a method of communication that works best for each party. Teachers should be flexible with parents' ability to communicate; whether that includes the parents' ability to read, use technology, or personal time constraints (Eberly et al., 2007). When interacting with families, it is important to remember that teachers are constantly building rapport. Teachers should make positive phone calls to show dedication to the student and his or her success (Davis & Yang, 2009). A positive relationship is more likely to form in this manner, making difficult issues easier to discuss in the future (Eberly et al., 2007).

Teachers may choose to send weekly newsletters or work folders home to describe current goals, activities, or procedures (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). This provides an opportunity for teachers to share their expectations, provide student work, ask for assistance, give updates on the student's performance, and encourage participation at home. It also provides an opportunity for parents to ask questions, make suggestions, or raise concerns ("Building positive relationships," 2014). Teachers should also encourage parents to observe their child in the classroom to understand his or her current level of performance. After these observations, teachers should invite parent commentary to understand potential social-situational contexts that may be shaping that student's performance (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

To assure that parents have access to the resources they need for this collaborative communication, teachers can create a pamphlet including all relevant websites, phone numbers, email addresses, teacher work hours, and any specific communication requests to reiterate their dedication to frequent correspondence (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005).

Shared Planning and Decision Making

Shared planning and decision making is an incredibly important component of a collaborative relationship for children receiving special education services. When a collaborative parent-teacher relationship is obtained, teachers have a better understanding of the parents' goals and the potential interventions to achieve those goals (Larocque et al., 2011). This relationship is incredibly important for disadvantaged families, particularly those of low income or minority status, because it may serve as a bridge to promote active participation in meetings related to special education services for their child. Lynch and Stein (1987) reported that Hispanic and African American parents knew less about their children's special education services and interacted as passive participants during these meetings. The importance of this collaborative

parent-teacher relationship is highlighted in Matuszny, Banda, and Coleman's (2007) article which states, "When culturally diverse families are not involved at the school level, teachers- especially those from mainstreamed backgrounds- fail to benefit from parental input and knowledge that is critically linked to the development of effective, culturally relevant educational programs" (p. 25). They recommend that when building collaborative parent-teacher relationships with culturally diverse families, teachers should focus on two main goals: break down the barriers that hinder the parents from being involved in the IEP process and encourage parent participation by providing resources and support. This passive role in the IEP process may be perceived as a lack of interest or desire to be involved in their child's education. However, these differences and barriers are not always considered a viable reason for lack of parental involvement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Barriers

Addressing Cultural Barriers

The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2014) projects that 50.8% of all United States students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the year 2015 will be from non-mainstreamed cultures. The NCES (2008) also states that only 16.5% of teachers are from non-mainstreamed cultures, leaving a large gap between our current student and teacher population. Although these statistics represent the races that currently compose our school population, it does not account for other cultural differences faced by students and teachers. "Cultural diversity is not limited to ethnicity and geographic origin. It is also recognized as differences in age, gender, language and communication style, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, sexual preference, and ability" (Matuszny et al., 2007, p. 24). Teachers have reported their lack of confidence involving parents whose racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds differed

from their own (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) as well as their inability to communicate effectively with them; thus hindering the formation of a collaborative parent-teacher relationship.

An important element of this relationship—trust —has been shown to be more difficult to acquire when the parties do not share a common culture (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005) and when professionals do not strive to meet the individual’s needs for communication and cultural sensitivity (Matuszny et al., 2007). In order to meet these diverse needs, teachers must be able to empathize with their students’ parents. Empathy helps us understand people whose values, views, and behaviors are different from our own; a critical element in human relationships. Peck and colleagues (2015) interviewed preschool teachers who reported using empathy to create successful parent-teacher relationships. The following subthemes were interpreted to provide suggestions for teachers working with culturally diverse parents: embrace inclusion as a philosophy, be relaxed and balanced, accept and respond to family culture, and engage in meaningful communication with families.

Embracing empathy as a philosophy allows any individual to feel welcomed in a non-judgmental environment that focuses on the child’s educational future. The teacher does this by creating a sense of community in her classroom where all individual family members and their ideas are important. Teachers build rapport with parents by asking about the family members, how the parents talk to their child, how they discipline and engage their child, and about their individual cultures (Eberly et al., 2007).

When teachers expressed empathy in a relaxed and balanced manner, parents felt more comfortable and understood (Peck et al., 2015). Teachers may encourage a trusting relationship by sharing her personal stories or by asking parents to come into the classroom to share theirs (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Teachers may need to gauge this situation as some cultures may view

the discussion of personal matters or emotions as unprofessional or unacceptable (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994). Regardless, teachers should maintain a balanced relationship with their students' parents; sustaining flexibility and support while allowing parents to take the lead (Peck et al., 2015).

Empathetic teachers accept and respond to each family's unique culture. Teachers can show this acceptance of culture by incorporating relevant activities into her classroom learning experiences. For example, a teacher may teach her students about the Muslim holiday Ramadan through hands-on crafts and experiences to validate that child and family's cultural background (Peck et al., 2015). Teachers can also demonstrate this cultural sensitivity by taking workshops to learn more about the family's culture (Eberly et al., 2007), volunteering with activities in the family's community (Matuszny et al., 2007), and reflecting on her own views, stances, and biases (Chisholm, 1994).

Finally, empathetic teachers engage in meaningful communication with parents (Peck et al., 2015). Teachers should determine the most effective way to relay information to diverse families. When sending home newsletters or posting information on a school website, teachers should consider providing the information in different languages to promote understanding and alleviate any language barriers (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). When the parents arrive for parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings, an interpreter should be provided when appropriate (Larocque et al., 2011). A teacher should also consider providing a translated copy of the parents' rights (Matuszny et al., 2007) and a glossary of relevant terms (Larocque et al., 2011) to allow the parents to feel more comfortable throughout the process.

Addressing Economic Barriers

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2016) states that 22% of all children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level; an amount that represents half of the expected expenses to cover basic needs. It is no surprise that parents who struggle to meet their family's basic needs are less involved, or are perceived as less involved, in their child's education (Voltz, 1994). Eberly and colleagues (2007) discussed culture, class, and child rearing as a theme to generate discussion among teachers in a focus group. One teacher said:

Some parents have time to come to conferences- had time to answer phone calls... With other parents, we find five disconnected phone numbers; nobody returns your calls, nobody showing up for conferences. And then we have the ones that just don't care. They don't send their kids in with snack sometimes... (p. 16)

Teacher comments like this mirror the counterproductive practice of tracking; when parents are labeled as concerned or unconcerned with their child's education (Voltz, 1994). This labeling is unfair due to some family's inability to provide adequate or necessary resources. When parents have fewer resources, they may be incapable of being involved, which furthers the cycle of being perceived as unconcerned with their child's education (Kohl et al., 2000). Whether these resources are related to time, knowledge, money, emotion, or physical capabilities (Payne, 2005), teachers may have access to resources that can provide some relief to parents.

Some parents may feel less inclined to interact with teachers or become involved in their child's education because of their past experiences in the educational system (Kohl et al., 2000). Parents may feel intimidated by the environment, the teacher's educational expertise, or the teacher's perception of the parents' abilities (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). All of these factors may place the teacher in a more authoritative, superior role to the parents. For example, the school

determines a parent-teacher conference's setting, time, and topics. Payne (2005) states that the culture of poverty has a distrust of authority and views systems as inherently dishonest and unfair. However, individuals in poverty place value in their relationships, which can benefit a teacher who is willing to collaborate with this parent.

An example of this potential opportunity could be something as simple as altering your language register. Payne (2005) explains that teachers tend to use a more formal register, which uses appropriate word choice and syntax, usually found in the workplace or at school.

Individuals living in poverty tend to use a more casual register, which uses non-specific limited vocabulary and incomplete syntax, usually demonstrated in conversations with friends. When interacting at a parent-teacher conference, the teacher will use the formal register to get straight to the point. Parents living in poverty, on the other hand, will use the casual register to “beat around the bush.” Schools are inherently run on middle-class norms and rules, which incorporates the formal register. When problem solving with parents at parent-teacher conferences, teachers should understand that middle-class solutions and formal registers may not always be the answer. Allowing parents to feel a sense of affiliation and support helps everyone arrive at appropriate decisions for the child (Vickers & Minke, 1995).

Addressing Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Although it is the ultimate goal for parents and teachers to collaborate throughout the child's education, some parents may feel inadequate in their abilities (Larocque et al., 2011). Some parents may struggle with mental illness, such as depression, and can view their role less positively. Initial interactions should remain positive to reduce any anxiety or defensive behaviors from parents (Davis & Yang, 2009). Other parents may not have the confidence to interact with their child's teacher or feel uncomfortable when participating in school activities

(Kohl et al., 2000). Teachers should not expect every parent to understand everything but should encourage any involvement and reaffirm all contributions (“Building positive relationships,” 2014). Teachers may set up relaxed library days where parents can read or interact with stories alongside their children. When parents feel welcomed and valued in their interactions with teachers and the school, they are more likely to be involved in the child’s education (Larocque et al., 2011).

Suggesting a Progressive Plan

To enhance the cyclical concept of parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement, a progressive plan can be used for culturally diverse families whose children receive special education services. Matuszny and colleagues (2007) have developed a progressive plan as a means to improve, support, and maintain family involvement and collaborative partnership during the IEP process.

With this progressive plan in mind, educators are including parents in the decision-making process and incorporating activities to develop trust, while meeting the individual needs of each parent. The progressive plan is unique to each family and focuses on reflection and revision to ensure optimal outcomes for each school year. This plan is based on the relationship between the parent and the teacher so that they may become a collaborative team throughout the child’s education. Each of the four phases incorporates ideas and suggestions previously mentioned, supporting the carry-over of generalized teaching strategies to special education collaboration.

Phase 1: Initiation

Phase 1 ideally begins prior to the start of the school year in which parents and teachers interact with one another as individuals before their roles have officially begun. The school may

host a festive event, such as a school picnic, in order to interact with the families in an informal environment where the child is not the focus. When parents and teachers are able to introduce themselves as regular people, it helps eliminate the formality of active and passive participants (Miretzky, 2004). Adams and Christenson (2000) believe that in some situations, trust and understanding can be built between parents and teachers if they have previous interactions in positive, neutral environments before serious issues arise. If this kind of event is not feasible, Matuszny and colleagues (2007) suggest that teachers send personalized notes home acknowledging their excitement about the school year. Teachers may take this time to acquire additional knowledge of the family's culture or provide an alternative way for introductions. Payne (2005) recalls an interesting situation where the principal of a school in Illinois sent DVDs to parents living in poor communities as a form of parental education. The teachers in this school created a fifteen-minute video to make a personal introduction, identify the school's expectations, and encourage parental involvement. This method for an introduction could benefit parents who are not literate or do not have access to transportation to receive this information. The initiation phase allows the teacher to accommodate for and personalize her relationship with parents before the educational collaboration begins.

Phase 2: Building the Foundation

Phase 2 usually continues within the first few weeks of school. During this time, teachers and parents are exchanging information to support the development of trust. For example, the teacher may share information about her expectations for the school year, her classroom, and her students. The teacher should also ask parents for their input on what they expect from the school, teacher, and child. Throughout this exchange, the teacher is allowing the parents to voice their

preferences related to their involvement, communication methods, and shared information (Matuszny et al., 2007).

This phase is a great time for parents and teachers to determine realistic roles and the ways in which they wish to communicate and interact throughout the school year. Whether the parent's preferred method of communication is email, phone, text, or written correspondence, the teacher should determine what information the parents expect to receive and how often they wish to receive it (Davis & Yang, 2009). However, it is also important for a teacher to preface this exchange with her capability and availability to meet those needs. A common concern raised by parents who use the Internet for correspondence is that teachers do not respond to their emails quickly enough (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). Parents and teachers should establish set expectations for these interactions early in the school year to reduce the likelihood of miscommunication or misperceptions of involvement.

To meet the needs of culturally diverse families, teachers can request information on the cultural congruence of the environment that relates to the child. Matuszny and colleagues (2007) provide an excellent parent preference and needs survey, which includes checklists for anticipated needs and questions such as, "Do you have cultural beliefs and/or concerns that may affect your child's needs or participation in class that you wish for us to be aware of?" Teachers may wish to use this information to incorporate multicultural activities in her lessons to validate the family and the child.

Phase 3: Maintenance and Support

Once the foundation for the collaborative relationship has been formed, the teacher must continuously maintain, support, and strengthen her relationship with the parents (Matuszny et al., 2007). Throughout this phase, communication is crucial and the key to parent involvement

(DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). Teachers should consistently honor the communication method and timeline suggested at the beginning of the school year during all interactions. Any new information, such as assessment results, areas of strength and weakness, strategies and interventions, status of goals, and upcoming meetings, should be shared with parents so they are up-to-date and included (Matuszny et al., 2007). Teachers should maintain positivity throughout this phase so problems are perceived as a natural part of the process. This is a great time to send personalized post-cards home or end the school day with a positive phone call to celebrate the student's successes (Davis & Yang, 2009).

To support culturally diverse families, Matuszny and colleagues (2007) suggest learning simple words or phrases in the family's language, inviting families to class to share information about their culture (Lazar & Slostad, 1999), attending events in the community, and planning around the family's availability. When barriers are alleviated and the family's needs are met, it allows the parents and teachers to focus and reflect on the quality of their relationship. Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, and Aupperlee (2009) emphasize that it is the quality of the relationship and the interactions between parents and teachers that truly influences parental involvement.

Phase 4: Wrap-Up and Reflection

The progressive plan does not end with Phase 4, although, it is recycled through teachers, classes, and schools throughout the child's education. This phase focuses on reflection of both the parents and the teachers to determine the strengths of their relationship and what could have been altered. Matuszny and colleagues (2007) also provide a great parent-teacher collaboration worksheet, which includes checklists that address activities or strategies that were helpful and unhelpful. It also encourages parents to write down anything, such as resources or services, they

wished they had received that could have improved the parent-teacher relationship or provided more comfort throughout the IEP process.

Discussion: Applying the Plan to Deaf Education

Beginning at diagnosis, families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing have access to high-quality early intervention services granted through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. Yoshinaga-Itano (2013) supplements the Joint Committee on Infant Hearing's 2007 position statement by providing focused guidelines to ensure that all parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, regardless of culture or socioeconomic status, have access to a supportive and knowledgeable team of individuals who will optimize the child's development and well-being. These guidelines include furnishing early intervention providers (teachers of the deaf) who are knowledgeable about the family's desired mode of communication and respect each family's expectations for their child.

Parent involvement is also stated to be a critical component for positive outcomes for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Parent-professional collaboration is necessary to develop appropriate and attainable goals so that parents are able to enhance their child's language and development at home. Yoshinaga-Itano (2013) lists mutual respect for skills and knowledge, honest and clear communication, understanding and empathy, mutually agreed upon goals, shared planning and decision making, open sharing of information, accessibility and responsiveness, negotiation and conflict resolution skills, and joint evaluation of progress to be necessary skills for the collaborative parent-provider (teacher) relationship; all of which have been previously discussed. As educators, whether in the home or school setting, it is our responsibility to continue this collaborative relationship so that transitions are successful throughout the child's educational journey.

Although the number of students who are deaf or hard of hearing receiving IEP services has remained steady at 0.2% of the total student population over the past 35 years, (NCES, 2013a, 2013b), parents still need guidance throughout this process. The majority of parents of children with hearing loss (approximately 90-95%) are hearing themselves. Therefore, parents are embarking on an unexpected journey where they are confronted with unfamiliar terminology, communication options, laws, and services related to their child's disability (Zaidman-Zait, 2015). This means that parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are facing a variety of challenges including new care-giving demands, medical and educational decision making, working with multidisciplinary professionals, and financial expenses (Lederberg & Goldbach, 2002; Quittner et al., 2010; Zaidman-Zait, 2008). Families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing will be grieving in their own ways with trigger events resurfacing their grief throughout the child's education (Luterman, 2008). It is this time when teachers of the deaf become crucial members in the parent's support system. When teachers become part of the parent's support system, parents are more likely to handle these challenges effectively than if the teachers were not part of the parent's support system (Dunst & Trivette, 1994).

Parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing have described their needs for information, social support and participation in parent-to-parent networks, and collaborative relationships with professionals (Poon & Zaidman-Zait, 2013). Teachers of the deaf can benefit from the strategies, suggestions, and plans listed throughout this document to encourage trusting collaborative parent-teacher relationships. For example, teachers of the deaf can encourage "veteran" parents to interact with new parents (Miretzky, 2004) during an informal event, as suggested by Matuszny and colleague's (2007) initiation phase of the progressive plan. This kind of event will aid in the formation of parent-teacher relationships and parent-to-parent

relationships. When preparing for an upcoming IEP meeting, teachers may create a packet of resources or a glossary of common terms (Larocque et al., 2011) so the parent's needs for information are met. When the teacher sends a weekly newsletter home, she may include a prompt such as "Ask me about..." which will allow the parents to practice the child's language, vocabulary, or learning targets at home (Davis & Yang, 2009).

In order to achieve this, teachers must have open communication with parents that focuses on their family's strengths and needs. The goal of this collaborative relationship is to empower the parents to make decisions and become participants in their child's education (Poon & Zaidman-Zait, 2013). Parents of children with disabilities display higher levels of trust in their children's teachers (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Therefore, parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on teachers to provide accurate and honest information, strategies to develop their child's language and overall well-being, and ways in which parents can be involved throughout the process. Reed, Antia, and Kreimeyer (2008) state that parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing who are knowledgeable about their child's services, are involved in their child's life and education, have high expectations, and communicate with their child's teacher of the deaf are more likely to achieve above-average results. Working together to achieve this collaborative parent-teacher relationship will allow parents to feel successful as their child's primary educator.

Limitations/Future Research

Graduates of teacher preparation programs have disclosed their perceived lack of training in areas such as classroom management techniques, parent communication skills, and parent involvement strategies. The ability to use parent-friendly language, share classroom information, and invite parents to participate are common concerns teacher candidates express when leaving

their teacher training programs; all of which lay groundwork for collaborative parent-teacher relationships (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). A lack of professional training in these areas can create additional barriers for parents and teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Teachers who receive appropriate training to develop positive home-school relationships are more likely to incorporate parent involvement strategies and communicate effectively with parents (Hughes et al., 2005). Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) suggest that pre-service teacher programs incorporate activities such as observations, role-playing, and mock interviews to increase familiarity with strategies used while interacting with parents. Teacher candidates may also benefit from parent involvement assignments, such as writing weekly newsletters or planning a family fun night.

Although these suggestions can be explored, further empirical research that examines teacher characteristics and specific parent involvement strategies used to create successful collaborative parent-teacher relationships should be obtained. Additionally, research and data surrounding these topics can be perceived as subjective due to the method and nature of information acquisition (i.e., personal interviews, focus groups, and surveys). In order to feel confident in these findings, researchers should seek objective ways to measure the quality of parent-teacher relationships and the payoff for all parties involved, particularly those involved with students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

It is no secret that parents and teachers are crucial members throughout a child's personal life and educational journey. When parents and teachers collaborate with one another, the child receives individualized attention and care, which may improve his overall success. Parents and teachers must work together to determine their expectations and abilities to promote this success while celebrating every step forged and victory created through their collaboration. Regardless of

how big or small each step taken is, our goal as professionals should be creating collaborative relationships so that every parent feels competent as a member of his or her child's educational team.

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