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Changing the Power of Discourse: Intercultural Communication for the Involvement of Black Parents with High School Students in Special Education—The Admission Review and Dismissal Experience

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**Changing the Power of Discourse: Intercultural Communication for the
Involvement of Black Parents with High School Students in Special
Education—The Admission Review and Dismissal Experience**

by

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Dedication

To my mother Dorothy M. Williams and daughters Kaisha S. Johnson and Tajsha A. Johnson. This has been a long journey but well worth the effort. Thank you for your patience. My love and sincere appreciation is joyfully extended to you all.

A special thanks to Dr. Robert Marion for staying the course.

**Changing the Power of Discourse: Intercultural Communication for the
Involvement of Black Parents with High School Students in Special
Education—The Admission Review and Dismissal Experience**

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Although the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) provided parents an active and more visible role in the education of their children, these roles can be supported only through meaningful dialogue that is understood by both the transmitter and the receiver. African American (AA) families with high school students in special education often face challenges in communicating with professionals who are Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee members, who may only communicate from their perspective. This diminishes the possibilities of utilizing intercultural communication processes; therefore, not applying the “posture of cultural reciprocity.”

This qualitative study describes and interprets the insight and experiences of AA parents with high school students in special education as they relate to

intercultural communication and the “posture of cultural reciprocity.” Intercultural communication identifies a “process by which two individuals who do not belong to the same culture ‘try’ to exchange a set of ideas, feelings, symbols...[and] meanings” (Casse, 1980, p. 16). Since they do not belong to the same culture, by implication they do not share the same assumptions, beliefs, values, or some ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Casse).

The “posture of cultural reciprocity” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) can be described as building relationships between families and professionals so that the cultural needs of the parents are met and understood. It may also address the need for professionals “to confront the contradictions between their values and practices” (Skrtic, 1991, p. 42) so that meaningful dialogue is achieved to assist parents and students.

Findings from the study revealed that professionals in ARD meetings did not usually communicate using intercultural communication processes or from the “posture of cultural reciprocity”; thus meaningful communication between parents and professionals was limited. This was especially evident as parents related their perceptions of communicating the needs of their students in (a) curriculum, (b) social and emotional development, and (c) student satisfaction.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It's easy to sit in the sunshine
And talk to the man
in the shade
It's easy to sit in a well-made boat
And tell others just
where to wade
It's easy to tell the toiler
How best to carry his pack
But you'll never know the
weight of the load
Until the pack is on your back
—Anonymous

Introduction to the Problem

Involving parents in the education of their children (Epstein, 1987, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Henderson, 1987; Newman, 2000) and building stronger community ties (Comer, O'Neil, 1997; Conner & Epstein, 1994; Wasley & Lear, 2001) reflect new direction and determination in the new millennium. Parents are recognized in schools as members of campus advisory teams offering visible support to teachers and students. The Texas Education Agency spearheaded a statewide initiative that supported and encouraged parent involvement. In addition, charter schools have erupted across the country espousing greater roles for parents in schools (B. Jacob, personal communication, 1998). However, an ever-present barrier to equitable and authentic parent involvement for culturally and linguistically diverse families persists into the beginning of the 21st century (Dodd & Konzal, 1999).

Efforts of educators and administrators in promoting parent involvement are ongoing; unfortunately, parent involvement suffers from a lack of understanding how to communicate across and within cultures and diverse ethnic groups (Coertze, 2000; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, Lindeman, 2001). As Dauber & Epstein (1993) pointed out, “all parents of children in a classroom may not be treated the same by a teacher, and/or they may not interpret messages, requests, and opportunities in the same manner” (p. 62). Consequently, this leads to a misinterpretation of meaning (Coertze; Gudykunst, 1994; Gudykunst & Kim; Lindeman) that ultimately results in parents’ belief that they are disenfranchised by schools (Dunn, Gernake, Jalali, & Zenhausern, 1990; Finders, 1994; Hilliard, 1988; Lindeman). There is also a sentiment of incompetence in advocating for their student’s academic success (Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Dodd & Konzal, 1999; Epstein, 1987; Fordham, 1996; Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Newman, 2000).

These issues are most evident as we witness “families of color,” specifically African American (AA) families with high school students in special education, attempting to become involved in their children’s education (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Brophy, 1983; Hilliard, 1991; Marion, 1980; Newman, 2000). This is true particularly when they are unable to “personally understand and act on the teacher’s practices that encourage their involvement” (Dauber & Epstein, 1993, p. 63). Although schools do not intentionally choose or intend to discourage parent involvement, they often miss important cues from families that would support a dialogue embracing intercultural communication, thereby diminishing possibilities for authentic and equitable family involvement.

Intercultural Communication

“When we communicate with people from other cultures, we often are confronted with languages, rules, and norms different from our own” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 4). Other cultures may include family members from another state or community, the pharmacist from the neighborhood store, the minister from church, the next-door neighbor, and more than likely the teacher that students interact with on a daily basis. What influences effectiveness in communicating with different individuals is the ability to understand their culture (Coertz, 2000; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Obiakor, 1994, 1999, 2001) and to respond without bias to their voices.

Researchers have recognized that assumptions regarding communication influence individuals’ interactions with group members that differ from their own (Coertze, 2000; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Obiakor, 1999; Singer, 1998; Talbert-Johnson & Beran, 1999). These “preconceived” assumptions were identified by Gudykunst and Kim as follows:

- Assumption 1: Communication is a symbolic activity
- Assumption 2: Communication is a process involving the transmitting and interpreting of messages
- Assumption 3: Communication involves the creation of meaning
- Assumption 4: Communication takes place at varying levels of awareness
- Assumption 5: Communicators make predictions about the outcomes of their communication behavior
- Assumption 6: Intention is not a necessary condition for communication

Assumption 7: Every communication message has a context dimension and a relationship dimension

Assumption 8: Communicators impose structure

To respond to intercultural differences requires an understanding and exchange of meaning that does not repudiate the attitudes, attributes, behavior, or shared experiences of culturally diverse groups (Coertze, 2000; Harry, 1992; Singer, 1998; Talbert-Johnson, 1999). Messages that are transmitted must be interpreted in relation to an individual's cultural background and the context in which it is transmitted (Garcia, 1994; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Hall & Hall, 1996; Obiakor, 2001; Singer).

Humans communicate feeling primarily through the use of nonverbal communication—facial expression, vocal patterns, posture, social distance, and the use of time (Singer, 1998). Albert Mehrabian's (1996) seminal piece, "Communication Without Words," provided evidence that nonverbal communication was the most vital aspect in all face-to-face interaction (in Weaver, 1996). This becomes most evident as one watches the interaction of AA families with members of their group. According to Seymour, Champion, and Jackson (1995), "because African American children are socialized from an early age to be feeling oriented, emphasis is not placed on verbal exchange" (p. 100). To involve families of color in effective communication and authentic participation, educators must consider all aspects of communication.

Communication is crucial to the involvement of parents of color (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1999, 2002; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; McAdoo, 1999) in the education of their students. The expression "break down in

communication” is often applied to situations where an individual’s position is not considered a high priority or valued to the degree that would justify acknowledgement of the individual’s perspective. Parents of school-age children with disabilities, specifically AA parents, are usually faced with the dilemma of not being heard (Delpit, 1995; Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Kayanpur & Harry; Marion, 1980; Obiakor, 1999). Their needs and desires are not always communicated in a “voice” that is understood by teachers or administrators (Delpit; Harry 1992a, 1992b; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Obiakor). This lack of understanding perpetuates the institutional racism believed to be in schools (McAdoo; McWhorter, 2001). Unfortunately, this attitude has negatively influenced the academic success of AA students (Delpit; Ladson-Billings; Obiakor) and discouraged AA parent involvement in schools (Delpit; Harry & Anderson; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; McAdoo; Marion, 1980).

Communication

Historically, AA parents have contributed consistently to the education of their children. The migrants from the agrarian south (Woodson, 1990) to the industrial north traveled with dreams and aspirations for the children. For many years prior to the “great migration” of 1910–1940 (Marion, 1996, personal communication), AA parents were involved in the education of their children. Upon arrival in the northern cities in search of jobs, fair housing, and educational opportunities for their children, AA parents were surprised by the lack of communication between home and school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Epstein, 1987;

Harry, 1992b; Marion, 1980). Also alarming was the disproportionate number of AA children identified and placed in special education classes (Artilles & Trent, 1994; Deno, 1970; Dunn, 1968; Mercer, 1973).

Research has indicated that families of color are not always comfortable with the communication of schools and educators (Bower & Wright, 1986; Coleman, 2001; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Garcia, 1994; Harry, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Marion, 1980). In an effort to insure that all parents are included in their students' education and are active participants in school activities, educators must understand the style or mannerism in which communication occurs so that parents' voices are heard and validated (Delpit, 1994; Harry, 1999; Hollingsworth, 2001; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

Parents of special education students often feel that teachers do not communicate enough (Harry & Anderson, 1994, Harry et al., 1995; Lake & Billingsley, 2000) and in addition, teachers express uncertainty of their roles and responsibilities in communicating with parents (Jayanthi, Bursuck, Epstein, & Cumblad, 1992; Lytle & Bordein, 2001). Discussion about African-American parent involvement and family life often focused on cultural deficits (Clark, 1974; Delpit, 1995; Deno, 1970; Harry, 1992; McAdoo, 1999; McWhorton, 2001) and what educators can best do to teach parents to support instructional agendas at home (Keesling & Merlargen, 1983; Mansbach, 1993). However, the impact of cultural differences and how communication influences the involvement of AA parents is most important.

Frequently, minor attention is given to understanding the communication mores of AA families. Educators do not take into account how a parent's school

experience or home life may influence the relationship they have with their child's school (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Finders (1994) suggested that parents' school experiences, economic and time constraints, and linguistic and cultural practices have produced a body of knowledge about school settings that frequently goes unacknowledged. Unfortunately, these unspecified cultural factors elicit miscommunication between intercultural and interracial groups.

African American children enter schools with cultural experiences from their home and family (McAdoo, 1999). However, the experiences of most White teachers are those generated by their own cultural value system, and their expectations reflect those of the wider society. African American children and their families have expectations consistent with their experiences and beliefs (Dunn, 1968; Newman, 2000; Ogbu, 1974a, 1974b).

The misinterpretation or lack of understanding of the symbols, signs, and behaviors particular to their cultural group is often a communication nightmare for families of color. It becomes evident as African American families attempt to understand the overrepresentation of their children in special education (Collins & Cambin, 1983; Dunn, 1968, 1995; Maerkowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997). Despite parents' attempts to become active participants in the education of their children in special education classes (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), they are often faced with uncertainty as to the degree of their involvement.

Many parents have related that their own personal school experiences created obstacles to involvement in school settings (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2000). They also cited language barriers and lack of written literacy skills as barriers to active parent involvement (Lindeman, 2001). In addition, parents have experienced cultural

discomfort when communicating with educators outside of their culture (Finders, 1994) as indicated by the following comment:

[In] the Hispanic culture and the Anglo culture things are done different and you really don't know--am I doing the right thing? When they call me and say, 'You bring the plates' [for class parties], do they think I can't do the cookies, too? You really don't know. (p. 3)

Ethnically diverse families living in poor socioeconomic conditions often face sustained isolation from the school culture (McAdoo, 1999), which can lead to miscommunication between parents and school. Schools facilitate the exclusion of students and parents (unconsciously or consciously) by establishing activities that require specific knowledge and behaviors about the school as an institution that are based on the cultural majority (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Harry, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999).

African American families with children in special education when confronted with negative factors decrease their participation in schools and programs that may affect their child's progress (Harry et al., 1995). This decline in family participation is in sharp contrast to the AA family's culture and values (McAdoo, 1999). In the AA community, children are viewed as the future; families work together to ensure that each generation advances on the shoulders of the preceding generation. However, schools have not always heeded or complied with the voices from families of color, especially those who do not understand the agenda of schools. This miscommunication has concluded with inappropriate identification and placement in special education programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, DeBello, Brennan,

Krimsky, & Murrain, 1981; Markowitz et al., 1997) and with the AA family not fully understanding the special education process (Harry et al., 1995).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Families of color, especially AA families with students in special education, have attempted involvement in their children's education (Brophy, 1983; Harry, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Marion, 1980). Unfortunately, the traditional deficit view of Black families (Anderson, 1988; Frazier, 1948; Glazieer & Monihayan, 1963; Harry et al., 1995; McAdoo, 1999; McWhorton, 2001) and the view of Black students' learning (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1994; Hilliard, 1991; McWhorton) continued to support the attitudes of special education professionals. These stereotypical views of the AA family created an atmosphere that jeopardized consistent ongoing collaboration with parents who were not familiar with the special education process.

One of the major provisions of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975 (P.L. 94-142) mandated that parents be informed of decisions related to their children's placement and encouraged parent participation. IDEA (1990) also encouraged parent involvement when determining a student's eligibility for special education and related services. However, the IDEA Amendments (1997) used precise language for parent involvement. The provisions included (a) consent from parent for initial evaluation, (b) no reevaluation without parental consent, (c) inclusion of the parent in determining student eligibility, and (d) involvement of parents as team

members of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or of any group that makes decisions about educational placement.

In addition, IDEA (1997) required the gathering of data to ensure that school districts did not disproportionately identify and place children with disabilities in separate educational settings, and that such children were not disproportionately suspended or expelled. Past research (Artlilles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Hillard, 1991) and landmark litigation (Larry P. v Riles, 1979) documented that overrepresentation was a recurring issue within the Black community and raised concerns regarding appropriate educational placement for Black students.

Although the reauthorization of IDEA proposed to provide families and teachers with the knowledge and training to effectively support students' learning, the ability to engage in dialogue with Black families so that they are active participants in schools has yet to fully emerge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct in-depth research on the processes of intercultural communication between AA parents of high school students in special education as they interacted with educators in Texas public schools during the ARD process. Research had indicated the need for parental involvement to be comprehensive and long lasting, offering parents a wide variety of involvement roles (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1987; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). However, traditional parent involvement has failed to provide ample and meaningful opportunities for AA parents.

Traditional parent involvement roles have consisted of “parents-as-customer and parent-as-political-actor” (Dodd & Konzal, 1999, p. 53). To participate as a “customer,” a parent must have the “cultural capital” to engage educators in making informed choices regarding their children’s educational welfare. To participate as a “political-actor,” parents must hold political power to be a part of the decision-making body. Traditionally, AA parents are excluded from both roles because their voices are neither heard nor understood. Therefore, intercultural communication could possibly establish an opportunity for parents and educators to engage in discourse that is meaningful and comprehensive, one that would support families of color as active-encouraged-parent participants.

Researchers and teachers contend that communication between home and school is essential for students’ academic growth (Epstein, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moles, 1987; Nardine, 1990; Newman, 2000). However, minority parents of special education students believe that teachers do not communicate enough (Harry, 1994; Harry et al., 1995; Lindeman, 2001). Nor do these educators understand the needs of AA families (Delpit, 1995; McAdoo, 1999; Marion, 1980; Obiakor, 1999; Ogbu, 1974a; 1974b) or how to respond to their individual needs (Yonezawa & Oakes, 1997).

As students progress from elementary to high school, the line of communication becomes harder to maintain between teachers and parents (Newman, 2000). At this level, teachers and students rarely interact because of class size and the number of classes within a school day (Dodd & Konzal, 1999). This poses an additional challenge for parents as they attempt to ensure adequate placement in high school courses (Newman; Yonezawa, 1997) for their secondary students.

In spite of research interest in communication, there has been limited research in the field of intercultural communication concerned with matters of parent involvement and high school special education students. Moreover, the field of education has only recently begun to recognize the important role of intercultural communication in the involvement of parents in schools (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Harry et al., 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lightfoot, 1978; Tatum, 1997). Over the years, investigations of culture and multicultural education have been the main growth areas of education research (Banks, 1977, 1981; Grant, 1981; Hilliard, 1974; Lightfoot, 1980; Marion, 1980; Obiakor, Schwenn, & Rotatori, 1999; Sleeter, 1996). Those findings have concluded that diverse cultural groups differ in some crucial and interesting ways.

Therefore, a combination of intercultural communication and parent involvement research is now long over due, especially when one considers the rapid growth patterns of the United States, where almost half the population by the year 2050 will be composed of people of color (Salend & Taylor, 1993). The reviewed literature provided little guidance on how parents and educators utilized the processes of intercultural communication to empower and involve parents, specifically, AA parents with high school students in special education.

The theories of intercultural communication are discussed in this study. In addition, the study's conceptual framework is drawn from the "posture of cultural reciprocity" (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), which proposes that special education professionals engage in a self reflective and dialogic process toward identifying both their own and the families' cultural norms. Consequently, factors that promote, facilitate, encourage, or inhibit parent involvement due to the processes of

intercultural communication need to be identified. Specifically, the following questions were researched:

1. What do AA parents perceive the role of parent involvement to be when communicating with ARD committee members about the needs of their high school students?
 - (a) in curriculum?
 - (b) in social and emotional development?
 - (c) in student satisfaction?
2. To what extent can intercultural communication processes impact the involvement of African American parents in the ARD meeting?
 - (a) in developing partnerships?
 - (b) in addressing “ways of knowing”?
 - (c) in recognizing diversity?

Importance of the Study

The result of this study extends the literature that currently exists on parent involvement as it relates to intercultural communication processes and the “posture of cultural reciprocity.” Although the study was conducted in an urban city in Texas, the findings have implications for national educational initiatives by educators and practitioners seeking to encourage meaningful dialogue with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, the study serves to strengthen parental initiatives through the creation of innovative teacher preservice training, teacher inservice

training, and parent communication workshops. Ultimately, it may assist in changing the power of discourse as it relates to parent involvement.

It is critical that schools be able to link cultural differences to the context of intercultural communication and parent involvement with the overall goal of improving communication for all parents, students, and educators. The understanding of intercultural communication should be the key to improving relations between home and school and overcoming the barriers that impede communication on many school campuses.

Limitations of the Study

The generalizability of this multiple case study is reduced due to the small number of cases and people involved (Patton, 1990). Therefore, the transferability of the study findings is a challenge due to a lack of generalizability. Case studies are not generalizable to populations due to the fact the case studies are nonrepresentative of a sample.

Organizational Plan of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and a general overview for the significance of this study. The focus of chapter 2 is a review of the relevant and related literature on intercultural communication and parent involvement. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and the data analysis of the study. The research approach employed a case study with open-ended interview questions, observations, and document reviews. The findings of the case study are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 completes the

dissertation with a summary, conclusions, implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

African American parents and their involvement (or lack of) in special education are quite visible in research studies (Bratlinger, 1987; Ford, 1995; Harry, 1992b; Harry et al., 1993; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Harry & McLaughlin, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Marion, 1979, 1980; Obiakor, 1986, 1992, 1997, 1999; Salend & Taylor, 1993; Sontag & Schacht, 1994). However, the involvement of families, specifically AA families with high school students in special education, remains limited in the literature (Collier-Kingberg, 1998; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Fordham, 1996; Lightfoot, 1983; Sizer, 1992). Furthermore, the perspective of intercultural communication and parent involvement has generated minimal discussion in the literature.

Therefore, a focus group interview approach afforded research participants an opportunity to explore their perceptions and interpretations of communicating with high school special education teachers and other related personnel. This technique provided a noninvasive environment for a nonthreatening dialogue between participants. Documentation of how participants perceived intercultural communication was collected to discover African Americans' perception of intercultural processes and their participation in the special education process.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

African Americans (AA): An interchangeable term for Black Americans.

Blacks: An interchangeable term for African Americans.

Charter school: Semi-autonomous, public entities that are established under a contract between a group that manages a school and a sponsoring authority that oversees it.

Culturally diverse: Differences that exist between individuals who do not share the same racial, ethnic, or social background.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997): This act strengthened academic expectations for children with disabilities and bridged the gap that too often existed between what children with disabilities learned and what is required in the general curriculum.

Intercultural communication: Intercultural communication is a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people of different cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Parent: TEC 21. 21.7532 (b) defines parent as a person who is a parent of or person standing in the parental relation to a student enrolled at school and who is not an employee of the school district.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power. (Delpit, 1995)

Even though research findings indicate that African Americans are “familistic...with paternal and maternal relatives perpetuating vital ties to multigenerational and nuclear units” (McAdoo, 1999, p. 55), schools tend to overlook the bond that AA children and families share. The involvement of AA parents in schools across the United States continues to be an issue of concern due to a failure to communicate (Delpit, 1995; Harry et al., 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Marion, 1980; Smith-Maddox, 1999) in a manner that is nonthreatening and culturally responsive (Hilliard, 1992; Wlodkowski & Gingsberg, 1995). Samovar and Porter's (1991) definition of intercultural communication might be the most useful in addressing issues of communication and parent involvement for AA families and their high school students in special education. They propose that intercultural communication involves the sending and receiving of messages that are significantly influenced by some aspect of culture.

Special education and the schools in which it functions represent a culture—a school culture—where AA families are often unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and do not feel readily accepted within its folds (Harry et al., 1995; Marion, 1980; Smith-Maddox, 1999). Hence, the communication and interaction that takes place within the

confines of the ARD are mostly reflective of the gatekeepers who understand and speak the same language. It appears that schools have not considered intercultural communication processes (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) as a tool to address the diverse cultural communicative styles of AA parents with high school students in special education. To put intercultural communication in perspective as it relates to “communicating with strangers” from different cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) requires an overview of the varied definitions of culture that exist in the literature.

Definitions of Culture

Many aspects of cultural life impact daily experiences. For families of color these cultural experiences usually vary from home to school, from school to church, and from cultural group to cultural group. Communications during these interactions are as varied as the cultural experiences taking place and should be understood by all members of the interacting group.

Gudykunst and Kim (1984) equated culture with a theory "for interpreting the world and knowing how to behave" (p. 13). According to Hall (1990), "culture is a technical term used by anthropologist[s] to refer to a system for creating, sending, storing, and processing information developed by human beings, which differentiates them from other life forms" (p. 183). Hofstede (1982) suggested that culture is "to human collectivity what personality is to the individual" (p. 21). Brislin (1993) asserted that it consists of ideals, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared among people and that guide specific behaviors. Samovar and Porter (1972) found that culture

manifests itself both in patterns of language and thought and in forms of activity and behavior. These patterns become models for common adaptive acts and styles of expressive behavior which enable people to live in a society within a geographical environment at a given state of technical development (p. 3).

Finally, Condon and Yousef (1975) reminded readers that "we cannot separate culture from communication, for as soon as we start to talk about one we are almost inevitably talking about the other, too" (p.34).

White and Johnson, Jr., (1991) posited that "students who come from lifestyles or cultures that significantly differ from the school-valued-culture results in the labeling of those students as deficient" (p. 409). Consequently, educators tend to communicate and interact with these families based on their conceptualization of culture, subculture, race, and ethnicity. Therefore, for the purpose of clarity and a more applicable understanding of intercultural communication, the aforementioned concepts will be described as follows:

Culture—"a historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings, identifiable through norms and beliefs shared by a people" (Collier & Thomas, 1996, p. 99). The term culture includes other group characteristics that have been targets of prejudice and discrimination, such as an individual's sex, class status, or disability (Sleeter & Grant, 1992).

Subculture—"a set of shared symbolic ideas held by a collectivity within a larger society" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 18).

Race—Casas (1984), in quoting Krogman's (1945) definition, stated that race is "a sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters,

of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind [sic] (p. 49)” (p. 787).

Ethnicity—“a group classification of individuals who share a unique social and cultural heritage passed on from generation to generation” (Casas, 1984, p. 787).

According to Kessing (1974), all members of a culture do not share exactly the same view of their culture. Therefore, it is outrageous that schools communicate with families of color as though their cultural and racial identity (Tatum, 1997) interpret their social life, role expectations, and social norms (Olsen, 1978; Smith-Maddox, 1999). However, with an understanding of cultural differences and how they may positively impact the communication between AA families and schools, educators are at least obliged to reevaluate their perceptions and expectations of families of color. Each individual transmits his/her own interpretation of meaning as created from interaction with and between other group members. In order for schools to engage in meaningful dialogue that encourages family involvement, there should be a willingness to assess how communication is transmitted across and within cultures. This could possibly unlock barriers to useful information and afford schools and families a valuable opportunity to learn and grow from an intercultural perspective.

Cultural Influences

Culture impacts what people know, think, and say (Singer, 1999). It leads individuals to communicate from their perspective in reaction to world experiences.

Culture identifies who people are and influences interaction and communication between groups (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Researchers have identified cultural influences as contributing factors to miscommunication between families of color and the schools their students attend (Anderson & Webb-Johnson, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Terkel, 1992). The consequences of this miscommunication have distanced culturally and linguistically diverse families from interaction with and participation in meaningful school activities.

The situation is further exacerbated when AA parents with students in special education perceive greater alienation because of their student's identified "exceptionality" (Obiakor, 1999). To address the problem caused by miscommunication and misinterpretation of meaning, "we must be aware of culture's influence on our communication" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 18). Educators should become culturally aware and sensitive as well as culturally responsive to the needs of culturally diverse families and understand how this awareness could possibly lead to purposeful involvement with AA parents who have children in special education.

Special education culture for students of color. The role of IQ in arriving at placement decisions in special education was portrayed in the 1972 Larry P. v Riles case as "primary and determinative" by Judge Peckham. This ruling and subsequent cases dealing with the issue of overrepresentation of African American children in programs for students with MMR, such as Marshall et al. v. Georgia, 1984; PASE v. Hannon, 1980; and S-1 v. Turlington, 1986. These rulings begin to describe the cultural experience of students of color attending schools in the United States. Their

placement in special education was influenced by what Skrtic (1991) described as “the institutional practice that emerged in the 20th century to contain the failure of public education to realize its democratic ideals” (p.46).

These democratic ideals appear to be ones of acculturation—accepting the values and beliefs of the wider society and becoming neutralized to one’s own cultural norms, values, and beliefs. In fact, special educators are perpetuators in the process of cultural reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). They have not always been culturally sensitive or aware of their role as educators in communicating with students and families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Delpit, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; McAdoo, 1999; Sileo & Prater, 1998).

Cultural awareness. Students with disabilities, especially students of color, are often confronted with negative attitudes and misperceptions of who they are and the extent of their capabilities (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; MacMillan & Forness, 1998; Obiakor, 1999; Smith & Luckasson, 1995). The overrepresentation of African American students in special education has been well documented in the research literature (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1986; Ewing, 1995; MacMillan & Reschly, in press; Ortiz, 1997; Patton, 1998). Researchers have suggested that the lack of understanding of families’ cultural differences impacts the way teachers identify and ultimately place students of color in special education classes (Jacobs, 1991; Jairrels, 1999; Obiakor; Voltz, 1995). In addition, parents of color do not always feel comfortable in the school setting (Delpit, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry; Lindeman, 2001; Sileo & Prater, 1998) and have limited involvement, in part due to professionals’ limited awareness of the families’ cultural differences (Lindeman; Rene, 1999; Sileo

& Prater). Gay (1997) stated that “professional preparation of teachers must compensate for this lack of cross-cultural and interethnic group interactions” (p. 195).

Levels of Cultural Awareness

Helping prepare teachers to become culturally aware of students of color and their families’ differences requires an understanding of their own cultural values, experience, and attitudes (Harry, 1992; Kalyunpur & Harry, 1999; Kea & Utley, 1998). Skrtic (1991) suggested that special education professionals should be forced to confront the contradictions between their values and practices as they relates to the field of special education. These professionals must view the families’ home, community, and individual lifestyle from a perspective that is nonbiased and nondiscriminatory, and be prepared “ to use strategies that are congruent with cultural heritage and communication styles” (Sileo & Prater, p. 514). This can possibly be accomplished by addressing the three levels of cultural awareness (overt, covert, subtle) proposed by Kalyanpur and Harry to clarify how professionals can better serve students of color in special education and build a bridge towards intercultural communication.

Overt Level of Awareness

The overt level addresses “the awareness of obvious differences, such as language or manner of dress” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999, p. 116). It is usually recognized by most individuals in determining that there is a cultural difference between groups. However, according to Kalyanpur and Harry, because professionals

are aware of explicit aspects of cultural differences, they do not always respond to a family's levels of acculturation or "change the power of dynamics of the interaction in favor of the family" (p. 116). For example, in January 1996, a Black parent sought to enroll his children at a South African school—Potgietersrus Primary School. The school had previously been a school for White children only. This was the first time that Black parents had approached the school. A dispute broke out between Black and White parents and between the White governing body of the school and the prospective Black parents. On demand from the White parents, the Black pupils were refused admission to the school. The Black parents took their case before the Supreme Court of South Africa.

The friction between the different parties was clearly illustrated by the nonverbal behavior of the right-wing White parents who dressed in the distinctive clothing of a right-wing extremist group, the Afrikaanse Weerstand Beweging and carried arms. The White parent body of the school based its case on the claim that Potgietersrus Primary had a Eurocentric culture and the culture of the Black parents and their children was Afrocentric. The school claimed a vast difference between these cultures and, therefore, the White parents were "entitled" to preserve and protect the dominant culture and ethos of the school (Linde, 1997).

Covert Level of Awareness

Kalyanpur and Harry's (1999) research has suggested that professionals can achieve greater sensitivity and acceptance of others at this level. However, professionals may misinterpret covert awareness by attributing their own meaning to

behavior observed. For instance, when southern Blacks moved from rural areas in the south to northern cities, educators perceived their mannerisms and communication styles as docile and slow (Tolnoy, 1997). Educators therefore concluded that the children were uneducable and in need of special education services.

Subtle Level of Awareness

This level of cultural awareness refers to the “cultural underpinnings of our professional knowledge” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999, p. 117). It is basically coming to the realization that one’s beliefs and values are embedded in an individual’s own cultural experience. It is realizing that ones’ own cultural belief cannot guide the cultural values of others without interfering with family and students’ cultural beliefs. These levels of awareness (subtle, covert, overt) are important in establishing communication that is reciprocal across cultures, especially to AA students needing assistance from special education programs, and for the families that support their students’ efforts.

Communicating Across Cultures

When attempting to communicate across and within cultures Collier and Thomas (1996) argued that “actual discourse between interlocutors [should be]...examined for its intercultural quality” (p. 99). Accordingly, “the intercultural status of communication would then be determined by the discursive interpretations of the participants, as they attribute and acknowledge each other’s different cultural identities from one another” (p. 99). Gudykunst and Kim (1997) stipulated “that

intercultural communication is a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures” (p. 19). To minimize miscommunication and better understand cultural differences, special educators should have knowledge of intercultural communication and its applicability to the ARD procedures.

The ARD team provides family members, students, teachers, and service providers an equal opportunity to discuss and to determine the least restrictive environment and most appropriate placement in which the needs of a student can be met. This approach, which can be viewed as an intercultural approach, is imperative for involving families of color in authentic family–school participation, especially for AA families with high school students in special education.

High school years offer many challenges to African American students and their families (Reyes et al., 2000). Students’ efforts to “fit in” and feel accepted by peers and teachers are often misconstrued. Casteel (2000) pointed out that one of the most frequent complaints of high school students, especially AA students, is that some teachers, most noticeably Whites, do not relate very well to them. In addition, AA parents’ efforts to be involved are confronted with attitudes that alienate them from participating (Delpit, 1995). As AA students in special education consider options for postsecondary years and career choices, parents are needed to contribute their perspective of the students’ needs or their view for transitional services (Clark, 1996; Coleman, 2001). To provide this support for their students, AA parents require a cultural understanding and nonbiased interaction that encourages an intercultural discourse that is not tainted with superfluous ideologies.

Literature supports the theory that parents' involvement contributes to student academic success (Comer, 1984, 1989; Cushman, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1991; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Epstein, 1987; Galinsky, 2001; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). It is further documented that communities pulling together for a common goal help generate strong connections with schools (Comer, 1984, 1989; Cushman; Epstein, 1987, 1995; Henderson, 1987; McLaughlin, 2001; Wasley & Lear, 2001). However, studies also indicate that teachers receive minimal preparation in working with parents (Conner & Epstein, 1995; Harvard Research Family Project, 1997), resulting in a lack of communication between home and school and an appearance of indifference towards meeting the needs of families of color (Lindeman, 2001).

With the ever-changing demographics of the country's student population and the cultural diversity of the population (U.S. Census, 2000), use of intercultural communication strategies may assist schools in becoming more receptive and informed as to the needs of families of color. If schools are to address their multiethnic/multi-cultural population, the voices (Delpit, 1995; Hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994) of families from diverse cultural backgrounds must be heard. Moore (1997) contended, "When silence is in some manner forced upon us, it becomes a state of oppression that vanquishes our voices and shackles our soul" (p. 19). To erase the silence and allow voices of AA families to be heard, educators should be mindful of the proud heritage of AA families as well as the adversities that were confronted in their struggle to be heard.

Historical Perspective

In areas of Africa, before and after slavery, the rhythmic sounds of drums, stringed instruments, and songs communicated marriage, birth, death, merriment, and social conflict in villages and between tribes. The African's oral tradition of "proverbs, tales, epics, and histories served as educational devices, sources of amusement, and the guides for the administration of government" (Franklin, 1967, p. 39). This method of communication kept everyone well informed as to the daily experiences and occurrences of the community and neighboring villages. However, Africans were captured, enslaved, and stolen away from their homeland by slave traders (Franklin), and communicating took on a "new" meaning.

Unquestionably, the Black experience in America was a far cry from the reality once shared by Africans in their native land. The long distance from their homeland compounded by the unfamiliarity with America's culture led to many frustrations and conflicts (Franklin & Schweninger, 1999), which continued for African descendants more than a century after the initial arrival of their forefathers (Tolnoy, 1997).

Important dates and events chronicled by Banks (1984), Smith (1998), and Woods and Liddell (1992) document the Black experience in America (see Appendix A). The most significant of these events included *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), which signaled the end of desegregation, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which launched an attack on poverty.

Descendants of Africans struggled to become involved in the American way of life. Even though constantly confronted with heartache, frustration, and

degradation, they continued to strive for the American dream. Lucious Curtis (1940) articulated that dream in a song entitled, “Times is Getting’ Harder” that embraced Black Americans’ search for greater opportunities in the “great migration” from the rural south to the industrial north.

The Great Migration

Times is gettin' harder,
Money's gettin' scarce.
Soon as I get my cotton and corn,
I'm bound to leave this place.
White folks sittin' in the parlor,
Eatin' that cake and food,
Nigger's way down to the kitchen,
Squabblin' over turnip greens.
Times is gettin' harder,
Money's gettin' scarce.
Soon as I get my cotton and corn,
I'm bound to leave this place.
Me and my brother was out.
Thought we'd have some fun.
He stole three chickens.
We began to run.
Times is gettin' harder,
Money's gettin' scarce.
Soon as I get my cotton and corn
I'm bound to leave this place.
—Lucious Curtis, 1940

Between 1900 and 1990 the percentage of Blacks living in the south plunged from 90% to a little more than 50% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985, 1995). Historically, the southern economy had offered few opportunities in the Black communities with the exception of becoming preachers or teachers (Tolnoy, 1997).

Therefore, combined with social obstacles (e.g., political disenfranchisement, inferior schools, and racially motivated violence), these economic conditions represented a powerful incentive to pursue the greater opportunities available in the north (Tolnay, 1997).

The Black migrants responsible for the change in the south's population were considered displaced farmers, largely sharecroppers with little education or urban experience (Anderson, 1988; Drake & Cayton, 1962; Frazier 1932, 1934; Lemann, 1991). However, Carole Marks (1989) argued that the participants in the Great Migration were the "displaced mudsills" of southern industrial development, rather than a suddenly superfluous agricultural force. Her observation suggests that the migrant stream was more urban, educated, and occupationally skilled. This echoes Carter G. Woodson's characterization of Black migrants before 1900 as members of "the talented tenth" of the southern population.

The "talented tenth" was a concept coined by W.E.B. Dubois, co-organizer of the Niagara Movement, which provided the springboard to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Boyd, 1995). According to Boyd, the "talented tenth" represented "the percentage of the Black community needed for leadership" (p. 79) in the early 1900s. Grossman (1989) found this a contradiction by noting "the sheer volume of migration indicates that even if the 'talented tenth' was over-represented, the movement had to have drawn heavily upon the impoverished farmers and laborers who constituted the overwhelming proportion of Black southerners" (p. 33).

When Black sharecroppers in the 1940s migrated from the rural south to the north in search of better living and educational opportunities (Edsall, 1991), they

were surprised that the “Promised Land” did not fulfill their expectations. Many northern-born Black communities resented their arrival to the cities and believed that the Black southerners would threaten their social, economic, and political security (Tolnay, 1997). Moreover, southern Blacks realized that jobs were for skilled laborers, housing accommodations were poor, and schools did not openly communicate with their families, other than to lament “deficiencies” of their children (Erickson, 1997). With the migration from the rural south and the inherent elements of plantation culture, the family patterns of southern Blacks were radically changed.

Plantation Culture

Plantation slavery was not the idyllic homestead historian Ulrich B. Phillips described in his Pulitzer Prize–winning *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929). The slave masters constantly and carefully watched over their “property.” However, slaves took advantage of many opportunities to outwit or escape plantation life.

According to the research of Franklin & Schweninger (1999), excessive drinking or a master’s emotional and mental problems gave the slave an opportunity to run away. They also alluded to the interracial sexual liaisons that prompted slaves to attempt freedom. The wives of slaveholders, once aware of the infidelity of their husbands, would viciously attack the slave woman, and in some cases male slaves were also in fear of their lives because of relations with White women.

Their masters, creating yet another opportunity for slaves to escape to freedom, hired out slaves. “Some hired slaves were auctioned off from year to year to different employers” (Franklin & Schweninger, 1999, pp. 33-34). This separation

from families and loved ones generated a fierce determination in the slave to escape and attempt to reunite with their families.

The family and family members were important to the slave plantation community; however, plantation life offered a limited quality of life. Family members often witnessed whippings and other cruel and harsh punishment administered by the slave master or overseer. They also watched as their loved ones were sold off to other plantation owners. Franklin and Schweninger (1999) asserted, “the separation of families was an inherent part of the south’s peculiar institution” (p. 51).

Although there were many attempts by escaped slaves to reunite with their families, most resulted in recapture. Often the slave master would find the runaway slave at the plantation where his wife or family member lived. In an attempt to curtail the slave’s running away, the slave master would give spouses who lived on different plantations passes that would allow them to visit with one another.

Mothers and children also ran away in search of husbands and fathers. Pregnant women are also documented as running away from plantation life (Franklin & Schweninger, 1999). All of these escape attempts were undertaken in an effort to keep the family unit together. It was “the fear of being separated that prompted families to run away” (p. 66). Family continuity was most important and became quite evident as ex-slaves traveled north after having experienced “southern hospitality.”

Family life (what a life). According to Frazier (1966), the southern Black family was a result of the slavery experience. In the south, Black families were able to survive because of the extensive support provided by family members, the church,

the lodge, and other institutions. With their new social surroundings in the north, Blacks could not depend on the same kind of familial or institutional support that they had enjoyed in the south. They could not rely on the northern-born Black to identify with the struggles of the south (Tolnay, 1997).

Nor could they escape the attitudes of Whites who perceived them as dysfunctional and the children uneducable. This position is portrayed in a suit filed by a Kentucky woman who traded horses from Virginia traders for two Black babies. She complained that the children were “extremely delicate, sickly and feeble, and it is very doubtful whether they can be raised at all” (Frankin & Schweninger, 1999, p. 51). This tragic assessment and attitude toward African slave children persisted as Black families moved into urban communities, resulting in marginal teaching of Black children who migrated with their families from the south into the urban north. Anderson (1990) stated that persistent discrimination and economic disadvantages led to the development of an inner-city culture that began to devalue traditional values. However, this is contrary to evidence of continuous efforts of southern Blacks to pursue educational goals and to maintain family connections.

Schooling and the Southern Black

In the postrevolutionary period, southern “Negroes” had benefited from the trend to establish and improve communities with the opening of common schools or field schools (Durrill, 1997). In the New England and Middle Atlantic states Negro children attended both private and public schools taught by White teachers (Franklin, 1967), even though compulsory ignorance laws adopted in the early 1740s (Erickson,

1997) were designed to prevent the Negro from becoming self-reliant. Eventually, separate schools began to emerge, employing Negroes as teachers (Mercer, 1994).

Although the south was slow to respond to the education of freed slaves and even slower to provide meaningful education that would potentially place the freed Black on equal standings with White Americans, Blacks were encouraged by potential prospects in the north. Blacks migrated from the south to the north, partially in search of educational opportunities for their children. Instead they were surprised by the lack of communication between home and school (Degado-Gaitan, 1990; Epstein, 1987; Harry, 1992a; Marion, 1980). Even more alarming was the disproportionate number of their children identified and placed in special education and/or remedial classes (Artilles & Trent, 1994; Deno, 1970; Dunn, 1968; Mercer, 1993).

Over five million Black families had migrated from the segregated agrarian south to the “liberated” industrial north (Anderson, 1988); however, teachers in the northern cities did not know how or attempt to educate the new wave of Black migrants. Black students spoke a different dialect (Seymour et. al, 1995), had different learning styles (Hale-Benson, 1982, 1993, 2001; Hilliard, 1980), and their own way of communicating (Heath, 1983). The students were viewed as low achievers and labeled mentally retarded (Dunn, 1968).

The “great migration” was supposedly the realization of dreams and aspirations for the impoverished Black sharecropper and his family. To embark on a journey filled with the unknown, to leave friends and family, was a leap of faith. However, the opportunities that waited ahead encouraged Black families to migrate. Unfortunately, there would be many struggles to overcome.

Educational legislation and litigation. In 1865, the federal government had organized the Freedman's Bureau. The bureau built schools and hired teachers to educate children of ex-slaves (Katz, 1974). Katz recorded a White Tennessee official who stated, 'The colored people are far more zealous in the cause of education than the Whites. They will starve themselves, and go without clothes, in order to send their children to school' (p. 241). The formation of the Freedman's Bureau opened the doors to educational opportunities for the children of ex-slaves. It also set the stage for challenging unequal and biased laws as well as for advancing the education for all students.

Brown v Board of Education (1954) was considered a landmark decision in recognizing the value of education for all students. Yet, in the South, schools that Black students attended were closed, and they were sent to all-White schools. In this unfamiliar setting, Black students were often tracked into remedial and/or special education classes (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1986). Parents who had been actively involved in their students' education were now distanced from their children's learning in schools.

Brown v Board of Education (1954) struck down segregation in the public schools of Topeka, Kansas, in reversing the "separate but equal" ruling of *Plessey v Ferguson* (1896). However, the literature supports the disproportionate number of Black students placed in special education and/or remedial classes (Anderson, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1994, Markowitz et al., 1997), which continued to be an issue. According to the research, many of the Black students were labeled "mentally retarded" (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1986; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Patton,

1998), and Black parents continued to be viewed as outsiders (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Thorp, 1997).

Although Black parents exposed to biased treatment by educators in regard to their students' education, the "africanism" from preslavery proclaimed the power of family and family preservation (Franklin & Schweninger, 1999; Seymour et al., 1995). Their shared belief in education and their high aspirations is well documented in many court decisions and legislative actions. These include, but are not limited to, *Brown v Board of Education* (1954); Bilingual Education Act, 1968 (PL 90-247); The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975 (PL 94-142); *Ann Arbor v Michigan*, 1979; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997.

Court Cases

In the court case of *Mattie T. v Holliday* (1975), Black parents argued that Mississippi school districts did not offer their children an equal opportunity to be educated with their peers. They maintained that their children were being placed in special education classes and misclassified as mentally retarded (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Patton, 1998). Research conducted by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (1992) called into question the validity of the serious emotional or behavioral disability category because of diagnostic criteria and the variability in frequency rates observed across the states for AA students. Parents contended that these test practices were at risk of discriminating against their children and were not

reflective of all students. These Black parents brought forth issues that would impact education and special education, especially.

Ann Arbor v. Michigan (1979) argued that Black children were not receiving equal educational opportunities under the law and that the students were being placed in remedial or special education classes. The case involved a group of Black Michigan parents who sued the local school district in *Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*. They wanted the right to have their children educated in Ebonics. In a limited decision, U.S. District Court Judge Charles W. Joiner relied on the testimony of scholars such as Geneva Smitherman and William Labov on the Creole origins of Black English. He ruled in favor of the parents. Joiner ordered Ann Arbor to institute special language programs for Black students (Heilbrunn, 1997).

With the enactment of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (PL 90-247), issues pertaining to multiculturalism became recognizable (Gollnick, 1995; Nieto, 1995). Educators soon began to understand the connection between regular education and special education (Walsh, 2001). They also began to recognize the need for parent involvement.

Public Law 94-142 (1975), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, guaranteed all handicapped children the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). By 1989, the number of students identified as learning disabled and receiving services rose 152%, to nearly two million students (Frankenberger & Fronzaglio, 1993). These numbers indicated the need for additional educational

services for all students, and it was also a response to AA parents who believed that their students were disproportionately identified in special education.

Public Law 90-247, the Bilingual Education Act was enacted in 1968 to help reduce the high dropout rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students who were limited in their English proficiency. Prior to the enactment of P. L. 90-247, students with limited English proficiency were also disproportionately placed in special education classes (Garcia, 1994).

BEA served all culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families as demonstrated by the decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). The Supreme Court ruled “the civil rights of students who did not understand the language of instruction were indeed being violated” (Nieto, p. 402, in Banks.). This decision resulted in a document entitled “The Lau Remedies.” It provided guidance for educators in identifying, assessing language abilities of, and providing appropriate programs for students with limited English proficiency. It went further in mandating bilingual education for all students in all states where students required language assistance.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Mandated court cases and legislative actions established educational opportunities for all students. However, it was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (IDEA) of 1997 that addressed the issue of disproportionate representation of minority students, by requiring districts to collect and report accurate data of culturally diverse students in special education programs.

Also, the participation of parents in the identification, placement, and selection of related services highlighted the amended provisions of IDEA (1997).

In Texas, in accordance with the IDEA, the ARD committee reviews every student referral for special education. Students identified in need of special services must have an Individual Education Program (IEP) planned by family member(s), special educator(s), teacher, administrator, and other professionals that will provide services to the student (IDEA, 1997). PL 94-142 (1975) required the inclusion of the IEP to ensure that school-age children with special needs received the special education and related services appropriate to their needs (Smith & Luckasson, 1995).

Title II of IDEA (1997) stated that IEP provisions would take effect on July 1, 1998. The IEP provisions required that parents be members of any group that would make decisions about the educational placement of their child. Under the revised provisions parents and school IEP teams were expected to reach agreements for IEPs that were currently in place. Although one of the provisions under IDEA included notification and procedural rights for parents, with the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997) parents were viewed as full partners in assisting professionals develop an IEP that would address the individual needs of the student with a disability.

The “face lift” of IDEA did not necessarily cause parents to become more involved in the ARD. This was especially true for those AA parents unfamiliar with the special education process (Harry, 1994; Harry & Kalyanpur, 1999; Lytle & Bordin, 2001) and straddled with negative attitudes, conflicts, and experiences from education professionals in educational settings (Harry, 1992, 1992b, 1994; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lindeman, 2001; Lytle & Bordin, 2001).

Assessing Issues in Special Education for AA Family Involvement

Issues of Diversity with Students and Families

A common cultural belief in the United States is that Americans from European backgrounds value the qualities of efficiency, independence, and equity more than do Americans from other backgrounds (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Many Americans of European descent perceive that other cultures do not place importance on these values. Frequently, the same values operate within diverse cultures, but members of the culture (Gudykunst & Kim) do not label them as such.

Cultural diversity is recognized as differences members in a certain sociocultural group bring to members of other groups. Kim (1996) pointed out, “groups can be identified with shared characteristics and given labels to distinguish them from other groups who do not share similar characteristics” (p. 26). Unfortunately, in distinguishing characteristics of cultural group members, the assumption is that communication is taken place at the same level for each member of the identified group. This appears evident as schools attempt to address issues of cultural diversity with families and students.

Education is deeply rooted in culture, but professionals struggle with how best to recognize and convey these roots (McWhorter, 2001, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Westby & Rouse, 1985). Some educators believe that there should be an assimilation of multiple cultures into the education setting, whereas others emphasize cultural pluralism. As Banks asserted, “the goal is to help kids function in their home communities—their ethnic communities—and in the mainstream world” (Brandt, 1995, p. 29).

Culturally and linguistically diverse groups in the United States have expressed disappointment in not having their voices heard (Delpit, 1988, 1995; Garcia, 1994; Harry, 1992; Harry, 1995; Lindeman, 2001) or understood. Garcia (1994) contended, “Educational endeavors related to culturally diverse students have been pragmatically oriented” (p. 89). The focus has not reflected a vision of embracing diversity, but rather one of focusing on deficit terms that Garcia identified as “discrimination, segregation, underachievement, low self-esteem, and non-English proficiency” (p. 89). This often leads to students of color and students from low socioeconomic families placed disproportionately in special education (Best, 1999; Coutino, 1999; Deno, 1970; Dunn, 1968; Hilliard, 1980).

Issues of family involvement. For students and families of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds, recognizing and embracing diversity involves developing the knowledge and skills that each student already possesses (Delpit, 1995). This often poses a challenge for professionals working with AA students in special education since they have limited contact with parents of minority students (Harry, 1992b; Lindeman, 2001). Given the importance of parent involvement (Chandler, 1999; Comer, 1984, 1989; Coots, 1998; Epstein, 1987; 1991, 1995; Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Marion, 1979, 1980), special educators should become aware of barriers that impede interaction with families of color.

Research reveals that there is a need for parental involvement so that children could experience success in school (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Comer, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Henderson, 1987; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001;

Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Walber, 1984; Wasley & Lear, 2001). However, for culturally diverse students of low socioeconomic background, traditional methods of parental involvement do not necessarily have the same results (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1983; Lindeman, 2001; McWhorter, 2001; Sleeter, 1996) as those same methods do for students whose parents are wealthy and well-educated (Rene, 1999). Culturally and linguistically diverse parents with students in special education do not participate in the same numbers or to the same extent as White parents or parents of higher socioeconomic status (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1984; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Kalyanpur & Harry; Marion, 1981; Rene, 1999; Sullivan, 1991).

Although it is imperative that all parents fully participate in the education of their students, it is interesting to note that earlier models for parental involvement suggest a gradual move to active involvement on the part of parents (Fantini, 1983; Epstein, 1987, 1992; Sanders, Epstein, & Tadros, 1999). However, these models did not directly address parents of high school students in special education nor elaborate on factors that may engage minority parents and special educators in intercultural communication strategies during ARD meetings.

Models of Family Involvement Research

As previously noted, parent involvement is paramount to students' academic success in school (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Comer, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Henderson, 1987; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Sanders et. al., 1999; Walber, 1984; Wasley & Lear, 2001). However, Beth Harry's (1995) findings revealed several aspects of professional behavior that function as

active deterrents to parents' participation in ARD meetings. These impediments included:

1. Late notices and inflexible scheduling of conferences. Parent's notification of meetings did not always allow time for rescheduling work or accommodating the needs of other children.
2. Limited time for conferences. Parents may require more time to discuss and understand placement of student. Therefore, schools should be flexible in addressing time constraints.
3. Emphasis on documents rather than participation. Professionals focused on addressing required documents and limiting discussion of content.
4. The use of jargon. Parents are often unfamiliar with the language associated with placement meetings (pp.372-373).

Harry (1995) asserted that "when a deficit model of African American parents combined with the special education's deficit model of children" (p. 225, in Ford et al.), some professionals might not approach parents as potential partners in decision making. This could possibly influence the delivery of services or placement for Black high school students, particularly when professionals have not clearly communicated their intent to parents in a way that is understood.

Earlier research continued to identify why Black parents were not fully participating in schools and offered suggestions to remedy the situation. Jenkins (1981) described five steps to correct lack of parental involvement in urban schools.

1. *Entry*. The first step is to interest the parents in the school through approaches such as assembly programs, home visits, and telephone contacts.
2. *Involvement*. Step two encourages parents to volunteer at school or to act as parent teachers at home by being involved in activities such as monitoring homework.
3. *Participation*. Parents participate in curriculum and instruction through workshops or committees. Parents are taught skills to help reinforce school learning at home.
4. *Self-assertion*. Parents learn how to intervene in their children's problems and better support student learning.
5. *Decision-Making*. Teachers and parents working together identify school problems, and solutions are reached by consensus.

The need for parents to be involved in schools and offer support to their children was also addressed in Fantini's (1983) outline of a four-point continuum of community involvement from indirect to direct input so that all parents were visible and active in schools. They included:

1. *Client-related*. Parents and community members are viewed as clients by the schools. Due to their restricted level of knowledge, their input is limited to activities such as PTA, parent-teacher days, and attendance at school events.

2. Producer-related. Parents participate as volunteers, paraprofessionals, tutors, and assistants. Frequently, they are asked to assist in civic and businesses school-related activities.
3. Consumer-related. Parents are viewed and involved as active, intelligent, and informed consumers. The school serves as a community vehicle for solving neighborhood problems (i.e. gangs) and offers evening and summer programs for parents and community members.
4. Governance-related. Parents and community members offer advice and make recommendations on major school policies through participation in lay commissions (i.e. site-based decision-making (in Ornstein, 1983, p.38).

Epstein's (1995) model for partnership with families and schools included six types of involvement:

Type I: Parenting—assist parents with parenting and child-rearing skills to support children's learning. Assist schools in understanding families.

Type II: Communicating—communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

Type III: Volunteering—involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school to support schools and school programs.

Type IV: Learning at Home—involve parents with their children in learning activities at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

Type V: Decision Making—include families as participants in school decisions (i.e., PTA/PTO, advisory councils, and committees).

Type VI: Community Collaboration—establish connections to enable the community to contribute to schools, students, and families.

Although Epstein's model is probably the most utilized for parent/community involvement, it does not detail how to assist schools in understanding families from an intercultural perspective. However, there is the contention that schools communicate in a manner that is understandable to all families, regardless of educational or linguistic background (Epstein, 1995; Harry, 1992, 1992b; Lindeman, 2001).

Intercultural Communication

Culture and Language

The language or dialect that people use to communicate influences the encounters that they will have with others (Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Perry & Delpit, 1998). This becomes more evident when participants involved in discourse are not familiar with the phonological rules that tell them how sounds are combined to form language. There is an additional disadvantage between groups when confronted with grammatical rules that tell the order of words that form sentences or pragmatic

rules that tell participants how to interpret the meaning of utterances (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), and often individuals are not aware of these differences.

The lack of language rules places some individuals at a disadvantage when attempting to communicate, especially minority groups, who may use different language patterns to convey meaning (Delpit, 1995; McAdoo, 1999; McWhorter, 2001). Gudykunst and Kim (1997) pointed out that “our language attitudes are influenced by our stereotypes and the situation in which the language is used” (p. 212). Gudykunst and Kim posited, “Our language is a product of our culture, and our culture is a part of our language” (p. 46). This leads to a consideration of Whorf’s (1952) hypothesis:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there. On the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our mind. (p. 5)

Although the Sapir-Whorf theory (1952) contended “that there is a relationship between language and culture and the associated differences in the ways speakers of different languages view the world” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 196), many scholars disagreed about the generalizations of culture and about attributing generalizations to the language spoken in them. According to Singer (1998), Whorf’s theory “created the impression that only peoples who spoke distinctly different languages—not dialects—had distinctive cultural patterns” (p. 7).

Cognitive-cultural conceptualization. Since languages “have a real existence only in the social and cultural settings in which they appear” (Wurm, 1976, p 363)

and knowing how to communicate is more than language, Forgas (1996) suggested a social-cultural approach to the conceptualization of intercultural communication. He offered several propositions to this approach which state the following:

1. Culture and cognition are interdependent.
2. Communication is based on shared cognitive representations about reality, which are by necessity culture specific.
3. Cognitive representations about social episodes are critical to successful communication.
4. Intercultural communication by definition involves the absence of wholly shared episode representation between the interactants.
5. The effectiveness of intercultural communication is directly related to the degree to which shared episode representations between the interactants are present (pp. 187-188).

Forgas (1996) believed “that in order to make such an approach plausible, it is first necessary to establish how various cultural and subcultural influences do in fact shape a person’s perception and understanding of social situations” (p. 208). He pointed out that there is little literature related to “links between the surrounding culture and people’s perceptions of social episodes” (p. 191), although Thomas and Znanieck’s early studies on cultural adaptation contended that there is an interdependence of external cultural norms and values and internal cognitive representation of episodes. Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionist theory emphasized

the role that human symbolic capacities play in the construction of both cultural systems and individual perceptions.

Interaction situations are considered the building blocks of a culture that directly influences everyday behavior (Triandis, 1972; Wolf, 1964). However, “for interaction to succeed, participants must agree in their social situation definition” (Leodolter &Leodolter, 1976, p. 327). Research indicates that the use of certain language codes may influence how the situation and the communicator are perceived and interpreted (Bond, 1983).

Language codes. Research has indicated that individuals use codes (vitality of language or dialect) to accommodate the person with whom they are communicating (Gudykunst, Nishida, & Schmidt, 1989; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990). Chaika (1982) pointed out that people switch codes for emphasis or to see if a stranger belongs to the ingroup. The language or dialect that they select reinforces their social identity. Banks (1987) contended that code switching is linked to an ethnic identity in organizations. He argued “the boundary (e.g., the line separating) between marked (e.g., use of ethnic dialect) and unmarked (e.g., standard dialect) ethnic discourse is soft and permeable, while the boundary between low-and high-power positions in the organization is harder and less permeable” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 218). Within this structure of intercultural communication (language or dialect codes) there also exists the “domain of verbal and non verbal exchanges” (Forgas, 1996, p. 208).

Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior

Mehrabian (1996) pointed out that there is a distinction between verbal and vocal information. He suggested that the verbal information is usually positive, whereas, the vocal can often contradict the information transmitted verbally (p. 24). Too often, families react to the vocal transmissions of school officials, thereby experiencing further rejection and alienation from the school.

It is recognized that verbal behaviors are influenced by culture and are mostly explicit. Nonverbal behaviors are primarily the cultural patterns acquired throughout the socialization process. To better communicate with strangers a person must understand both cues of communication.

Verbal behavior. Giles' (1973) Communication Accommodation Theory introduced the concepts of convergence and divergence as strategies to signal interactants' attitudes toward each other. Convergence was identified as "changing one's linguistic (language, dialect, vocabulary, speech style) or paralinguistic behavior (tone of voice, speech rate, and so on)" (Gallois, Franklin-Stokes, Gile, & Coupland, 1996, p. 160) so that both partners are more intimately involved in communicating. Divergence was identified as when "speakers emphasize differences between their own and their partner's speech" (Gallois et al., p. 160). They argued that our cultural background affects how we respond to linguistic convergence by strangers.

Studies that research verbal behavior in language interaction build on previous research in this area, such as Giles and Powesland's (1975) similarity-interaction

theory (SAT) that argued convergence should increase attraction and divergence should inhibit it. From the framework of SAT, Giles and Johnson (1981) identified the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory. It proposed that “members of subordinate ethnic groups were more likely to retain their linguistic styles if they see language as an important dimension of their group, see their group boundaries as hard and closed, and see their group as having high ethnolinguistics vitality” (Gallois et al., 1996, p. 160).

Several studies have also identified the importance of the interactants’ perception of their communicative behavior as well as that of others (Beebe & Giles, 1984; Street & Giles, 1982; Thakerar, Giles, & Cheshire, 1982). Within the parameters of the SAT, Gudykunst & Hammer (1988) examined the influence of gender, ethnicity, and dyadic composition on interactive strategies (intent to interrogate and intent to self-disclose). They discovered that when “people contemplate a closer relationship with a conversational partner, they use uncertainty reduction techniques” (Kim & Gudykunst, 1996, p.161). Gudykunst (1996) stated “uncertainty reduction involves the creation of proactive predictions about others’ attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behavior, as well as retroactive explanations about others’ behavior” (p. 123). According to Gudykunst (1986), intercultural research indicates that the theory of uncertainty reduction is useful to explain communication between people from different cultures and interethnic communication in the United States.

The language behavior in intercultural encounters is influenced by various factors attributed to participants (i.e., ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background). “Understanding cultural and subcultural variations in the social meaning of verbal

behavior...is a crucial step toward a greater understanding of ourselves and the strangers we meet” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 222). This distinction allows us to decrease our anxiety, accept the “cultural reality” (Znaniecki, 1918) of others and predict behavior that will lead to a better understanding.

Nonverbal behavior. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) identified types of nonverbal behavior exhibited when communicating with strangers. These behaviors are indicative of communication styles between Black parents and education professionals and must be considered before engaging in dialogue. They include: physical appearance, the way one uses space (proxemics), the way people move their bodies (kinesic behavior), the way they use their voice (paralanguage), and the way they touch others and the degree to which they allow others to touch them.

Cultural differences in nonverbal behavior are expressed in a variety of ways. LaBare (1947) identified emotional expression and stated that it was culturally based. Birdshell (1963) agreed with this hypothesis dismissing Darwin’s (1872) contention that facial expression is biologically inherited. In considering the viewpoint of LaBare and Birdshell, Ekman (1972) espoused a neurocultural theory of facial expression. He posited that “cultural display rules are learned within our culture, and these rules tell us when to express emotions and when not to expose them” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 227).

Hofstede’s (1980) dimensions of cultural variability, which identified individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculine-femininity is evidence of cultural differences in the expression of emotions. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) noted that in Hofstede’s cultural variability “people in masculine

cultures tend to experience distress more than people in feminine culture” (p. 228), and “that people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures experience less joy from relationship than do people in low uncertainty avoidance cultures” (p. 229). These findings support the individualistic and collectivistic cultures espoused by Gudykunst and Kim (1997).

Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures

Similarities and differences exist in communicating between cultures that can be explained by Hofstede’s (1980) theoretical dimensions of cultural variability that identified individualism and collectivism. Although the dimensions give a general attitude of what to expect from cultural groups that represent individualistic or cultural tendencies, it is necessary to note that, “not all members of a culture share the general tendencies of their culture” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, pp. 54-55). This is due in part to the representation of “ingroups” that are important to their members within individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Even though ingroups may be the same in individualistic and collectivistic groups, the sphere of influence is different (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Individualistic cultures. According to Hofstede (1980), Americans are very individualistic with a tendency to use personal characteristics and achievements to define who they are. According to Martin and Nakayama (1997), individualism is one of the most important European values. It is demonstrated in the way parents

encourage children to leave home after completing high school and in the way older parents prefer to live on their own rather than with their children.

“Individualistic cultures assume individuals look primarily after their own interest and the interest of their immediate family” (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 133). In addition, “individualistic cultures have many specific ingroups (i.e., family, religion, professionals, social clubs, etc.) that might influence behavior in any particular social situation” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 57). This culture has a universalistic worldview and applies the same value standards to all.

Given that there are many ingroups, individual groups do not have much influence on behavior in the individualistic culture. Consequently, the ingroups’ sphere of influence affects behavior in very specific circumstances. In contrast, the sphere of influence is very general in collectivistic cultures, people in this culture “tend to be particularistic...applying different value standards for members of their ingroups and outgroups” (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 57). Additionally, the sphere of influence of ingroups in collectivistic cultures “affects behavior in many different aspects of a person’s life” (p. 57).

Collectivistic cultures. In Hofstede’s (1980) research studies of the Quality of Life concept the qualitative outcomes correlated with the dimension “individualism,” which

as a characteristic of culture, opposes collectivism.... Collectivist cultures assume that individuals—through birth and possibly later events—belong to one or more close ‘in-groups,’ from which they cannot detach themselves. The in-group (whether extended family, clan, or organization) protects the interest of its members, but in turn expects their personal loyalty. A

collectivist society is tightly integrated; an individualistic society is loosely integrated (p. 133, in G. Weaver)

The collectivistic culture tends to “emphasize families and loyalty to groups” (Martin & Nakayama, 1997, p. 250). It usually emphasizes goals, needs, and views of the ingroup rather than those of the individual (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), ingroups have different rank-orders of importance in collectivistic cultures often placing family ahead of all other ingroups. It is important to point out that “individualism-collectivism is expected to affect communication mainly through its influence on group identities and the differentiation between ingroup and outgroup communication” (p. 57).

All groups do not share the same cultural tendencies or behaviors. However, research has found that groups of AA children, compared with Euro-Americans, are more cooperative than competitive (Richmond & Weiner, 1993), and that the extended family structure is more visible for African Americans than for Euro-Americans (Hays & Mindel, 1973). These observations suggest that there is a need to consider the differences in styles of communicating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, it clearly supports the need for intercultural communication in schools, especially as parents with high school students in special education attempt to communicate the needs of the children and establish an intercultural understanding.

Issues of Understanding

Reaching an understanding in communication is realizing the individual role of the communicator at any particular level of communication (Singer, 1998). Gudykunst and Kim (1996) asserted, “Predictions we make when we communicate are aimed at reducing the uncertainty present whenever we communicate with strangers” (p. 32). To eliminate the uncertainty when communicating with strangers, each participant must know the “attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values and behaviors” (p. 32) of the other. AA parents and professionals in ARD meetings may exhibit feelings of anxiety when communicating with each other “based on negative expectations” (p. 36). Gudykunst and Kim pointed out that “when our anxiety is too high, we use only our stereotypes to predict other people’s behavior” (pp. 36-37). These are communication idiosyncrasies that create a divide for AA parents and special education professionals, especially when AA parents strive to advocate for their children with a disability.

How AA parents characterize their children, explain their performance, or express their own experience with schools is critical to students’ success (Anderson & Matthews, 2001; Comer, 1984; Harry, 1992b; Harry et al., 1992; Marion, 1981). To ensure that parents are actively engaged in the ARD process, Harry (1992b) proposed four parental roles:

1. parents as assessors,
2. parents as presenters of reports,
3. parents as policy makers, and
4. parents as advocates and peer supports (pp. 226-227, in Ford et al.).

These roles may empower AA parents with confidence to communicate their concern regarding placement and services for their high school student in special education.

High School Issues

Transition to high school can be very frustrating for AA parents as well as for their students with or without a disability (Reyes et al., 2000). Students are constantly confronted with peer pressure, peer acceptance, and day-to-day school requirements. As a result, students with disabilities will drop out at double the rate of students without disabilities (Benz & Halpern, 1987; Wagner, 1991). This retreat from schools is primarily due to social alienation from teachers and peers (Roessler, 1991).

Schools have focused attention on developing alternative curricular options for special education students (Smith & Luckasson, 1995) so that they may experience success in school and in their transition from school to work (Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1998). However, it is reported that students who drop out of high school special education programs participate less in postsecondary academic programs, independent living, and community life (Knitzer et al., 1990; Roessler, 1991; Wagner et al., 1993).

By the time students with disabilities reached the age of 16 (and when appropriate, by age 14), all students should have had an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) which “addresses the skills and the supportive services required in the future” (Smith & Luckasson, 1995, p. 116). IDEA (1990) reauthorized (1997) “placed transition planning in the IEP” (Parker & Szymanski, 1998, p. 149) that was to include, “when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages

(or both) before the student leaves the school setting” (p. 149). These plans were initiated to assist high school students with disabilities in being successful. Another action legislated to benefit students was the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. It provided states with federal assistance to develop and implement a statewide school-to-work transition system. However, in some cases high school students with disabilities did not always benefit from the proposed provisions.

Hanley et al. (1998) pointed out, “Special education is not preparing the vast majority of young adults with disabilities for productive work or independent living outcomes once they leave the shelters of home and school” (p. 169). This suggests minimal contact of special education professionals with students and families in productive dialogue that allows communication that is fluid and meaningful to decide upon agreed services and/or placement. Kim (1996) defined communication “as the process of using signs and symbols that elicit meanings in another person or persons for whatever intent” (p. 25). Professionals communicating with families of color must consider proper use of signs and symbols to elicit responses that encourage active participation.

Special educators servicing the needs of AA high school students should communicate their intent in a manner that is understood by the student and family. According to Kim (1996), “communication events may be classified by levels of interculturalness based on the extent to which the participants in the communication event share worldviews, normative patterns of beliefs and overt behaviors, code systems, and perceptions of their intent” (p. 27). This taxonomy of interculturalness establishes critical similarities and differences (homogeneity/heterogeneity) among participants in a given communication event that could provide special education

professionals with additional insight to work with high school students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Increasing Involvement of African American Parents

Every culture has its own definition of what constitutes a disability (Young & Westernoff, 1996) and a degree of tolerance for developmental patterns regarding their children (Anderson & Matthews, 2001; Harris, 1993; Harry, 1992b). Some cultures may have fatalistic views towards disabilities (Chan, 1986) or the disability may be perceived as a gift or blessing (Cheng, 1993). The interpretation of language use and behaviors may (Miller, 1984; Van Kleeck, 1994; Vasseur et al., 1996) influence the ways families communicate with professionals. Indeed, every family's personal mannerism should be considered and addressed by the professional and with family members to encourage full family participation in the ARD meetings for students with disabilities.

According to Sileo and Prater (1998), educators who are sensitive to the diverse needs of students with a disability, as well as to parents and family members can provide a quality parent-professional partnership. Morris et al. (1997) identified these educators as individuals who have acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and strategies necessary for effective interactions with students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, AA families have endured many hardships, such as

1. racial discrimination (Fordhan, 1996; Ogbu, 1978; Woodson, 1933),
2. bias labeling of their children (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Ford, 1992; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Sale & Carey, 1995), and
3. feelings of apprehension about schools based on their experiences (Comer, 1984; Delpit, 1988,1995; Fordham, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lindeman, 2001; Lightfoot, 1978; Marion, 1979, 1981; McWhorter, 2001; Ogbu, 1978).

Because of some AA parents' perceptions that they are not welcome in schools, and their shared experiences of not succeeding in schools, education professionals should consider alternative approaches to family participation so barriers can be eliminated, and communication between home and school can become consequential. If professionals are to support and understand AA families with special education students in high school, they will have to address the aforementioned issues and consider communicating with AA families in a manner that would establish and sustain trust and honesty.

An Intercultural Approach to Parent Involvement

Research of intercultural communication does not relate or analyze the perspectives of AA families in the ARD process, nor does it focus directly on issues pertaining to special education. This phenomenon directly correlates to findings of training international business leaders (Shaheen, 1996) cross-cultural management (Adler, 1996), and the field of social psychology (Hall, 1996; Shutter, 1982; Weaver, 1996a, 1996b). However, there is a body of literature that addresses the need for

intercultural communication in education and counseling (Gardner, 1996; Jackson, 1996; Tannen, 1996; Weaver, 1996a, 1996b).

Consequently, research studies of AA families and minority students with disabilities and the interaction of their families speak to the lack of or miscommunication between home and school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Harry, 1992; Harry, 1995). This addresses why there appears to be a need for another approach to involving AA families in schools, especially in special education.

Posture of Cultural Reciprocity

According to Rhinesmith (1970), culture affects values, which affect attitudes, which affect behavior, which in turn affects the culture itself. Although AA families may share culture, race, and ethnicity, there still exist individual differences within the culture (Adler, 1996). Each family group brings its own cultural norms and nuances predicated on life experiences. Special educators should be aware of the many differences that exist with AA families' culture when discussing the special needs of students (Anderson & Webb-Johnson, 1995; Harry, 1995; Marion, 1980). Special educators should also be aware of their own cultural interpretations (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) before attempting to communicate with AA families whose cultural norms and beliefs may not reflect those of the ARD committee members.

The "posture of cultural reciprocity" proposes that professionals engage in a self-reflective and dialogic process toward identifying both their own and the families' cultural norms (Harry et al., 1999; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). In suggesting

that an intercultural communication approach is needed to actively involve AA parents in the ARD process. The “posture of cultural reciprocity” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997, 1999) provides a unique opportunity for special educators to engage in meaningful shared dialogue because of an understanding of the influences that may deter full participation.

There are several influences that impact the process of communicating with strangers that may determine the extent of African Americans’ participation in ARD meetings. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) identified these influences as: cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental.

1. Understanding cultural influences may involve understanding “the behavior of people in a culture from their point of view” and/ or “to compare one culture with another” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 53) so that there is a clearer understanding of their differences.

2. Sociocultural influences may pertain to the influence of an individual’s membership in social groups, an individual’s social class identity, and the individual’s role relationship within a group (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Special educators, prior to the ARD meeting, should identify these behaviors of families, so that there is minimal miscommunication regarding placement of students.

3. To engage in meaningful dialogues with AA parents of high school students in special education, special educators should also be aware of psychocultural influences that may impede involvement in the ARD process. Often communication with strangers is based on expectations and predictions from “our intergroup attitudes and the stereotypes we hold” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 111).

Special educators should “engage in a self-reflective and dialogic process” (Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999) so that an intercultural communication approach to communicating with AA parents can be established. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) asserted, “The environment in which interaction occurs influences the communication taking place” (p. 140). In addition, “the physical environment—geography, climate, landscape, and architecture—influence our feelings, emotions, and attitudes, which in turn influences our communication behavior” (p. 162). Special educators must be aware of these physical influences to facilitate communicating with AA parents in ARD meetings.

Families of color realize that their involvement in schools is important to the social and educational success of their children (Comer, 1984; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Garcia, 1994; Harry, 1992b, Harry, 1995; Hilliard, 1991; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lindeman, 2001; Marion, 1980; Newman, 2000). The “posture of cultural reciprocity” (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) coupled with an understanding of the cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environment influences (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) in communicating with strangers could possibly result in intercultural communication strategies that encourage greater participation of AA parents in ARD meetings.

Conclusion

The American culture proclaims an equal opportunity for all to succeed; however, should one fail (i.e., communicating specific needs and desires), that person alone is responsible for his/her failures. “Consequently, the implicit theory of

schools...is that (Artiles & Trent, 1994, p. 427) ‘educational quality comes through uniformity’”(Cohen, 1989, p. 7). Therefore, it appears that AA families who do not fit the standards of the “model school system” and do not show signs of acculturation—taking on similarities, beliefs, and values of the wider society—forfeit the right to be heard and involved in the schooling of their children.

Clearly, faced with the African slave experience, the postslavery era, the migration from the south, compounded with striving for equal educational opportunities and meeting the challenges of an often biased and discriminatory system, AA families have endured a lifetime struggle that does not include uniformity. With the continuous effort of defining who they are and what they represent, AA families’ ideologies and idiosyncrasies are often misinterpreted. Artiles and Trent (1994) stated that “individuals shape each other’s responses during interactions, and their unique characteristics and idiosyncrasies mutually construct the nature and quality of interactions and the meanings attached to them” (p. 428). AA families with high school students in special education are often confronted with education professionals who do not understand the symbols and cues, nor the special “influences” that would direct the flow of meaningful communication.

Parent involvement in the high school setting has become a priority (Riley, 1999) as states strive for high academic standards and schools witness an increase in student violence. However, addressing the particular needs of AA families also needs to be a priority and becomes more evident as AA students continue to be placed disproportionately in special education and their families are not totally immersed in their schooling.

Research has identified opportunities for AA families to be heard and involved in schools (Banks, 1981; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Epstein, 1987; Fordham, 1996; Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Ladson-Billing, 1994; Lightfoot, 1978, 1980; McWhorter, 2001; Newman, 2000; Tatum, 1997). Unfortunately, education professionals do not always understand the voice in which they speak. They do not recognize the communication styles of men and women, often leading to misinterpretation and conflict between communicators (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

Intercultural communication is complex in that it relies on the exchange of meanings between strangers. These strangers may hold different attitudes, values, and varying degrees of status within their communities. This status can solely dictate the manner in which information is transmitted or received (Mehrabian, 1996). African American families who have students with disabilities want to participate in schools. However, consistent parent involvement and interaction are reliant upon educators seeking to understand the dynamics of culture and the many patterns of intercultural communication.

Education professionals who do not fully comprehend the socialization patterns (Comer, 1991; Leodolter & Leodolter, 1976; Lindeman, 2001; Singer, 1998; Stevenson, 1994); verbal and nonverbal cues (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Lindeman, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 1997; Singer, 1998); or the cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural, and environmental influences (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997) may not be prepared to communicate successfully with families from culturally diverse backgrounds to achieve meaningful parent involvement in the admission, review, and dismissal process.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking. (Patton, 1990, p. 24)

This study was positioned within a qualitative study designed to give AA parents with high school students in special education an opportunity to communicate their perceptions of intercultural communication processes in ARD meetings and its impact on parent involvement. Individual interviews were conducted with AA parents at their convenience. A focus group interview consisting of 8 parents, 2 of whom participated in the individual interviews, took place at an after-school program site in a Central Texas urban community that had a mandatory parent involvement component, which was highly representative of AA parents.

In qualitative methodology, the researcher seeks to obtain qualitative depictions that are at the core of a person's experience (Moore, 1997). This is well documented in research studies that pertain to the involvement of African American and minority parents in schools (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Harry, 1992; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lindeman, 2001; Lightfoot, 1983; Newman, 2000). The following question guided this qualitative research study: What do AA parents perceive the role of parent involvement to be when communicating the needs of their high school students with ARD committee members?

1. in curriculum
2. in social and emotional development
3. in student satisfaction

This chapter discusses the rationale for the use of a qualitative research method, as well as the methodological procedures and design used in the study.

Research Design

“Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument” (Bogden & Bilken, 1982, p. 27).

After reviewing various methodologies, the researcher selected qualitative research. These methods included the strategies of naturalistic inquiry, ethnography, and case study design. The following provide an overview of these approaches.

Naturalistic Inquiry

The strategy employed in this qualitative study was “naturalistic” (Lincoln & Guba, 1978) considering that the researcher did not attempt to manipulate the research setting (Patton, 1990). “The research setting is a naturally occurring event, program, community, relationship, or interaction that has no predetermined course established by and for the researcher” (Patton, 1990, p. 41). According to Patton, “the researcher is exploring—gathering data and beginning to allow patterns to emerge” (p. 178). From the real-world setting, a researcher is able to recount the unknown, unspoken perceptions of the participant. This can be readily captured in case studies and often described in ethnographies.

Ethnographic research has its roots in anthropology where anthropologists traditionally “studied nonliterate cultures in remote settings” (Patton, 1990, p.68). In education, the framework for anthropological studies is the concept of culture (Bogden & Bilken, 1992). For the purpose of this study, the task of ethnography is viewed as “thick description” allowing the researcher to describe the behavior of participants in detail from their perspective of recurring cultural interactions within their community and outside the community. The methods of participant observation and intensive fieldwork are the foundation of an ethnographic study. However, it is interpreting and applying the findings from a “cultural perspective” (Wolcott, 1980, p.59) that makes the approach unique.

In addition, the case study, by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study method focuses on holistic description and explanation. The epistemological orientation of most case study research is interpretive (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996), in which understanding the meaning of a process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory-generating mode of inquiry, rather than a deductive, hypothesis- or theory-testing mode (Merriam, 1998). Interpretive researchers start from the assumption that access to reality is through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, a series of interviews, including a focus group interview with AA parents who had high school students in special education, provided a valuable resource for gathering data. This technique allowed “for a more egalitarian and less exploitative dynamic than other methods” (Montell,

1999, p. 44). It created an atmosphere for uninhibited discussion of how AA perceived communication in ARD settings with professionals that did not necessarily share the same cultural values or racial background.

“Intercultural communication is a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Therefore, research questions that guided this study addressed the behaviors and experiences of AA parents in relation to communicating with special educators and service providers in ARD meetings. Although “the language out of which the questions are constructed is not bound or stable” and is “ambiguous from person to person” (Scheurich, 1995, p. 327), open-ended unstandardized interviews as well as the focus group interview presented an opportunity for participants’ own description of reality and interpretation of meaning.

Standardized and Unstandardized Approach

The standardized approach is more rigid and structured in nature in allowing interaction and/or opportunity for participants’ continuous perceptions to be realized. It does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview instrument was constructed. In addition, the standardized approach limits the use of alternative lines of questioning with different people depending on their particular experiences.

The unstandardized approach permits the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written and reduces the extent to which individual differences and circumstances could be taken into account. The

unstandardized interview allows for an exchange or clarification of meaning between participants as they responded to questions from the interviewer. This appeared to support Mischler's (1986) assertion that a standardized procedure is "largely illusory, because it is focused on assumptions that do not correspond to the essential nature of an interview as a form of discourse" (p.76).

For these reasons, the unstandardized approach was selected. This technique presented an opportunity for the participants to respond in the way in which they understood the question. It also offered a flexible and unobtrusive manner in which to collect data. Focus group interviewing that utilized unstandardized interviews allowed the researcher to explore a phenomenon that has not been thoroughly explained in qualitative research.

Instrumentation and Preparation for Data Collection

"In order to capture the participants 'in their own terms' one must learn their categories for rendering explicable and coherent the flux of raw reality. That, indeed, is the first principle of qualitative analysis" (Lofland, 1971, p. 7).

Multiple sources of evidence were used, including open in-depth interviews with parents, focus group interview, and document review. Open in-depth interviewing, also known as unstructured interviewing or qualitative interviewing (Patton, 1987), is a type of interview that allowed the researcher to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view when participating in ARD meetings. Open in-depth interviewing also set the climate so

that conversation was fluid and maintained as uninhibited talk with the interviewees. See Appendixes D and E.

The use of focus group interviewing afforded a small group of AA parents to gather for an intensive discussion of their experiences in ARD meetings and the intercultural communication processes, with the researcher as moderator. The researcher/moderator focused discussion on parent involvement and intercultural communication processes in accordance with a general outline of questions gathered from the initial single interviews. Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) suggested that the focused interview with a group of people ".will yield a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis both for designing systematic research on the situation in hand." (p. 135).

To validate and give voice to participants' observations and perceptions, this researcher reviewed several documents, which included the following:

1. The Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 that mandated procedural guidelines for services to students with disabilities and addressed parent involvement,
2. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA/IASA) that promoted equity and excellence for every student in Title I* programs and stressed a parent involvement compact, and
3. The IDEA parent's handbook that provided a framework on how to assist parents when communicating with special educators. The handbook consisted of sample letters and other communiqués that may be of assistance to parents with students in special education.

*Title I is a federally funded program created to deliver supplementary educational services to “at-risk” students.

Procedures

Purpose and Setting

In the study to identify AA perceptions of parental involvement and intercultural communication processes, an after-school/outreach program designed to provide extended educational and extracurricular activities to youth was identified. The youth of the after-school outreach program resided in a Central Texas urban community and the prerequisite for student participation was the mandatory involvement of parents.

Personal contact was made with the director by telephone and a date and time was set for the director and me to meet. At the meeting, the director shared information about the program, and I explained the proposed study. The director was interested in the study and arranged for me to meet with the founding director. The meeting took place the same afternoon in the office of the founding director where the proposed study was discussed. At the conclusion of the meeting, the founding director agreed to the research being conducted at the site with parents from the program. The director and I arranged for another meeting time to discuss how to distribute information to potential participants pertaining to the study. As we could not coordinate meeting times because of conflicting schedules, a telephone conversation ensued describing how parents might be contacted.

The director informed me of the mandatory parent meetings and suggested that would be the best way to contact potential participants. A letter was sent to the directors thanking them for agreeing to allow me to contact parents from their program site. The letter reiterated the purpose of the study and how potential parents would participate.

Field Procedures

Selecting Participants

A letter to the parents was drafted and submitted to the director for approval (see Appendix C). Once the director reviewed the letter, a copy was given to parents in attendance at the required parent meeting. Although I was unable to attend the meeting, the director informed the parents of the study and requested any interested parents to return the signed form to their office.

After several weeks, I received names of potential participants from the director. Parents who had expressed an interest in participating in the study were contacted by telephone. The parents were told of my doctoral candidacy in Multicultural Special Education and explained that the study would focus on AA parents' perceptions of participating in ARD meetings and their view of intercultural communication processes. See Appendix C.

Interviewing: Phase 1

Interviews have been identified as one of the most important sources of case study information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). Moreover, interviews have been defined as a “conversation with a purpose” (Dexter, 1970). Well-informed respondents provide insights into a current situation, provide shortcuts to prior history of the situation, and help the researcher identify other relevant sources of data (Yin, 1989).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that “a major advantage of the interview is that it permits the respondent to move back and forth in time—to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future, all without leaving a comfortable armchair” (p.273). Patton (1990) described the common characteristics in interviewing as persons being able to respond in their own words and to express their own personal perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also characterized interviews by their degree of structure, their degree of overtness, and the quality of the relationship between the interviewer and respondent. To insure quality interviews, respondents were fully informed of the purpose of the study. In addition, an effort to establish positive rapport was initiated by the reviewer prior to the interview.

Participants

Ten African American parents with high school students in special education agreed to be interviewed as a precursor to the focus group interview. Six females and 4 males participated in the interviews. Their educational backgrounds ranged from high school dropout to college completion.

The purpose of the single interviews was to test the suitability and clarity of the interview questions, prepare for the focus group and more importantly, gain insight from the participating interviewees on their perspective of intercultural communication. The parents were very candid and informed me that such a study was needed because they did not believe the schools really listened or understood them or their children's needs. The males interviewed indicated that the schools looked at their sons as behavior problems.

One of the male interviewees stood approximately 5'9" and weighed about 275 pounds. A high school dropout, he sported a "jerri curl" hairdo and was missing a few front teeth. He was dark-complexioned and called "Skillet" by his friends. When asked "what reactions would I have observed from the ARD committee members as he participated in an ARD meeting?" he responded, "Sometimes they would feel uneasy because, sometimes people just look at me and they feel uneasy. Particularly people of a different color, and I got to get through that. Um... a lot of nervousness." However, all of the participants hoped they could make a difference in what occurred during ARD meetings, such as how ARD members talked to them and about their children and how relations could be established between parents and members of the ARD committee.

The interviews took place at various locations. Two of the participants agreed to the interview at work; three interviews were conducted by telephone; the others were conducted over lunch. All interviews were audio taped.

Phase I of the study tested the procedures to be followed and the logistics of the process for the focus group interview. Field packet materials were prepared (Miles & Huberman, 1985). These included a consent form for the interviewee, tape

recorder for recording all interviews (including extra batteries) and office supplies (pens, pencils, and index cards).

As a result of the single interviews with parents in Phase 1, I was able to clarify questions that appeared to be ambiguous. For example, in the original protocol, participants were asked: If I had been at an ARD meeting with you, what experiences would I observe you having? When you walk into an ARD meeting, what do you see? These questions were deleted and reworded before they were presented to the focus group.

Most important, Phase 1 of the study reaffirmed my assumption that many AA parents were not necessarily comfortable in the ARD setting or with ARD members, and that ARD committee members did not recognize AA parents' "ways of knowing". This seemed to me to be due in part to school climate and the lack of intercultural communication processes within the ARD meeting. For example, a participant in the single interview who was an administrator and served as an ARD member stated, "most of the parents did not have a 'good taste' of school." "They feel intimidated because they are in a group with a bunch of professionals and here is a parent who maybe didn't finish high school."

Even though she shared the same cultural and ethnic background as many of the parents attending the ARD meetings, Mrs. J stated,

They feel as though I am out to get them [and] they won't look at me. They always want to say, well, you think you're better than us. It's nothing like this. I never try to portray anything like that. I am there to help that child.

Mrs. J. acknowledged, "We need more sensitivity training for teachers and administrators." She continued by stating, "Our teachers and administrators and parents are not aware enough of the diversity that we are seeing in our school."

Single Interview Criteria

Parents were willing to answer questions to see if they met the criteria for single interview participation. The questions were brief and addressed whether the parent had a high school student(s) in special education, the level of parents' education, and whether the parent had participated in ARD meetings. Those who did not meet the criteria were willing to share names of other parents who had students in special education. I contacted the selected participants to schedule an interview. A time and location convenient for the participants were selected. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour, and all were audio taped. A professional transcriber transcribed the interview tapes. The initial interviews took place over a one-year period.

Table 1

Single Interview Participants

| Participants | *Students in special education | *Attended ARD meetings | Parent's education |
|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Female | X | X | College |
| Female | X | X | High school |
| Female 3 | X | X | High school |
| Female | X | X | High school dropout |
| Female | X | X | GED |
| Female | X | X | College |
| Male 1 | X | X | College |
| Male 2 | X | X | High school dropout |
| Male 3 | X | X | High school |
| Male 4 | X | X | High school |

□Researcher obtained information in casual conversation

Focus Group Interviewing: Phase 2

Focus groups are a standard tool in marketing research (Montell, 1999). For many years social scientists have ignored them, but recently there has been a surge of interest in their scientific application (Krueger, 1988; Lunt & Livingston, 1996; Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Morgan, 1988, 1993, 1996). Focus group interviewing is

an interactive method of conducting qualitative research (Brotherson, 1994). Qualitative research methods may include life histories, ethnographies, case studies, and focus group interviews (Bogden & Bilken, 1992; Glesne & Peskin, 1992; Patton, 1990).

In this study focus groups provided a unique way to examine how African American parents with high school students in special education perceived the intercultural communication processes in the ARD meeting. The interactive focus group interview led to understanding attitudes, behaviors, and contexts from many points of view (Patton, 1990). These interviews provided a means to examine the changing values of families and school professionals, which can often be difficult to measure (Brotherson, 1994).

Focus groups are basically group interviews; however, there is a significant difference—“they capitalize on group interactions to gain data and insights that would otherwise be less attainable” (Brotherson, p. 103). In addition, group interviews are designed to elicit multiple perspectives and are best suited to address questions that inform or assess policy and practice (Brotherson, & Goldstein, 1992). Although focus groups are “presented as a single method of qualitative study” (Brotherson, p. 3), they are always used in conjunction with other strategies, which include (a) triangulating data, the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on understanding of the phenomenon; and (b) conducting member checks of data, a recursive process of taking knowledge learned back to respondents for discussion and verification (Guba, 1981; Patton, 1990).

A criticism of unstandardized interviews is that they fail to provide data that can be objective or compared across individuals. However, Mischeler (1986)

contended that in the use of standardized questions, researchers make an implicit and faulty assumption that every respondent understands the question in the same way. He also stated that decontextualized responses lack intrinsic meaning. Mischler's position is that researchers can best understand human experience by allowing individuals to tell their own stories with little interruption.

Focus Group Participants

The participants were selected for the study using purposeful sampling. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain insight" (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). Consequently, participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) They had participated in ARD meetings, (b) they had high school students in special education programs, (c) they were from economically diverse backgrounds, (d) they were African American or of African American descent, and (e) they lived and/or worked in an urban community.

The participants (4 females and 4 males) were between the ages of 25 and 55. The selected parents were active participants in their high school student's education. One of the parents was an administrator at a local high school. Another was a community activist, 2 were employed by the local city municipality, 2 were first-time college students, one was unemployed, and the other a grandparent.

Each parent faced one of the following challenges with their children: learning disabilities, attention deficit /hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), spastic quadriplegia, and cerebral palsy. All of the participants were familiar with the ARD process.

Table 2

Focus Group Interview Participants

| Participants | Age | Occupation | Education | Number of children | Ethnicity |
|--------------|-------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------|
| Cowboy | 46-55 | Cowboy | College | 2 | AA |
| Shariyf | 46-55 | Community activist | High school | 4 | AA descent |
| Blackjack | 26-35 | Sanitation collector | High school | 3 | AA |
| Harold | 36-45 | Unemployed | High school | 3 | AA |
| Mary | 36-45 | Student/ Receptionist | High school | 2 | AA |
| Frances | 46-55 | Librarian | College | 2 | AA |
| Karina | 25-35 | Student | High school | 3 | AA |
| Sylvia | 46-55 | Grandmom | High school | 5 | AA descent |

Note. AA = African American.

Focus Group Interview

In April 2000, the focus group interview took place. Participants in the focus group were comprised of parents from the after school/outreach program, parents who were referred by individuals in the special education community, and by individuals who were aware of the researcher's study. Prior to and at the end of the focus group interview, I stressed that the intent of the study was to give the participants an

opportunity to express their perceptions of ARD meetings and the intercultural communication processes.

The length of the interview was approximately 75 minutes and was tape-recorded using a cassette recorder and 90-minute audiotape to ensure accurate data collection. Each participant understood that they could withdraw from the study at anytime and that their decision would not affect any current or future relations with The University of Texas at Austin. They each acknowledged their consent and signed a consent form.

Focus Group Setting

The focus group interview took place at the center of a community outreach/after-school program. The new two-level building is located east of the interstate highway, where many neighborhoods are undergoing gentrification. The building was erected by the city to accommodate offices for other programs that offer services to assist the east-side residents, as well as the city at large. Nestled in the shadows of the downtown high-rises, the building backs up to grounds that are nicely manicured; picnic tables that sprinkle the back lawn; and huge hovering trees that give shade from the sweltering Texas summer heat.

The building has a unique architectural design; the inside gives the illusion of an art gallery rather than a building housing different offices. Lining the walls are paintings by local African American and Latino artists depicting life and passion in their community. The paintings are also of individuals who have made significant contributions to the community. Vibrant murals of children playing and events that

have occurred are all part of this upper level, including the encased glass tables containing documented history of this east-side community.

As one circles the floor of the building absorbing the local history, one comes across steps that spiral to the lower level. At the foot of the steps is a life-size painting of the founder of the outreach/after-school program and an equally large painting of Huey Newton. It is rumored that the founding director was a member of the Black Panther Party. In the early 1970s, he organized the first free breakfast program for children residing in this Central Texas city. The outreach /after-school program is his perseverance realized!

A few feet away from the spiral stairway is the room where I met with the focus group participants. The meeting rooms/classrooms can be reached from the upper level or by entering from the back of the building. I did not realize this would cause confusion until participants began to arrive. I had placed a sign on the front door indicating the location of the focus group meeting but not on the back door!

One of the participants, a woman, had parked her car in the back of the building and had to walk up a hill to the front of the building. The sign that I had posted on the front door had fallen away and she had trouble locating the room. When she did reach the room she was a bit agitated. Fortunately, there was someone there that she recognized and an animated conversation ensued while they snacked on finger foods.

I provided refreshments for the participants which included deli sandwiches purchased from the neighborhood grocery, canned drinks, bottled water, tortilla chips, and salsa. Wanting to encourage a relaxed atmosphere, I had covered one of the oblong tables with a picnic table cover and arranged the refreshments so that

everyone could eat and interact with one another. Although the room was cluttered, with overflowing boxes and computers lining the walls, it did not appear to distract the participants from their conversations. They had arrived between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m., and several of the parents knew each other from the outreach/after-school program. Two of the individuals had participated in the single interviews. In addition, to the surprise of the scribe who assisted with the interview, the scribe had been the caseworker for the adopted sons of parents participating in the focus group, thereby, establishing further trustworthiness for me as the researcher.

Another parent, “Cowboy”—wearing a large cowboy hat and scuffed cowboy boots—was recognized as having participated as a Buffalo Soldier in the Juneteenth parade. Cowboy’s wife, dressed in jeans and cowboy boots, was also present. I had seen them ride their horses in the parade at the Juneteenth celebration. As this is a recognized and established event in the Black community, other participants also recognized the “celebrities.”

The Juneteenth parade is held annually on the east side of town, celebrating the emancipation of slaves in Texas. It is a festive day attended by many of the residents of the community and the city at large. Parade participants include: the Buffalo Soldiers riders, Black cowboys, high school bands, fire department, police department, low-riders, community organizations, city representatives, and many others. The parade begins on Martin Luther King Boulevard and ends at a local east-side park where activities have been planned for this special day.

The room where we were met with the focus group was very spacious. It was filled with tables, student desks, chairs, computers, and a blackboard lined one side of the classroom wall. The classroom was used to train neighborhood children to

become proficient on the computer, for after-school tutorials and summer classes, and also served as an auxiliary classroom for students attending a Charter School where students outnumbered available classrooms. Students' written work, computer printouts, and drawings were displayed on the walls, door, blackboard, and windows. In addition, the students had a spacious back yard where they could spend time playing and learning or sitting under one of the many towering trees.

While the parents socialized, the chairs were arranged in a semi-circle formation, and the tape recorder and tape rechecked. The tape-recorder cord was too short to reach the electrical outlet but fortunately an extension cord was available. The tape recorder was placed on a folding table, and the focus group interviewing began.

Immediately following the interview, I reviewed impressions of the interview and the setting in a notebook as suggested by Bogden and Bilken (1992). A scribe who took notes during the interview and recorded any observations assisted in this review. The tape of the session was given to a professional transcriber who was very proficient in including all features of the interview, including laughter, pauses, sighs, and background noises.

Protocol Development

Yin (1989) recommended developing and using a strategy to increase the reliability of a case study as well as guiding the investigator in carrying out the research. A protocol contains the general guidelines and procedures that will be followed in the study and is essential if multiple case design is being used. Yin's

guidelines for case study protocol included an overview of the study (communicate the purpose and setting for the study), field procedures (emphasizes major tasks in collecting data), case study questions, and a guide for the case study report (basic outline for the case study report).

Phase 1 resulted in the opportunity to utilize a naturalistic inquiry, to employ focus group interviewing that capitalized on group interactions, and to do a case study which allowed for focus group participants' shared understanding of communication processes and its impact on parent involvement.

Remuneration

To solicit active involvement of potential focus group participants, interviewees received a monetary stipend for their participation. Although Siedman (1991) warned, "Anything more than a token payment would seriously threaten to bias the potential participants' motivation for taking part in the study," he conceded a flipside to the issue (Seidman, 1991, pp. 52-53). He cited Patai's (1987) view of interviewers as expropriators of participants' words for their own exploitive purposes (Moore, 1997). Weighing both points of contention, I believed payment was warranted. Although the economic level of participants varied—to provide for one and not all would have invalidated my integrity and intention. A stipend, therefore, was a way to compensate participants for their time and to validate their expertise.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

One of the most difficult aspects of naturalistic inquiry is managing the enormous amount of data accumulated through case-study research. Patton (1990) identified the challenges as being the need to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed.

Although Patton described data analysis as one of the culminating activities of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding theory and the emergent structure of later data collecting phases (p. 242). Miles and Huberman (1984) shared this view as well. They described data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These three activities form an interactive cyclical process.

Triangulation of data was used in this study, permitting the researcher to “combine dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit” (Merriam, p. 69). Denzin (1970) suggested that with the use of multiple methods “observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies” (p. 308). Yin (1989) identified a major strength of case study data collection as being the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies.

As the study unfolds and particular pieces of information come to life, steps should be taken to validate each against at least one other source or a second

method. No single item of information should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated. (p. 283)

The researcher is the key instrument for data collection (Bogden & Bilken, 1982). Adler and Adler (1987) posited, “We are the research instrument” (p. 87). Patton (1990) also identified the preponderantly used instrument in qualitative study as the researcher.

After reviewing the transcribed tapes, the scribe’s notes, and listening to the recorded tapes, similar messages appeared to emanate from the participants’ voices in regards to interacting with special education professionals and school personnel. With the use of varied colored pencils, it was possible to highlight these significant recurring messages, which evolved into identified themes. This technique is described as using content analysis and narrative analysis

Narrative analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) involves deconstructing stories in search of a cause-and-effect relationship. Parents had constantly referred to the negative or uncomfortable feelings they experienced participating in the ARD meetings. Although these feelings did not cause them to abandon the meetings, it revealed that even though they were supportive of their students and were actively involved in schools, the ARD process was intimidating, and the attitudes of ARD members appeared to be indifferent towards parents’ participation and perceptions.

Trustworthiness

A primary factor in ensuring the trustworthiness of results from a qualitative field study is the preparation of the human instrument for research. Yin (1989) provided a format for such research:

To help prepare an investigation to do a high quality case study, intensive training should be planned, a case study protocol developed and refined, and a pilot study conducted. These procedures are especially desirable if the research is based on multiple-case design or involve multiple investigators (or both). (p. 61)

Patton (1990) stated, "Training to become a skilled observer is no less rigorous process than the training necessary to become a skilled statistician. Both require training, practice and preparation" (p. 201). The issue of trustworthiness must be addressed in naturalistic or qualitative studies. The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability must be applied as the equivalents for the conventional terms of "internal validity," "external validity," "reliability," and "objectivity" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

A major criterion of trustworthiness is credibility. Credibility is the operational criteria for the internal validity concept, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). The goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was operated in such a manner as to assure that the subject was adequately identified and described (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). According to Brotherson (1994), "Credibility addresses the issue of

congruence between the constructed realities of the focus group participants and those realities represented by the researchers and attributed to the participants” (p. 103).

Several activities were used to increase the probability that credible findings were produced. These activities included prolonged engagement (scope), persistent observation (depth), and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My follow-up interviews demonstrated prolonged engagement, and numerous telephone calls reflected persistent observation. The interview data and member checks supplied additional credibility for the study.

It is important to note that I relied on the participants’ “constructed realities” and was careful not to impart the constructed realities that I held as it related to special education, intercultural communication, and parent involvement.

Triangulation is a powerful solution to the problem of relying too much on any single data source or method, thereby undermining the credibility or validity of the findings (Patton, 1990). Using a combination of data types increases the validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1978).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other situations, or for the purpose of this study, how focus group interviewing provides information about the general phenomenon (Brotherson, p. 106). Patton (1990) made the point that while qualitative methods may produce a wealth of

detailed information, the generalizability of the study is reduced because of the small number of cases and people involved.

Therefore, naturalistic inquiry must be supported by the thick description generated by data collection at each site (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The descriptions will enable another concerned researcher interested in making application or a transfer to decide whether a transfer is appropriate.

To establish whether the data collected by the researcher has transferability, another researcher might consider developing surveys or extrapolations (Patton, 1990) and present them to other participants with similar experiences.

Dependability

“Since there is no validity without reliability or, as stated in qualitative studies no credibility without dependability, a demonstration of credibility is sufficient to establish the latter” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Dependability was established based on the activities outlined for credibility: the use of overlapping methods, triangulation, and the use of an audit trail of the process as well as the end product and supporting documentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail consisted of member checks and individuals with expertise in the area of special education and parent involvement to serve as readers of the collected data. In addition, the researcher established trustworthiness with the interviewees by being a good listener and not by being an active participant.

Confirmability

The major technique for establishing confirmability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the confirmability audit. Therefore, an audit trail was established by describing how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 1988).

Limitations

Several limitations are inherent in qualitative research in addition to those identified in this study. The first limitation concerns generalizability of the findings. Generalizability refers to the ability to generalize or transfer the use of qualitative findings to other populations, settings, and contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Although I cannot ensure transferability for other investigators, it is the responsibility of a researcher to utilize strategies (e.g., thick descriptions, purposive sampling) to assist in the determination of generalizability.

The second limitation pertains to researcher and participant bias. The biases of the participants “are subject to distortions due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and lack of awareness” (Patton, 1990, p. 245). The biases of the researcher are also contingent on the distortions described by Patton and the perceptions that are brought to the study by the researcher.

The third limitation concerns the lack of involvement in schools of AA parents with students in special education (Harry, 1992a, 1992b; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Marion, 1980). Their perspective focuses on the limited communication that transfers from home to school to promote parent involvement.

Another limitation to the study is the effect of having an “outsider” probing the experiences of an “insider,” which involves the possibility of the “outsider” affecting the data being gathered in “unknown ways” (Patton, 1990, p. 244). Finally, the researcher as a human instrument becomes a limitation to the study. Although peer reviewers reviewed the manuscripts, the ultimate interpretation of the study rests with the researcher. Therefore, every safeguard to ensure trustworthiness was crucial.

Delimitation

The delimitation of the study was the criteria set for parent participation. Parent participation consisted of these criteria: (a) They had participated in ARD meetings, (b) they had high school students in special education programs, (c) they were from economically diverse backgrounds, (d) they were African American or of AA descent, (5) they lived and/or worked in an urban community.

Summary

Little or no combined research describes intercultural communication processes and the impact on the involvement of AA parents with high school students in special education and their perceptions of communicating with educators during the ARD meetings. The findings from this study may serve to strengthen parental involvement initiatives with the creation of innovative pre-service teacher training that utilizes intercultural communication processes, in-service training for teachers and administrators, and parent communication workshops that focus on intercultural communication processes.

This chapter addressed methodological procedures in investigating the perceptions of AA parents when communicating with ARD committee members during the ARD meeting. How parents' perceptions of ARD committee members and ARD meetings influenced parent involvement was also under investigation. As a result of the aforementioned procedures, this researcher was in a position to discuss how AA parents perceived their interaction with educators, the implications for utilizing intercultural communication, and the importance of cultural reciprocity in the ARD setting by addressing the two research questions under study.

Chapter 4

Interviews and Emergent Issues

Introduction

To involve AA parents with high school students in special education classes is a continuous challenge for special educators. The issue of utilizing intercultural communication processes during the ARD meetings appears to be a strategy not fully considered by members of ARD committees. Researchers agree that having meaningful dialogue with families of color is essential to students' success in schools (Marion, 1979; Harry, 1992a; Harry & Kalp, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McAdoo, 1999; Manning & Lee, 2000; Lindeman, 2001). Special educators and service providers must communicate with these families in a manner that acknowledges and supports their individual perceptions and “ways of knowing.”

This chapter focuses on the study's findings as a result of the data obtained from individual interviews and the focus group interview of AA parents with high school students in special education. The findings from these interviews are based on the research question related to the study:

1. What do AA parents perceive the role of parent involvement to be in the following areas when communicating with ARD committee members about the needs of their high school students:
 - (a) curriculum,
 - (b) social and emotional development, and
 - (c) student satisfaction?

Parents exhibit many emotions when discussing their children and the schools they attend, more so, when that child has a disability and is receiving special services. The parents in the single interview group, as well as the focus group, expressed how they felt and were made to feel during encounters with educators.

Interviews of African American Parents and Emergent Themes

In the review of collating responses from the single interviews and the focus group participants, several themes emerged. They included resiliency, self-assurance, facilitation, dissatisfaction, and culturally void perceptions of professionals. These emergent themes are described below and are highlighted in the discussion of the participants.

The participants' names are pseudonyms; any depiction to known individuals is truly coincidental, although there may be similarities to real persons' experiences that would support the findings of this study

Emergent Theme: Resiliency

Although parents did not always have favorable interactions with ARD committee members, they continuously supported their children by attending meetings and by being visible at school conferences, talking with teachers, and attending various school functions. Even though their perceptions of interacting with school officials were sometimes described as negative; the parents persevered and relentlessly returned to the ARD meetings.

These AA parents were faced with adversity (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993), yet were able to draw on inner strength in order to be advocates for their children. According to Wolin and Wolin (1993), “the capacity to rise above adversity by developing skills” that “ripens into lasting strengths or aspects of the survivor’s self” (p. 3) were considered resiliencies. These qualities are identified as follows:

1. Insight: asking tough questions and giving honest answers.
2. Independence: drawing boundaries between yourself and troubled parents; keeping emotional and physical distance while satisfying the demands of your conscience.
3. Relationships: building intimate and fulfilling ties to other people that balance a mature regard to your own needs with empathy and the capacity to give to someone else.
4. Initiative: taking charge of problems; exerting control; a taste for stretching and testing yourself in demanding tasks.
5. Creativity: imposing order, beauty, and purpose on the chaos of your troubling experiences and painful feelings.
6. Humor: finding the comic in the tragic.
7. Morality: having an informed conscience that extends your wish for a good personal life to all humankind.

The parents in attendance in the ARD meetings had relied upon some of the outlined qualities of “resiliencies” to become survivors. Sharyf and Cowboys’ descriptions of meeting with professionals epitomize resiliency.

Sharyf and Resiliency

“We were demanding for services.”

“I’ll be there for you and he started getting better.”

“And so, the position of being like prosecuted, I went to the position of being the defense attorney.”

“We took a reporter to report what the others were saying.”

Sharyf was a parent whose son had attended the after school/outreach program. The coordinator of the program had introduced me to him on one of my visits to the center when I had been recruiting parents for the study. He was a community activist and had been visible in the community since the early 1970s. I had seen him on several occasions and he was always dressed in T-shirts and dungarees. That summer day was no exception; he had on a T-shirt with the picture of Cesar Chavez with a raised fist. To me, the wearing of that T-shirt indicated the commitment of his activism in the community.

Sharyf was a slender, 5’9” middle-aged man, with a copper-toned complexion and a bushy mustache. He wore black-rimmed glasses and had an earring in his right ear. The battle scars from an encounter with police while supporting the demands of the community “back in the day” had been marked by his intricately carved walking stick. I had planned to talk with him about being “back in the day,” but knew our time was limited before his next meeting. Sharyf’s busy schedule continuously placed him at many city council meetings, school board meetings, and meetings with the elders in the community, so it was fortunate for me to be able to catch up with him.

The son of an African-American father and a Mexican-American mother, Sharyf was married to a Black woman. Sharyf was a soft-spoken, charismatic, articulate man and shared the heritage of both his parents. He was more than willing to be interviewed. He spoke of the inequities he had experienced at his son's school and, in his opinion, the unwillingness of a district to provide an equitable education for the students in his local community. We agreed to meet for lunch at a local restaurant.

A few weeks after our initial meeting, we met at the Mexican restaurant in the community. While we sat at the table, people stopped by to greet him, and he introduced me as the "researcher." The waitress who came over to take our order only asked for mine, already aware of Sharyf's lunch menu. I later learned that his uncle owned the restaurant.

Although we had not sat in the main dining area, we could still hear the clatter of dishes, the opening and closing of doors as patrons entered and exited the restaurant. The lingering aroma of mouth-watering carne guisada, tortilla soup, warm tortillas chips, enchiladas, black beans and other Mexican dishes filled the corners of the restaurant. We were also serenaded by Tejano music playing on the jukebox in the background.

I wanted to reschedule that meeting because the setting had seemed like a big distraction, but we had already missed one another because of a mix-up with the location of the restaurant, and I did not want to chance losing the interview. As we waited for the waitress to return with our lunch, I turned the recorder on to begin our interview.

Sharyf began the conversation by telling me that Omar was not his biological son, “See, but there was this relationship with him... He [son] told me, ‘Dad, I really need for you to come and talk for me’.”

Sharyf told me of his and his wife’s active and continuous involvement in their children’s school education as well as after-school activities. “We were taking care of business.” He also told me of the accusations of Omar’s alleged involvement in a gang. “They ID’d him as a gang member, even though he was not.” It was his opinion that was why the school did not want to provide Omar with special education services. The school administrators believed “that he was a trouble-making kid.”

Sharyf’s persistence as an advocate for his son along with the assistance of a counselor and teacher (“we were demanding for services”) eventually had resulted in Omar’s receiving additional special education services. However, Sharyf said, “[ARD meetings] would turn into arguments...they [ARD committee] did not want to mainstream him to other courses...they were very defensive all the time...We took a reporter to report what the others were saying.”

I was so enthralled with Sharyf’s conversation that I barely noticed when the waitress brought the food to the table. His voice was intense yet gentle and I hung onto his every word and gesture, at times forgetting the scripted questions, allowing him to share his experiences and perceptions. He told me, “Basically the ARD was a bullshit session...they [had] ID’d him [son] as a gang member, even though he was not. Just because he dressed and he had a tag, a little tag.”

The tagging reference needed clarification so Sharyf elaborated,

It was an incident where some kids had tagged [identified signature] one of the buildings. [It was on] a portable building using his tag. We went over and

over it, and he denied that he did it, and he was honest...and so, I backed him up. I asked them [school administrators] to prove it.

Sharyf was committed to supporting his son and believed that parents should be involved in ARD meetings, however, “parents should be educated first”. His attitude was that “any parent of any child with special education, needs to go for some training...to understand what an ARD meeting is. What ...an IEP is.” He also believed that cultural diversity had an impact on parents involvement in the ARD process.

For example, in the Mexican-American community, we have not been used to questioning because we always bow to authorities...we never question the authorities. If you do it, you get fired or something negative happens. So based on that...you know...We tend not to question the educators.

If what Sharyf expressed was typical of the attitude in the community in which he lived, I wanted to know if intercultural communication would make a difference in connecting schools and families.

My opinion is that...if it can work for those that need it the most, in this case...you know, the parents and the kids. Without it, I don't think the kids are really going to get the opportunity, the maximum opportunity that they deserve.

To receive the “maximum opportunity” from decisions made by ARD committees, parents have to communicate what there expectations are for their children. I had asked Sharyf how he felt about communicating with professionals in an ARD meeting. I had been somewhat surprised by his response: “It's real intimidating, even for someone that is aware.”

This conversation continued long past the lunch hour. Sharyf interviewed with the insight of an informed and involved parent. I asked him to participate in the focus

group interview. He agreed. I could barely wait to review the tape to see if it had clearly captured all of his words above the chatter of the restaurant.

Blackjack and Resiliency

“I feel like the process was a little rushed. Maybe I feel like they was rushing...to me.”

“I knew they had all the answers and I that is...I guess the downside of it.”

“I have friends who are educators...special educators.”

“I was able to ask my questions, but I did feel a little rushed.”

Blackjack was an African American man whose name might conjure up thought-provoking images. However, he was a very gentle, charming, and intelligent sanitation engineer who received a high school diploma from the same school his son attended. He was an avid reader of books by African and African American authors. He asked me if I had heard of Chinua Achebe, and I told him that I had. I suggested that maybe at a later time we could discuss some of the books we shared in common. However, at that point, I wanted to know how he had come about the name “Blackjack.”

He told me of the Friday and Saturday night neighborhood card games often played at his grandmother’s house. As a toddler, he had watched his grandmother play cards and heard her say “Blackjack” as she had slapped down the winning card. He had actually repeated her antics, so his grandmother had begun to call him Blackjack. The name had stuck, and as in most Black communities, had become his name.

Blackjack's son, Derrick, had been diagnosed as dyslexic and had been in special education since the first grade; at the time of the interview he was a sophomore in high school. Blackjack referred to the ARD meetings he had attended as a "professional environment"—"more like a doctor/patient kind of thing." He explained,

If you don't ask the questions, you don't get the answers...kind of deal. Like when you go to the doctor...you leave the doctor thinking...I should have asked that question.... I knew they [ARD members] had all the answers and that is...I guess the downside if it. But you wonder how you can get the answers out of them by asking the appropriate questions.

Blackjack had three children, two boys and a girl, and had always been involved in their education. He wanted them to graduate from high school and attend college. He attended as many school activities as possible and participated in the community center's summer program. Derrick was the oldest son and, according to Blackjack, a good athlete; he had played high school football. Blackjack, however, had always stressed to Derrick the importance of completing high school.

It was evident to me that Blackjack wanted the best for his son and was willing to communicate that to ARD members even though he had not sensed a receptive line of communication, as he had pointed out. "I think that communication has a tendency to deal with people looking for comfort and I think...that in the ARD meetings...there isn't a lot of comfort there."

I easily understood why an ARD committee would not have been ready for Blackjack; he was not the typical parent attending an ARD. He was assertive and not easily intimidated, although he stated, "If there is uneasiness, [it] is not knowing enough about the problem...my main thing was that I didn't want my son tracked.

That was the main thing.” Blackjack wanted the ARD committee “to arrange a way to make that happen.” He felt that if Derrick needed the services, he should have them “without him feeling isolated or not a part of the school.”

Blackjack had gathered a lot of information from his constant presence at his son’s school, his attendance at ARD meetings, and friends who had been educators. Because of his charismatic personality and global understanding of the world around him, Blackjack had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. From our conversation, I had the impression that he had used that to his benefit.

I have friends who are educators...special educators. And I asked around and talked to them about what I should expect and what kind of questions should I ask and what kind of responses should I anticipate receiving...that was a big help.

However, he later added,

There is some anxiety there....I could, even with the information I had, you would still at moments...still felt somewhat anxious with the interaction ...but a parent who does not have that information...I could see myself feeling very uncomfortable and basically just taking their word for whatever they said.

I wanted to know from Blackjack if communicating with “they” would include individuals from the same racial background as his. He replied,

I don’t think that would bother me, I think [it] is more how the interaction would have occurred. Because, sometimes, ethnicity or race does not play a part as much as affiliation does. So, if they [African Americans] are a part of the education system, I may see them more as part of that system than anything else.

Blackjack’s attitude and perception of interacting with the ARD committee was very deliberate and direct during our conversation. His value of education and his

“way of knowing” would certainly be invaluable for his children. I asked Blackjack to join the focus group interview. He agreed.

Cowboy and Resiliency

They [parents] need to be involved. Normally I try not to get involved, but as the father, I have to go. We adopted two children, and as a male, Black male...normally I was the only Black male involved. Even at other meetings, whether they be ARD meetings or other meetings. I just be sitting there.

“I don’t particularly think they identify with Justin or myself.”

“They immediately gave Justin the drums...(laugh) and Justin didn’t have a clue.”

Cowboy was an African American male standing approximately 6’1”. He was a handsome brown-skinned gentleman with a thick salt-and-pepper mustache. For a man who spent a lot of time in the outdoors; his skin appeared very smooth and wrinkle-free. His gait was not an indication of his age; he had the step of a 20-year-old, but with much more self-assurance. His demeanor immediately made the interviewer comfortable, even though I had to wait while he formulated his thoughts.

A quiet-spoken man, he proudly sported scuffed cowboy boots, a worn cowboy hat, and a black belt with a silver engraved buckle. He was a member of the Texas Buffalo Soldiers and participated in parades and rodeos. Originally from the northeastern part of the United States, he and his wife now lived in the country, where he bred and trained horses.

Karen, the director of the after-school program, who has known the family for many years, introduced Cowboy to me. I spoke with him over the phone and

explained the purpose of the study. He agreed to meet with me and said that we could talk over lunch at his home.

On a sunny Thursday afternoon, Karen and I went to visit Cowboy. As we entered the property, I noticed a posted sign: “horse crossing.” I felt as though I had traveled back in time to where “cowpokes,” cattle, and rattlesnakes all co-existed. However, the faint honking of a car horn promptly reminded me of my surroundings.

Colorful blossoming wildflowers scented the air and landscaped the grounds that stretched to the doorsteps of Cowboy’s sprawling ranch home. We entered through the handsomely crafted wooden front door. I noticed that spurs hung above the inside doorframe as we stepped onto polished hardwood floors accented by multicolored handcrafted rugs that I later discovered were gifts from a Native American friend.

The home was tastefully decorated with a southwestern flair: warm colors, Native American and Mexican pottery. Paintings of buffalo soldiers, Black cowboys, and beautiful pictured scenes of natural landscapes canvassed the walls of this huge room.

Cowboy ushered us into the kitchen, where he had prepared a lunch of a bowl of soup and a peanut butter sandwich. He told us that this was his favorite daily lunch and offered us to share in his meal. We declined.

Cowboy and I sat at an old wooden table with wicker woven chair seats, and Karen sat on a stool at the kitchen counter. The kitchen was inviting and comfortable. Cowboy shared with me that before he lost the sight in his left eye he spent a lot of time in the kitchen cooking. We chatted about his cooking, his horses, and the home that he and his wife shared. The conversation eventually led to the topic at hand. I

explained my research topic, set the tape recorder, and began the interview while he ate from his bowl of canned soup.

Cowboy was a quiet man, so additional probing was needed to obtain detailed information. I had the impression that he would rather talk about horses or buffalo soldiers than his experience at an ARD meeting. He would sit and ponder my question before answering. Although my questions were open ended and required more than a yes or no response, Cowboy was more contemplative than expressive.

In my attempt to visualize what I would have heard at an ARD meeting with Cowboy, he told me in a slow drawl, "Introductions, who we are...people in attendance." With my additional probing, between slurps of his tomato soup and bites of peanut butter sandwich, he added, "Uhh...my son's teacher probably, the special education teacher, counselors who have been there, sometimes a nurse." He quizzically looked up at me; I nodded and continued by asking, "What would I have seen you do at this time?" Pensively, he slowly replied, "Probably listen and probably look around the table, and try to figure out where people are coming from. Types of answers I should give."

This was not an unusual response from Cowboy, but more of an indication of his personality. "Sometimes things are personal," he told me. I had received information about Cowboys' adopted sons (Kevin and Justin) and could understand why he might be closed mouth in talking to strangers. Both boys had been adopted by Cowboy and Frances when they were in elementary school; prior to that they had lived in foster homes and shelters. According to the State of Texas, the boys' birth parents were considered unfit to raise their three sons.

I had seen pictures of Kevin and Justin in the home of Cowboy and Frances as youngsters and teenagers. They were very handsome. Their younger brother had been adopted by his foster parents.

Since Kevin and Justin were in conservatorship of the State of Texas, both boys had been placed in special education. It seemed that Kevin had done well in school and had not really needed special education services. However, Justin, who had a club foot, had experienced academic failure, and was considered a discipline problem, did require assistance.

Cowboy would have liked to have had the ARD committee work more closely with his son and “to identify with Justin’s problems.” Instead, he was left with the impression that his “son is a trouble maker.” I wanted to know what he thought about the individuals in the ARD. He told me, “I don’t think I can identify with them...normally most of the people are White.

Since Cowboy had almost finished with his lunch, and the food had appeared to be his comfort zone, I wanted to get his perspective on cultural diversity and intercultural communication. He responded, “Well, I know what culture means, and I know what diversity means, and in terms with ARD...there was none.” In terms of intercultural communication, Cowboy’s response was classic and to the point. He stated, “Like at the ARD meetings, they are White people, and I’m Black...we have something in common with my son and their student. And a lot of times we incorporate forms (so) that they can identify with him.”

Through out the interview Cowboys’ mannerisms—shifting in the chair, short responses, the faraway look in his eyes—indicated to me that this was not an easy topic of discussion for him. We completed the interview and I asked Cowboy if he

and his wife (not present) would agree to participate in the focus group. He agreed to speak with her.

Within the next few days, I received a call from Cowboy that he and his wife would participate. I followed up his call with a letter thanking him for the interview and informing him when and where the focus group would meet. I looked forward to meeting the wife of this quiet-spoken, resilient man.

Emergent Theme: Self-Assurance

To walk into a room of strangers can be intimidating, which may cause anxiety when communicating with others who may not be empathetic or concerned about issues that are important to parents in an ARD meeting. Although parents indicated that they had experienced anxiety and were intimidated at the meetings, they had attended and had exhibited confidence.

Harold and Self-Assurance

“Sometimes they would feel uneasy because, sometimes people just look at me at me and they feel uneasy. Particularly people of a different color.”

“Skillet,” as he was known in the community center, had been actively involved with the program since its inception. He served as bus driver, cook, and multi-handyman and was the director’s right-hand man. Although he was a high school dropout, Skillet was very concerned about his children’s education and was available for ARD meetings with his son. However, he noticed the uneasiness among

the ARD committee: “Sometimes they would feel uneasy because, sometimes people just look at me at me and they feel uneasy. Particularly people of a different color.”

The uncomfortable feeling that Skillet seemed to give people only served to his benefit. It gave him added confidence to obtain the most beneficial education for his son. It did not appear that his intent was to have members of the educational forum dislike him or feel threatened by him, but it did seem to boost his self-confidence.

Skillet was not a tall man, standing at approximately 5’9”, but his weight of approximately 275 pounds would have some call him a big man. Although in the era of micro-braids and dreadlocks, Skillet maintained a jherri-curl, a hairstyle that had been very popular in the Black communities in the 1970s and early 1980s. Skillet was a boxer “back in the day,” which might explain the few missing front teeth, the readiness of others not to confront his particular style, or the uneasiness one might have in his presence.

The involvement of Skillet with the community center and the many people that he had met over the years had made him well aware of the “educational institution.” He told me that “few parents really understand the rules of the game as it relates to ARD meetings and so they go in with the idea of being instructed about what should happen with their children.” This was not the case with Skillet; his son had been labeled as learning disabled and had the support of his father ever since he had started school.

Charles, Skillet’s son, was a ninth grader. I had seen him at the center, and he was the “spitting image” of his father. Skillet told me that Charles played the trumpet and planned to try out for the marching school band.

I wanted to know about Skillet's experience in the ARD meeting. He explained, "I guess I was somewhat prepared, but I wasn't thoroughly prepared. Don't get me wrong. I guess I was a little bit more, I guess...knowledgeable about the process." As Skillet mentioned, his knowledge base had come from the many conversations and activities he had participated in over the years. However, having the information is not as useful, if there is not enough time to thoroughly have a dialogue with ARD committee members, "some of the folks are teachers themselves and they have been working all day long. Probably stressed out themselves and they are just ready to get home." Skillet looked at all sides of a situation. I asked him to participate in the focus group. He agreed.

Wanda and Self-Assurance

"I tell them what I believe something is or what I think. How they digest it is something else."

"I have never had any negative reactions from any of the teachers that have been with my daughter."

"I suggest that they (parents) go to the school and see what is going on in the classroom."

"I think in communication the land of ignorance burden them [Whites]."

Wanda was a divorced mother whose daughter had multiple sclerosis and suffered from mental retardation. She told me that she and her husband divorced a few years after Melissa was born. "He couldn't handle it," she said. Wanda was very

devoted to her daughter and believed that special educators needed to know more about how AA parents relate to their children with disabilities.

Wanda and I met on a Friday afternoon in the cafeteria across from the state building where she worked to have lunch and to conduct the interview. The aroma streaming from the kitchen into the cafeteria was of “soul food.” An African American woman who was legally blind owned the cafeteria-style business located in this state office building. The lunch menu usually consisted of collard greens, fried chicken, okra, rice, cornbread, and at least once a month, chittlins, also known as “Texas Caviar.” On this particular day, the menu included fried catfish, cornbread, and green beans with “fatback” (pork seasoning), which Wanda had for her lunch.

The interview was scheduled for 1:00 p.m., allowing for a more quiet time to talk. When we had reached the cafeteria there were still a number of people lounging around talking and eating. Adjacent to the cafeteria eating room was a small reading room for the employees of the building. It was the perfect space and it offered us an opportunity for uninterrupted conversation.

Inside the room were a small worn blue couch, an overstuffed armchair, and two wooden bookshelves containing books, magazines, and newspapers. Against the wall stood a table about the size of a card table; above the table was a window covered with sheer white curtains that looked out into the cafeteria eating area. We were not invisible to people in the dining area, but we did have privacy. As Wanda ordered her lunch, I set up the tape recorder.

Wanda was a statuesque woman with coal black hair that was twisted in a bun at the nape of her neck. She had a “beauty mark” on her left cheek below the eye and wore ruby red lipstick. She appeared “dressed up” for a Friday afternoon (most

businesses have casual Fridays) in her navy suit and white blouse that tied into a bow at the neck.

Wanda's attire was a little conservative. I had learned from her coworker that she loved to wear bright colors such as red, purple, and yellow. "Church clothes" was the description given to me in describing how Wanda came dressed for work. According to her coworker, everything that she would have on would match: her shoes, pantyhose, and handbag. Wanda commented to me on her attire, "You never know who may walk through the front door." She greeted many influential people from her desk outside of the Deputy Commissioner's office on a daily basis, and Wanda wouldn't dare be seen attired "unprofessionally."

Wanda had been employed with the same company since completing junior college over 30 years ago. She was looking forward to retiring next year to spend more time with her daughter Sandra. Her daughter would be eligible for a group home and she wanted the transition to be successful.

Between mouthfuls of catfish, Wanda and I talked about her experiences with the ARD committee and her involvement in school with Sandra. She informed me "some of the classrooms were not equipped, or not adapted to some of the children's needs." She was "not satisfied the way the system has implemented the handicapped or physically and mentally challenged into the system." When asked about individuals who participated in the ARD meetings, she replied, "They all live under the same umbrella...they stick together, I don't see them coming in and telling me a bunch of negative stuff, or even admitting to anything that they are doing."

Although Wanda had been involved with the special education system for many years, she had seen flaws in how they interacted with the children. "I think

some of the classrooms had babysitting tanks, holding tanks. Because they [students] are not getting the stimuli they need.” This could be because all parents had not been as visible as Wanda in seeing about the care of their children. Wanda stated, “I’ve never had any negative reactions from any of the teachers that have been with my daughter.” She encouraged parents to attend ARD meetings, “that is one way of staying abreast of what the child is doing.” She stated that parents should “visit their child even before the scheduled meetings.”

I listened very intently to Wanda’s conversation; often she dropped her head and fumbled with her napkin, possibly searching for the right words to describe her encounters at her daughter’s school. Although her interaction with ARD committee members had been very direct and to the point, it was obvious that she was concerned with what her daughter would face once transitioned from high school. “For instance, my daughter is never going to acquire the skills she needs to where she can earn a living or be able to go out and hold her own in the world.”

Wanda came across as a strong Black woman with no doubts about herself or the world she lived in.

I think we [Whites and Blacks] have a lot of similarities and we are opposite. But, some people in the White culture may not accept the fact that there may be some Black blood in them as well as we accept the fact that there may be some White blood in us.

Wanda’s dry sense of humor was captured in our conversation. The way in which one responds to a question in some southern Black communities may be considered cynical by strangers. I asked her thoughts on intercultural communication. In her dry sense of humor, she said, “I think in communication the land of ignorance

burdens them [Whites].” She continued that in communicating in an ARD meeting, “I have no problems because, whatever they discuss I feel I can discuss with them.”

Wanda really had no qualms about letting her voice be heard loud and clear. “I tell them what I believe something is or what I think. How they digest it is something else. I can’t control how they are going to react to it, but I’m not going to change my mind.” The culture and cultural values of ARD members had not impacted Wanda one way or the other. “If they are over 21, I’m not going to beat the bible...beat the drum and tell them that they should come over to my way of thinking. I’ll listen to any one’s point of view!”

I truly enjoyed my conversation with Wanda. She was not someone to take lightly when the situation directly impacted her daughter. She wanted the school personnel to view her involvement in the ARD meeting “as a concerned parent” and to “view it seriously!”

Wanda and I concluded our conversation, and I walked with her to the office building. Although we were very close to the end of her lunch break, she sashayed unhurriedly and we continued to chat. I thanked her for her time and she wished me well with my study, saying that she hoped she had been helpful.

Emergent Theme: Facilitation

To have a clear understanding of the ARD process, parents have to be armed with information. Too often, they attend meetings and are unfamiliar with the language used by professionals. Although some parents had a working knowledge of ARD meetings, others needed help.

Denise and Facilitation

“Can you help me with my son? The principal wants to send him to the alternative school.”

Although I had not met with Denise’s son, Jamal, a sophomore in high school, I immediately sensed that there was urgency with this mother regarding her son. Jamal had been in special education since fifth grade. “They finally convinced me that he would get extra help with his work,” she said. Denise was a parent who responded to the letter from the after-school program to participate in the study and I received the consent form from the center.

I called Denise at home to set up a time to meet with her. Instead, I reached her mother who informed me that Denise was no longer at that number. Well, that was a surprise. I had only spoken with Denise a few days earlier.

I have been told that I sometimes sound like a bill-collector when I speak over the phone, so I hurriedly explained to her mother the nature of my call. I did not want to confuse her understanding of who had called and why. Once I explained to Ms. Williams’ satisfaction who I was and how I had received the number, she gave me another number so that I might contact Denise. I had to admit that this was unusual, although not unfamiliar, since I also have a family member who is never where she is supposed to be.

I finally contacted Denise at work, introduced myself, and explained the study. At first, she did not recall filling out the paper and was a little hesitant about talking with me. I gave her the director’s name from the center and assured her I was

not from her son's school. She had mentioned in an earlier conversation that the school had been calling her constantly. Denise gave me yet another number. She told me to call her on a Monday afternoon and we could talk, because she worked evenings.

I was relieved; I set the tape recorder and prepared for the interview. I called her at the designated time. The first thing Denise wanted to know was if I could help her with her son. It seemed she was not receiving support from the school. "Jamal is always getting into trouble...now they want to put him in that Alternative School." Denise had Jamal when she was 15 years old and had no idea where the father lived at that time. "I work at night so my mother sometimes have to go to the school," she said.

There was a great deal of noise heard over the phone during the taping: music playing, a baby crying, Denise shouting at the kids in the house—I did not think this was going to work. I attempted to focus Denise on the questions at hand; she told me that "those people don't care about Jamal or nobody else...I went to that school and they didn't care about me." Denise had been a student at the high school her son attended. She told me that she had gone into the assistant principal's office and told her to "stop f.... with my son."

I wanted to know about the ARD meetings and she said that she stopped going. "My mother goes but I won't ...they ain't doing nothing to help us. They talk to you like you ain't got no sense...like you shit. Ain't nothing but a bunch of White folks telling you what to do."

Denise asked me again if I could help her with her son. I told her that I would obtain the name of a special education advocacy group in the area and gave her the

name and telephone number of a social worker. She was thankful, said that she had to leave, and asked if I could call her back at another time. I agreed.

I attempted to reach Denise again, but when I had called she was never at that number. She also was no longer been employed where I had previously contacted her. I tried her mother's number and was told that Denise would get the message. We never spoke again.

Emergent Theme: Dissatisfaction

To experience satisfaction, individuals must believe that that their needs, wants, and desires have been met. During the single and focus group interviews, parents complained of professionals' perceived actions and behavior in the ARD meeting. Parents were not satisfied during these encounters.

Mary Blyde and Dissatisfaction

“The people outside in the special education department [need to] be more aware of what is going on and what really is the case and not what they hear.”

“There were a few instances where maybe I didn't agree with some of the findings.”

“Some of them knew what was going on and what was really happening, whereas others weren't really involved and just part of the group.”

Mary was a very fair-skinned, petite, African American woman with fine-chiseled features. She was a high school graduate who had taken classes at the local university in computer programming design. Her goal had been to take classes that

would prepare her for a higher paying position. She briefly explained during our initial conversation that, during her marriage, she was busy with her family and then after her divorce she had not had the opportunity to attend school while her children were young.

Although we had not yet set a time and place for the interview, Mary shared with me a little about her marriage to a military serviceman. She had been a divorced mother of two daughters, Angela and Ann. She indicated that there had been a struggle to provide for her daughters after the divorce. She also had sought public and government assistance to make ends meet. However, Mary spoken lovingly of her daughters. Both girls had been successful in school, including Angela, who had been diagnosed in her early years with spastic quadriplegia.

Angela was a petite, 5'3" teenager. She had curly brown hair and was very pretty. I had seen her on the elevator on a couple of occasions, but had never talked with her, other than to say hello. As a matter of fact, I had not realized that she was Mary's daughter until we had been introduced. It appeared that Angela was very independent; she exuded confidence and determination. The few times that I had seen her, she had managed her backpack and her crutches without assistance from her mother. It was obvious why Mary had been such a proud mom.

Mary was agreeable to the interview, so we set a time and place to meet. The interview took place at Mary's desk; she was a receptionist, and at that particular time was taking calls for another office. Her desktop was neatly arranged with colorful containers for pens and pencils, trays for incoming and outgoing correspondence, and pictures of her very pretty daughters in dainty silver picture frames. I learned during our initial conversation that she had a love for flowering plants and often brought

them to the office, which was quite apparent by the overflowing pots of plants surrounding her area.

At our meeting, I presented the interview questions. At first, I thought the reception area might be distracting and that she would not be able to speak openly. However, because it was the noon hour, there was very little interruption or foot traffic. As a matter of fact, when there was an occasional passerby, we continued with our conversation.

Mary responded to the questions asked by talking about modifications with professionals when attending an ARD meeting “as far as modification of her classroom work.” She stated that there was good communication at her ARD meeting, but as our conversation progressed she revealed, “I was not satisfied with some of the information that was given to me.” She talked about the elementary experience as being very challenging for her daughter and said that a teacher believed Angela was a burden to the class.

We talked about what she had encountered in high school for Angela, as far as communicating with the ARD team. She told me that one of the members had said, “Angela wasn’t really doing that great and I told her that she was wrong.” Mary continued, “She had different teachers and some teachers could care less. They were there to teach and if you passed, you passed, if you don’t, you don’t.”

Another issue that Mary had confronted at the high school was ramp accessibility.

The campus was not accessible for her needs. I said if my child gets hurt, you are going to hear from my attorney. But, when they took action, it was the end of the semester. The next semester she wasn’t in that classroom any more; they put her in another portable that was not accessible, and then here we go again!

When I asked her opinion of cultural diversity, Mary replied, “I’ve never had problems in that sense.” However, upon further discussion she indicated, “I wouldn’t like to go to an ARD meeting with all White people. I would like to see a mixture of races and educational backgrounds.” When asked what she thought about ARD members and parents being involved in intercultural communication strategies, she replied, “I don’t have an opinion because I never really faced that.”

After the interview, Mary and I reviewed the questions and responses for clarification. I also wanted to know if the questions had led Mary to think from a different perspective about parental involvement in the ARD process and how intercultural communication could possibly be a part of the scenario. She wasn’t quite sure but indicated that parents had to stand up for their children.

Since the interview, Mary continued to share with me events in her daughter’s life. She said that Angela had become more independent and had been the recipient of many academic awards. Although Mary’s schedule was crammed due to her evening classes, she agreed to participate in the focus group.

Mattie and Dissatisfaction

They [teachers] call from the school almost every day. They tell us [husband and Mattie] that Gregory has had a fight with another boy. They tell us that he is disrespectful to the teacher. I don’t know what to do. Why don’t they ever tell us something good Gregory is doing?

Mattie had five children; three of the five were boys and all were in special education. Mattie did not give me specifics other than to say that the school had told the parents that the children had learning problems. The older boys, Jon and Derrick,

had been out of high school for several years. Jon was in jail for drug possession, and Derrick skipped from job to job and lived at home.

Mattie referred to her sons as handsome, and that probably had something to do with Jon being in jail. “He always has the girls calling the house.” Gregory, the youngest son, was in the 10th grade. He was on the track team at his high school, although he had been temporarily suspended because of his grades in English and Math. Mattie did not understand: “If he’s getting special help, why’s he failing?”

Mattie’s 20-year-old daughter, Carol, also lived at home and was expecting a baby. The oldest daughter, Macy, had completed the local community college and had an associate degree. This made Mattie very proud. Her daughter worked in a doctor’s office and lived with her boyfriend not too far from Mattie’s home.

I met Mattie one spring afternoon when I visited the daycare/parent program where she was employed. The director of the program, Ms. Fancy, knew of my study and knew that Gregory had attended the outreach program. She introduced me to Mattie and we agreed to meet on a Friday afternoon.

Ironically, the daycare/parent center was located in a building that housed suspended high school students from the local schools. So, when I returned to the center and waited for Mattie to have her break, I took a walk around the building. While exploring, I met the counselor of the Alternative School, Ms. Jones. During our conversation, I told her of my study, and she informed me that they had a number of special education students and the majority was Black students. Ms. Jones indicated that she would had liked for me to include her parents in the study, but as it was the end of the school year, I had not the opportunity to contact them. However, I felt the

information she shared with me could have possible implications for further study at a later date.

At the end of my self-tour of the building, I returned to the classroom. As it was close to naptime, I watched and listened as Mattie read to the youngsters, in her red smock covered with giraffes, monkeys, and little bear cubs. Mattie was a teacher's aide and had been employed with the center for the past 5 years. It was obvious from her demeanor that she had a genuine love for the children.

Mattie was a plump 5'3" middle-aged woman with silky brown skin, a faint sprinkling of gray hair, and a smile that was actually luminous and infectious. She looked much younger than her years.

Mattie had the fragrance of freshly baked sugar cookies in her hair and clothing. The cooking classes for parents that attended the program were held in another classroom and Mattie was the resident baker. She informed me that she loved to cook and bake.

Prior to our arranged meeting, Mattie and I had discussed the purpose of the study. Mattie was a very soft-spoken woman; while the children rested, we began our question-and-answer session. She quietly spoke of the ARD meetings and interaction with the committee members. She also talked to me about her family and ailing husband. He had been unemployed since he re-injured his back while working on a roofing job. They now had to rely on his disability check and her earnings to make ends meet to support the household.

She was confused as to why the three boys had been placed in special education. "They get along fine with everyone...the church ladies love 'em," she

said. “I don’t understand why they [school] always call the house...I try to make them understand that Gregory is a good boy.”

I wanted to know of Mattie’s experience with the ARD committee. She told me that she does not always understand what is discussed, “but I have to trust that they know best. I go to those meetings [ARD] and everyone is in a rush...no one really listening to me...just rushing.” Mattie diverted her attention to the children napping, and quietly under her breath asked, “What’s going to happen to these babies?”

Most of my conversation with Mattie was filled with descriptions of her family situation: “My daughter is expecting a baby..., my husband always has to go to the VA hospital..., my oldest son is in jail...they just came to the house one night and took him off.” Even though my questions focused on obtaining information regarding the ARD experience, I allowed Mattie to speak. She obviously needed the opportunity to be heard.

I realized that it would not serve my purpose to try and contact Mattie for another meeting, although she said that I could call her. Nevertheless, I contacted her, and the background noise over the phone indicated that there would never be a good time; she had said what she had wanted to say.

Monique and Dissatisfaction

“He was having difficulty concentrating. He supposedly has ADD with mild hyperactivity. [In the ARD meeting] we were going over what they thought was...I guess...the best way we could deal with it.”

“They should explain what things need to be done.”

“They don’t have enough resources nor time.”

“To me, they were cramming all down our throats, what ever their findings were.”

Monique was what some would call “perky”—I really had to hang onto her every word so I did not miss anything. We met over lunch at my home on a Saturday afternoon between her many activities. I was pleased to finally catch up with her, as we had a difficult time coordinating our schedules.

As a single parent, Monique worked two jobs, volunteered in the community, and raised her son. She had worked in the health care profession and had also been a real estate agent. A petite, brown-skinned woman with a head full of sandy-brown hair, Monique had been born in the Philippines to a Philippine mother and an African American father. She was bursting with energy and was very chatty. She had traveled to many countries with her ex-husband and shared some of those experiences.

I learned that Monique’s marriage to an African American military serviceman ended when David was 11 years old. “He was disappointed in David, he pushed him too hard, he just expected too much from him,” she said. Her voice had become shaky and I had suspected from her tone that the divorce had not been amicable, so I had moved the discussion to her ARD experiences.

I wanted to know what she would have liked to see happen in ARD meeting.

They assume, I think, that everybody knows what an ARD meeting is all about. They should explain what things need to be done. Everything was put to you while you were there. You had to rush through reading it, or if not, read it after the fact.

Monique had not been overly satisfied with her interactions with administrators of the special education program in her son's school. "I think they try to help under the circumstances, but probably they don't have enough resources nor time." She explained that they were not providing the type of instruction that would enable her son to become a good reader.

I sent him to Jones Learning Center, to catch up on skills. To be at the reading level that everybody was. The thing that was amazing is that he was only there for a couple of months and he was able to catch up... he was a visual learner and a hands-on learner.

Even though Monique stated that David was sometimes asked for his input at the ARD meetings, he is Asian-African American. According to Monique, in the Asian culture, "you would ask them, 'are you OK,' they would always say yes, they will not complain in front of you, that is the culture. You have to know...How did somebody solicit how they really feel?"

It appeared that Monique's experiences in ARD meetings had been troubling because of her cultural upbringing and her son's cultural and ethnic background. Although she had been able to speak out about the services he should receive, "I've been to college, I guess I know all those things." However, she lamented, "they assume that everybody knows what an ARD meeting is all about. With me, we don't have that in our country. There is no such thing."

Monique made a rather poignant statement in pointing out differences between countries as it applied to special education and the process of intercultural communication. She believed that when schools communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, "they should have someone on their staff that knows the culture."

Emergent Theme: Culturally Void Perception

Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) have indicated, “There is no evidence that professionals who do not belong to the same culture as their clients are any more successful at accomplishing collaborative relationships than those who do not” (p. 131). In the ARD meetings, parents had contact with professionals who were from similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as with those who shared no racial, ethnic, or cultural similarities. To the parents, the action and behavior of the professionals were not a color-conscious reaction. They considered the behavior and attitude of most professionals in ARD meetings, regardless of race, to be similar in responding to their request for services and in communicating with the parents.

Joyce and Culturally Void Perception

I seem to get along better with someone of a different background than my own. The communication, the line of communication is there, they [will] look me in the eye as a professional. Many of the African Americans I deal with will not do that. They feel like...I'm out to get them. And even the ones that will bring a liaison or an attorney, here again...they won't look at me. I'm just an object there. And I don't appreciate it, but I'm still a professional with them....

Say for example, a Hispanic child, they say, well, you don't understand what I'm talking about. But, then I come back and say...Yes, I do understand, because I have Hispanic grandchildren. Yes, I do understand, so at least give me a chance.

Because most of the time my own people would move down on me and would feel like I am out to get them. That's not my job, you know...

Joyce was a special education administrator employed by a local school district. We spoke by telephone to set up a time for the interview; however, we were unable to coordinate our schedules. We agreed to conduct the interview via telephone on an evening that was convenient to her schedule.

Joyce had implied in our initial telephone contact that the district she worked in regularly had placed African American and Latino students in special education so that the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores would reflect favorably on their district. I had been looking forward to our conversation and her perspective of the communication process in ARD meetings. As an African American special education administrator and the mother of a daughter who had been diagnosed with congenital cerebral palsy with learning disabilities, she was well aware of what took place in ARD meetings.

Joyce had been “trained in special education...but I’ve worked 21 years with education and special education.” She and her husband had moved from San Diego, California to a small community in Texas after her husband, Ron, retired from the Marines. As the wife of a serviceman, Joyce had traveled extensively with her husband and young children.

Joyce’s daughter, Marsha, was a 12th-grade student in a local high school receiving special education services. Joyce had spoken about Marsha prior to our interview, and she had come across as a mother who went the extra mile to ensure that her daughter had a completely normal school experience. She had served on various boards that advocated for children with disabilities. I had the impression from Joyce that she was always available to her daughter, whom I had not had the pleasure

of meeting. From our initial conversation, it had been apparent that she and her husband adored their daughter and believed that she was very “special.”

Joyce was my first interviewee; she was very friendly and talkative and more than ready to share as much as she could about how she perceived special education and ARD meetings. Although she had planned the interview call so that we would not be interrupted, her clipped, fast-paced enunciation of words quickly spilled forth, as if in a hurry to end the telephone call. One of her acquaintances referred to her manner of speech as “proper.” In the Black community this would be considered “talking White.”

When we began our telephone interview, it was challenging because Joyce would sometimes talk from an administrator’s perspective and then again from a parent’s perspective. She had admitted from the onset, “D.J., it’s kind of hard for me to answer that [about her experiences in ARD meetings] because I have worked from the administrator’s point of view and from the parent’s point of view.” Nevertheless, it was my belief that the parent’s voice would dominate the conversation. It did not.

“I have no complaints with them [ARD meetings]. And here again, I don’t know if it’s because of who I am, instead of being just a regular parent off the street. I don’t know if being an administrator has anything to do with it,” Joyce informed me. When asked about parent involvement, the voice of the administrator stated, “I am constantly inviting parents to come on in, I try to make the building as parent friendly as I possibly can....My biggie is trying to push a mentor program.”

At other times Joyce spoke as a parent. “Having a physically challenged child, I look for everything she needs to be covered in her educational profile, and I have to say, it has been done!” This was a parent talking, but I could not help but think from

the tone of her voice that she was still wearing that “professional hat.” I had to ask her directly, “How do you feel about communicating as a parent?” She replied, “As a parent, it [communicating with school professionals in an ARD meeting] would never bother me, obviously, because I’m going to fight for my child, and I will tell this to my parents that I deal with.”

It was clear from Joyce’s authoritative and direct manner that she was assertive in obtaining what her daughter needed. “They gave me no hassle when I asked for them [additional needs...such as speech, OT, PT].” In addition, Joyce wanted to make a difference to the parents that attended ARD meetings or visited the school. “I can always find something for a parent to do.” However, she believed “the parents...don’t take the time to get involved in [these] ARD meetings.” Joyce took the lack of parent involvement personally. Emphatically she stated, “I don’t look down on them. ”

The attitude of some parents was that of distrust of ARD committee members. Joyce wanted parents to “at least give me the courtesy to know who I am.” I had the impression that Joyce believed that because she was Black she could relate to Black and Hispanic parents “I am conducting your ARD meeting!” She had stated. “I want the best for your child!”

Joyce confided, “They [district special education personnel] just did what they wanted to do with the children, and the parents never questioned them.” Often, the experience of being with a group of strangers can be overwhelming and parents may not feel confident or competent to have a dialogue that is meaningful. Joyce stated, “They are in a group with a bunch of professionals and here is a parent, a single parent who maybe didn’t finish high school.”

I wanted to know if Joyce felt that there was a need for intercultural communication. She responded,

There sure is because more and more of our children are being placed in special education. A lot of them should not be there, because, I know for a fact...they take in anything that “jiggles” the book to make sure that they qualify.

I needed her to elaborate on that statement, but she only repeated that the district did what they had to so that “our children” qualified for special education.

Joyce did not believe that schools were culturally meeting the needs of the parents or of the children attending the school. “I believe that teachers and administrators and parents are not aware enough of the diversity that we are seeing in our school,” she stated. Joyce adamantly believed that “we need more sensitivity training for teachers and administrators.” However, she was not quite sure “how we would go about getting parents more involved in the diversity training.”

The conversation between Joyce and me could have continued for hours, but it was getting late, and I had continuously stopped the tape to clarify with which voice she was speaking—administrator or parent. In the long run, it really did not matter; I had obtained insightful information from Joyce. I had her combined perspective as a parent/administrator participating in an ARD meeting.

We ended our conversation with my thanks and appreciation for her time. I told her of the focus group interview and she said that she and her husband would love to participate. Unfortunately, the evening before the focus group meeting, Joyce’s daughter was rushed to the hospital with an upper respiratory infection. Surprisingly, I later had found out that Marsha was Joyce’s older daughter’s natural birth mother, but Joyce had never mentioned that to me.

Focus Group Interview

I think that communication has a tendency to deal with people looking for comfort and I think...that in the ARD meetings...there isn't a lot of comfort there. They look kind of tense. I don't understand the tenseness because the purpose you both have is to try to help someone's child. Maybe it's because the majority of these kids are minority group members and the one's sitting behind the table generally are not. (Blackjack)

The focus group members that met at the community outreach center were rather quiet upon their arrival. I suspect it was because it is one thing to talk one-on-one and another to share experiences with unknown individuals. However, once they began to consume the refreshments that had been provided, a lively chatter filled the room. Two of the group members knew each other from the center and the married couple (Cowboy and his wife Frances) had met my scribe as a caseworker assisting with their adopted sons.

We began the focus group interview with the members sitting in chairs in a semicircle. The tape recorder sat on a table in front of the group. I explained the purpose of the study and opened the interview. Based on the conversation with the group, I was able to discern their perceptions of ARD meetings and the process of intercultural communication that will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Of the focus group participants, Cowboy, Sharyf, Blackjack, and Harold had participated in the single interviews. Mary was the only female participant in the focus group who had participated in the single interviews. The other female participants—Frances, Karina, and Sylvia—were only members of the focus group.

It was interesting to see the dynamics of the group. Frances and Sylvia were more opinionated in their responses to questions. This was also true of the three male participants, Skillet, Sharyf, and Blackjack. However, Cowboy barely responded to questions that were answered by his wife and eventually refrained from lengthy responses altogether.

I was somewhat surprised by the minimal input from Mary and Karina. Although Mary had been only somewhat reserved during our one-on-one interview, she was not very talkative and left before the focus group interview was completed. My scribe informed me that Mary had to leave for class. Since we had not started on time, the interview had conflicted with her class schedule.

I had met Karina and Sylvia on a visit to the center. Karina was a young mother with a ninth-grade daughter, Velma. Karina had blond braids tied in a pony tail that accented her dark skin. I thought that this slim young woman of about 5'7" looked more like a teenager than the mother of three. I had learned from Karina that Velma had a quick temper and had been in special education since fifth grade. Velma's teachers had told Karina that she was not a good reader.

Although Karina spoke freely with Blackjack and Skillet, she did not fully participate in the interviewing. Because she was the youngest of the group members, I assumed that she was gathering information for a later time when it would be of use to her.

Sylvia, on the other hand, was a gregarious grandmother whom I also had met at the center. She spent a lot of time at the center working as an aide in the charter school that had occupied classrooms in the building. She had five adult children who all lived in other cities in Texas, with the exception of her youngest son, Nathan.

Sylvia had lived all her life in the community where the study took place. Her mother had been White and her father Black; her features indicated that she could have “passed” for White. She had short brown curly hair and red manicured fingernails, and she spoke in a high-pitched tone.

Sylvia told me that Nathan was a senior in high school and spent many days throughout his school years in the alternative school. Nathan had been on medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and had been diagnosed in the fourth grade. She believed that his behavior was due to the medications that he had taken.

After the participants had talked and eaten their refreshments, we began the interview. I was able to able to solicit responses from the group members regarding the process of intercultural communication in ARD meetings by asking the question: What is your opinion of intercultural communication? At first, I received some hesitation and had to assure the respondents that I actually wanted their true responses.

Skillet: Oh, I think it’s, you know...for the most part an aristocratic joke. I don’t think that, that is, well...I think that there is a lot of areas to work on with regard to the intercultural communication process. I think that the first thing that has to happen is that, people who are part of the education institution have to learn to value the positive value of differences. And because one manipulates the language one way, does that at all have anything to do with one’s understanding? And I think that educators tend to speak in ways and address issues in other ways that sort of tickle each other’s, uh...middle class majority function and don’t really pay any attention to, you know...what’s real in somebody’s life!

Frances: I think that generally speaking, he is right, but my experiences were not exactly the same as his. Probably...I don’t know why exactly, but I know I did approach them [ARD members] as I said before. I asked a lot of questions because I need to understand. I gave the teachers a lot of information. I

thought it was important for them to know these children had issues. These children are adopted. I didn't give them the whole family background or anything like that, but I wanted to make sure they understood our kids.

Sylvia: Well, I think it [intercultural communication processes] would improve if they had some overview of, you know...the cultural beliefs...[of] the people that they see in the community, maybe there should be a requirement like that.

Blackjack: I think that the communication has a tendency to deal with people looking for comfort and I think...that in the ARD meetings...there isn't a lot of comfort there. They look kind of tense. I don't understand the tenseness because the purpose you both have is to try to help someone's child. Maybe it's because the majority of these kids are minority group members and the ones sitting behind the table generally are not.

Mary: I don't really have an opinion because I never really faced that problem.

Sharyf: My opinion is that it [intercultural communication] can work for those that need it the most, in this case...you know...the parents and the kids. Without it, I don't think the kids are really going to get the opportunity...the maximum opportunity that they deserve.

Cowboy conveyed the same type of reserve he exhibited when interviewed as a single interviewee when he was asked to give his opinion about intercultural communication. However, he finally responded by saying,

I have a lot of experience with it. There is a lot of things. I was a member of the Southern Christian Leadership with Jesse Jackson. I spent a lot of time with Martin Luther King's group. I spent a lot of time attending various meetings being the only Black person there and explaining to White people or people of different color who I am. I have feelings, so none of this is new to me.

Although Karina was mostly quiet throughout the interview, she did respond to the question, "I am a single parent, I do the best I can for my kids, but I think that

those people really don't know who we are. I was in high school and they didn't know who I was.”

Sylvia, whom I had expected to be the one to keep the group engaged in conversation, did not respond, although she had earlier stated, “When there's a lot of people that you don't know sitting around telling you about your child...you have to...you think, do they know what they're talking about.”

A proposition of intercultural communication is an absence of “shared episodes” (Forgas, 1996). The responses from the focus group suggested that cultural and cognitive perceptions are rooted in their understanding of “reality” and their “way of knowing.” In order to build on the shared episodes and develop intercultural communication there must be an application of the “posture of cultural reciprocity” for those AA parents communicating with ARD committee members.

Summary

The collection of data from the interviews allowed me to gain insight into individual and focus group participants' perceptions of intercultural communication processes and the AA parents' degree of involvement in the ARD process. In addition, the “posture of cultural reciprocity” had been established as a viable practice to engage parents in meaningful dialogue.

Parents, specifically AA parents, have varying degrees of becoming involved in their children's academic education. Some have had negative experiences in their school lives and tend to be uncomfortable in the school setting. Nonetheless, aspirations for their children are held to a high standard.

The ability to exchange meaningful information between informants allows each to have limited miscommunication. In the ARD meetings, AA parents and professionals can be identified as belonging to two different groups. “When dealing with people from other cultures, we may define people from our own culture as the ingroup and the outgroups as people from other cultures” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1999, p. 87).

Special education and the ARD process is a culture within its own domain. It has language, values, and ideology that define and interpret its philosophy. Professionals meeting with parents must learn how to communicate effectively—from an intercultural perspective—and from a posture of cultural reciprocity within groups to establish dialogue that will ultimately benefit the students.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Study

Introduction

This concluding chapter of the study will provide the summary of activities, which includes a brief overview of how the study evolved and how it was carried out. The Conclusion will reference the principal research questions and how the findings from this study relate to previous research in the role of AA parents of high school students in the ARD process and how intercultural communication processes can impact their involvement. The final section on Recommendations will include Implications and Recommendations for Further Study.

Summary of Activities

Although there had been interest and research in communication, the field of intercultural communication as related to AA parents' involvement with high school students in special education during the ARD process had not been widely researched.

Researchers had recognized the importance of intercultural communication in the involvement of parents in schools (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Harry, Anderson, & McLaughlin, 1995; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). This study was conducted to research the processes of intercultural communication between parents with AA high school students in special education when interacting with educators in

the ARD process. The posture of cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999), “which proposes that [special education] professionals engage in a self-reflective and dialogic process toward identifying both their own and their families’ cultural norms” (p. 123), guided the research study. The principal research question included the following: To what extent can intercultural communication processes impact the involvement of African American parents in the ARD meeting?

Parents had addressed and discussed these questions in the emergent themes of resiliency, self-assurance, facilitation, dissatisfaction and culturally void perception. There was great concern among the parents that professionals did not truly understand their individual situations nor fully understand the needs of their children.

Intercultural communication can only take place if individuals are cognizant of the behaviors, norms, and cultural independence of communicants. As noted throughout the study, AA parents have only the best interest for their children. They want them to be successful and have a fruitful and rewarding life. Therefore, they are willing to work with school professionals so their children’s needs are addressed. To employ intercultural communication strategies and the posture of cultural reciprocity would enable both parents and professionals to communicate so that issues relating to the lack of parental involvement are minimized.

Conclusions

The theories that are embedded within intercultural communication and the “posture of cultural reciprocity” laid the foundation for this qualitative study. Parents

had indicated that the use of codes and verbal and nonverbal behavior had been utilized in relating to professionals in the ARD setting. Hofstede's (1980) theoretical dimensions of cultural variability, which describes individualistic and collectivistic cultures, were also visible in the study. As the ingroup, professionals seemed to look after their own interest, which is most visible in an individualistic culture. Conversely, AA parents could be identified as members of the "outgroup," whose behavior and attitude embraced the collectivistic culture, with emphasis on families and loyalty to the group.

The "posture of cultural reciprocity" (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) represents an avenue where professionals could establish effective communication, thereby embracing both groups. Kalyanpur and Harry provided four guidelines that could assist professionals in this endeavor:

1. Identify the cultural values that are embedded in the professional interpretation of a student's difficulties or in the recommendations for services.
2. Find out whether the family being served recognizes and values the assumptions and, if not, how their view differs from that of the professional.
3. Acknowledge and give explicit respect to cultural differences identified, and fully explain the cultural basis of the professional assumptions.
4. Through discussions and collaboration, set about determining the most effective way of adapting professional interpretations or recommendations to the value system of this family.

Black parents with high school students in special education have a desire for their children to enter the work force with an ability to compete successfully with their peers and to be treated with respect. Parent involvement in schools can foster growth in student achievement and student satisfaction (Conner & Epstein, 1994). Families of color face challenges in school settings because of the strained relationship and lack of meaningful communication with educators and administrators (Fordham, 1996; Hilliard, 1988; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999).

This study concluded that parent involvement in the ARD meeting when communicating the needs of their children was often uncomfortable. Wanda indicated, “I think that communication has a tendency to deal with people looking for comfort and I think...that in the ARD meetings...there isn’t a lot of comfort there.” Denise found communicating with professionals a challenge, so much so that she was willing to confront the first person willing to listen to her, so she spoke to me, “Can you help me with my son? The principal wants to send him to the alternative school.” These were genuine concerns of the participants.

The term *intercultural communication* was conceptually understood by the parents and viewed as a viable solution when communicating between parents and educators—“this is an intercultural society, and we have to communicate,” and “I think the first thing that needs to happen is, that, people who are part of the education institution have to learn the value, the positive value of differences.” However, the process of intercultural communication was not perceived as an integral component in the ARD meetings: “There was no good communication between me and the administration,” and “The White assistant principal at my son’s school just didn’t

know how to talk with the parents. In the ARD meetings, he was very authoritative. It wasn't always what he said but how he said it!"

It was further concluded that parents needed a dialogue that embraced their understanding and perceptions as it pertained to their children—"Some of them understood what was going on with my kids and others didn't care. You can tell the ones who really care. So I usually talked to them the way they talked to me."

"I think that educators tend to speak in ways and address issues in other ways that sort of tickle each others middle class majority function and don't really pay any attention to, you know...what's real in somebody's life."

Parents must feel that their involvement in the ARD is a meaningful experience, that the members of the committee are vested in conducting a meeting that will engage parents in a dialogue that embraces their point of view. When professionals relate to parents in a manner that devalue their understanding of the needs of their children, it undermines parents' efforts of being present in the ARD meeting. It is dependent upon professionals to generate an atmosphere that will not alienate parents.

The conclusions from this study relate to the original research questions in addressing parents' perceptions of communicating the needs of their students in (a) curriculum, (b) social and emotional development, and (c) student satisfaction. Parents have sincere concerns as they relate to their child's educational welfare. In addition to educational needs, parents want their children to participate in school activities and have friends that will broaden their life experiences. They want their children to have the satisfaction in school and in life that they may not have experienced.

Curriculum

Often, achieving success in the wider society for AA students is defined by the formal school curriculum (Fordham, 1996). However, the IEP provides the opportunity for students in special education to have a curriculum that is customized. Unfortunately, AA parents with students in special education are not always actively involved in the development of this customized curriculum.

Mary indicated, “They were always emphasizing on the needs. I was emphasizing on the need to modify her work and yet they never did...we did homework for three hours every night.” Parents want to be active participants. They want to ensure that their child with a disability receives a quality education, in hopes that it will transition them into the wider society equally prepared.

Sylvia did not feel as though she was an active participant in her child’s course assignments. She stated, “[ARD members] tell me what they are doing and ask me if I have any questions.” This appeared to be the general attitude of ARD members when parents wanted to be more involved with their children’s’ educational welfare. Sharyf was told that his son “needs to really upgrade reading and writing scores”; his response to the committee was that “the IEP needs to reflect that.” Although he was constantly present at the school and requesting curriculum modifications for his son, the committee members were not conscientiously responding. Both parents wanted a more active role but did not receive support from the ARD members.

However, Joyce's observation of her role in the ARD meeting when communicating the need to participate in developing curriculum for her daughter was contrary to the other parents. Her voice was heard, and her role became apparent to committee members. Confidently she said, "having a physically challenged child, I look for everything she needs to be covered in her educational profile, and I have to say it has been done." Brandt (2002) has contended, "Parents hold strong and diverse views about the methods and goals of education. Instead of imposing a 'one option for all' system, public schools should respect these differences by combining intentional diversification with meaningful parent choice" (p. 13).

The parent is the first teacher in the education of his or her child and deserves respect and understanding from professionals. Their input into the special education process is referenced from home experiences and the needs of the student. Participants agreed that special educators tended to engage them from their own perspectives, allowing minimal input from the parents.

Parents are "strangers" in the ARD meeting; they are "physically present and participating in a situation" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997, p. 24), but they are "outside of the situation because they are not members of the group." To be members of a group there must be a shared understanding of the discussion between group members. In a setting that is unfamiliar and where all participants do not speak the language is neither productive nor advantageous to the outcome of the ARD meeting. Professionals must be self-reflective; that is, they must learn to think about how their words will impact parents and students.

Social and Emotional Development

To understand socialization, one must consider biological and cognitive factors as well as environmental influences (Yussen & Santrock, 1992, p.375). These factors are important when assessing placement for students in special education. In addition, the student's emotional development is equally significant.

Fordham (1996) pointed out those African American high school students, whether high achievers or underachievers, are faced with the dilemma of confronting and identifying who they are and how to interpret their surroundings. According to Lewis and Brooks-Gunn (1979), in this stage of emotional experience students are developing empathy, guilt, and embarrassment. This stage of development can be particularly troubling for students in special education without support and understanding from professionals.

With the myriad of television commercials, sit-coms, reality shows, and music videos that create and define the illusions of "beauty," "fashion," "what's hot," and "what's not," teen-agers struggle to live up to these images in defining how they "represent." This struggle is sometimes demonstrated in students' reactions and interactions with professionals, parents, and peers.

Although several of the parents had been contacted regarding their child's "negative" behavior, none of the parents mentioned that the schools had made an effort to include them in identifying what might be causing the behavior or in making recommendations to assist the family. Sharyf was told that his son "was a trouble-making kid" and "did not merit the services." Sylvia had also been notified about her son's unenthusiastic attitude toward school and professionals, however, no

constructive feedback had been offered during the ARD meeting. She observed, “If you happen to be lucky that there is someone in the team that takes a special interest ...you will probably make headway.”

The interviews did not flush out defined attitudes regarding social and emotional development. It had been evident from the parents’ tone that professionals in an ARD meeting had not addressed all the needs of their students. Unfortunately, educators put on “professional hats” and become “insiders” within their group and become oblivious to parents who are unfortunately considered “outsiders” or “strangers”. Harold suggested that it was the parents against the professionals. “It’s like they [professionals] prepare themselves to fight or something.”

To apply the “posture of cultural reciprocity” in ARD meetings, professionals must be willing to individualize situations and view them from the parent’s unique position. To ensure a meaningful dialogue, parents and professionals must be empowered so that the maximum level of understanding is maintained. Parents realize their parental roles and responsibilities, and that some functions will not be performed or addressed by an ARD committee. However, it is the responsibility of the professionals in the ARD to ensure that parents are respected.

Student Satisfaction

“The teacher that she had would not modify and Angela could not keep up with the rest of the class.” (Mary)

The realization that a task has been successfully completed usually offers satisfaction to the individual performing the task, whether the motivation is extrinsic

or intrinsic. However, students in special education may need assistance to attain success in schools, such as additional time on task, or modifications of lessons. These students may not be intrinsically motivated as described by the self-determination theory, which suggests that high academic performance is dependent upon an individual's sense of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

For parents with AA high school students in special education this may be an issue of concern. According to Oswald, Coutinho, & Best (2002), 75% of AA students with disabilities, as compared to 47% of White students are not employed 2 years after completion of high school. Parents interviewed were all seeking success for their children. Mary indicated that she wanted her daughter to “go out and hold her own in the world.”

The participants in this study cited several instances that they believed were not conducive to student satisfaction. These included unequipped classrooms and shortage of qualified teachers. Cowboy believed that “the teachers could not identify with him or his sons.” This would be disheartening to both parents and students. Parents’ perceptions of the ARD and its procedures are indicative of the experiences they have had within that particular environment.

Sharyf indicated that discussions about his son “would turn into arguments” with members of the ARD committee. Mary stated that her daughter, who is spastic quadriplegia, “was not comfortable with them coming and pulling her out of class.” In addition, “they would schedule one class at one end of campus and another at the other end.” This lack of concern displayed by ARD members could hinder the success of the student in special education.

Kalyanpur and Harry's (1999) assertion "that children are individuals and have rights; and that children, as individuals with rights, should be given opportunities to maximize their potential" (p. 107) is a philosophy that should be recognized and supported by professionals. Parents are the solitary voice for their children and they must be able to express to ARD members what they feel is necessary for the student to be successful and to experience satisfaction.

Providing Support to Parents with African American High School Students in Special Education

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), parents have an active and more visible role in the education of their children. Both the transmitter and the receiver can only support these roles through meaningful dialogue that is understood. AA families with high school students in special education may face challenges in communicating with ARD members, who may only communicate from their special education perspective, hence diminishing opportunities for intercultural discourse.

The posture of cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) can be described as building relationships between families and professionals so that the cultural needs of the parents are met and understood. It may also address the need for professionals "to confront the contradictions between their values and practices" (Skrtic, 1991, p.42) so that meaningful dialogue is achieved to assist parents, and teachers, in recognizing ways of knowing, recognizing diversity and in developing partnership.

Implications for Future Research

As a result of this limited study, the fact is that parents when parents met with professionals in the ARD setting they demonstrated: resiliency, self-assurance, facilitation, dissatisfaction, and culturally void perception. It did not matter how rude or uncaring the educator may have been perceived, Black parents or caregivers were at the ARD meetings to support their children.

To have a meaningful discussion with parents who have high school students in special education, especially parents of color, there must be a dialogue between parents and educators that is readily recognized and understood. Intercultural communication processes can assist in constructing that dialogue. The “posture of cultural reciprocity” can assist in maintaining the dialogue.

A deciding factor in whether parents will interact with professionals depends on their level of comfort, trust, and acceptance. By using communication strategies that can enhance the interaction of parents from socially and ethnically diverse backgrounds with special educators, rehabilitation counselors, health care providers, and other individuals interested in engaging all groups in meaningful conversation will be beneficial to families.

To provide the best experience for AA students in special education is of the utmost importance. The dialogue that takes place in the ARD meeting should be communicated in culturally relevant language. Educators often assume, solely on the basis of being an educator, that they are fully aware of the needs of students. These assumptions are usually constructed without fully considering the parents’ views or

the parents' daily interaction with their children. Understanding how parents interact and communicate with their children, especially those identified with a disability, is crucial in establishing meaningful dialogue between parents and educators.

Although, the parents that participated in this study had expressed their anger, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness; they all displayed aspects of resiliency by returning to schools or reaching out for assistance. It did not matter if they were a single parent or a married couple, the major concern was that of the student. Researchers have indicated that AA families pull closer together in a crisis and seek out support from community resources (Hanline & Daley, 1992) by mobilizing family members.

The AA male parent had not always been visible in schools and educational forums that require personal contact with professionals. It can be discerned from this study that the Black male is needed in the schools. Children feel protected and safe with dads; their presence in schools and at the ARD meeting is a positive message. To accept the uniqueness of those AA males, for the sake of the children that they serve, professionals will have to reevaluate their communication strategies. They must concentrate on self-reflection and self-direction to bring about intercultural communication with AA males and their families ways of knowing.

Ways of Knowing

Expectations and behaviors recognized within AA families vary according to cultural norms and values that are influenced by family members and communities in which they live (Fordham, 1996). In some AA families, a child with a disability may

be considered a gift from God (Rogers-Dulan & Blancher, 1995). Consequently, these parents have an understanding or “way of knowing” about their child that may not be recognized, accepted, or tolerated by special educators.

Wanda:

I feel that maybe they wouldn't understand something, for instance, my daughter had to have her hair braided in a certain way. Maybe in PE it needed to be...to not be in her way. Maybe a White physical therapist wouldn't know what to do with her hair. ...some things that they don't know about us. I told her...in a swimming class. I said, well, she doesn't have a perm on her hair and I rather not get it wet!

What a parent knows and how he or she knows it to be true and/or effective resonates from personal experiences and cultural beliefs. “The posture of cultural reciprocity enables professionals to understand each family's reasons for their silence or other specific behavior” (Kalyanpur & Harry, p.122).

Kalyanpur and Rao's (1999) research has indicated that AA parents were distrustful and distant to professionals because of the differences in their (AA) disciplining styles (Kalyanpur & Harry, p.99). African American parents of high school students also wrestle with finding a common ground with special educators so that their children become beneficiaries of successful school experiences.

Recognizing Diversity

Families from diverse cultural backgrounds have always had to fit into the mainstream of American society. They are expected to rescind their values and attitudes through the process of acculturation (Correra, 1989) and accept another's values and interpretation of life. Similarly, Black parents of high school students in

special education are expected to take ownership of the expectations and interpretations of special education professionals. Consequently, they are usually excluded from participating in the development of meaningful practices for their student (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) as defined by their life experiences.

The participants interviewed did not believe that all members of the ARD committee truly understood or accepted their diversity, thereby limiting their access to meaningful dialogue with the committee. Wanda indicated,

I think we have a lot of similarities, and we are opposite. A lot of it has to do with being an individual...but some people in the White culture may not accept the fact that there may be some Black blood in them as well as we accept the fact that there may be some White blood in us.

Harold stated, "Sometimes people still determine their reactions based on race and ethnicity." Frances remarked, "They were generally all White any ways, so you know, it wasn't like some of them related to me better than others."

ARD settings should have open communication so that all parties represented are united, regardless of ethnic background and ways of knowing. Blackjack wanted "people who are part of the educational institutions...to learn the value, the positive value of differences." He posed the question, "Because one manipulates the language one way, does that have anything to do with one's understanding?"

Recognizing and accepting diversity of families with high school students in special education will not weaken the purpose of ARD committees. Understanding the cultural differences of parents with AA students in special education can only result in meaningful service for the students and a more unified rapport with the parents.

Developing Partnerships

There were varying responses by parents to the issue of developing partnerships. Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) indicated, “the posture of cultural reciprocity enables both parties to engage in a dialogue whereby each learns from the other” (p. 122). The responses from several of the participants indicated that ARD members provided useful information to develop partnership. However, it did not seem that it was from a “posture of cultural reciprocity” or by utilizing intercultural communication processes.

Monique indicated that ARD members “opened up the meeting and let me know what the purpose of the ARD meeting was. And the types of testing that were going to go on and that also already had been completed. I thought that was helpful.” Wanda at times felt as though “there was good communication.” Harold stated, “They were helpful, but I think only because I felt that I had an advantage in some sense in regards to other parents who may have been in a similar kind of environment.”

However, the viewpoints of other participants varied. Sharyf related how the ARD “would turn into arguments.” Sylvia indicated, “It was like...they had done all their assessment, it was just a matter of reviewing it, you know...and then letting you read what they had to do and then...everybody signed it and that was it.” Cowboy stated, “I really didn’t know what was going on [in ARD meetings]...White people telling what I should do or what I shouldn’t do. It was confusing. And to this day, I’m still not sure of my role.”

Roles are everyday scenarios reenacted by parents for the benefit and happiness of the student in special education. However, for AA male parents, it can

be intensified because the presence of the male parent in a school setting has usually been uncommon. The signals that he receives from administrators have not always motivated him to be diligent and consistent in his role as a Black male parent.

Developing partnerships is paramount to full inclusion of AA parents in the ARD process and establishing intercultural communication. Special educators who only provide parents with information that is pre-scripted create an atmosphere of mistrust. As Blackjack pointed out, “very few parents really understand the rules of the game as it relates to ARD meetings.”

Subsequently, this information should be shared as a component of pre-service and in-service education because school and private psychologist often work from the paradigm that “one fits all,” disseminating information from this study would assist them in their interaction with parents of color. Teachers, administrators, and support staff, (i.e., office workers, cafeteria workers, and maintenance engineers) should all be provided with consistent and ongoing training on communicating with parents from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds by utilizing the strategies of intercultural communication and the “posture of cultural reciprocity.” When parents feel welcomed, they have a better attitude about schools and the services that they provide to their children.

Limitations

The small number of parents interviewed limits this study. However, their contribution to the literature is invaluable. High school students in special education

have a need to belong. The support they receive from family and community only serves to enhance their educational and academic experiences.

Recommendations for Further Study

Research on AA parents' participation in the ARD process is not a new phenomenon. Parents are encouraged to attend the meetings so they can have an immediate and direct influence on their children's education. However, service providers do not routinely show special education students and their families how to become actively engaged in the education process. Do service providers assume that they have enough information to make wise choices for parents and students? Do parents assume service providers will always be their voices? What about the students—does their presence at the ARD meeting allow for meaningful input into the process or are they only a silent figure?

During the data collection and analysis process, parents did not suggest that I meet and speak with their child to obtain their reaction to the ARD meetings. Furthermore, parents did not suggest that they would take the opportunity to talk with their son or daughter regarding their involvement in ARD meetings. Service providers need to know how students are feeling about communicating during the ARD committee. Do they exhibit the same feelings of anxiety and frustration as their parents, or do students always expect someone to be available for them?

Further research should detail students' responses to an intercultural communication approach with special educators as they receive identified services that are best tailored to their interest, needs, and cultural experiences. These students

have a way of communicating that is unique. Their style of clothing, hair styles, and interactions with fellow students are often viewed as contrary to what schools have determined to be “regular” or “normal.” To have their perceptions of communicating and interacting with special educators might prove useful before ARD committee members prepare curriculum for the student solely based on input of family members and service providers.

Therefore the following recommendations are offered for parents, service providers, and students to compliment an intercultural approach to communication in the ARD process:

1. Develop useful communication guides that are user friendly that describe in detail the process of ARD meetings and the terminology that parents and students may encounter
2. Build on the strengths of parents so that they become more comfortable in an environment that may be perceived as hostile.
3. Have students become an integral part of the ARD process so that they begin to realize that there is a vested outcome to their education.
4. Set up mock ARD meetings so that parents are aware of the process and becomes more proficient at expressing their concerns.
5. Discuss cultural diversity and cultural reciprocity so that professionals and parents can understand its impact on educational issues for families of color.

These recommendations may serve as opening a continuing line of communication for all involved in the ARD process.

Changing the Power of Discourse

How do all participants in the ARD process open lines of communication? How do they obtain the power of words and have them become useful tools to their benefit? Are participants willing to share the meanings of their words so that they become useful tools that will create meaningful dialogues with parents in ARD meetings?

AA parents are willing to do what ever is necessary to ensure that their children receive all they are entitled. The parents in this study attended the ARD meetings because of maternal and paternal responsibilities, although they often felt as though they did not belong and their opinions were not valued. For hundreds of years Black families have been faced with adversity and challenges, and in the words inspired by Maya Angelo, still they rise.

Attending an ARD meeting for the parents in this study was like attending a foreign movie without the subtitles. The professionals conducting the meeting used unfamiliar terminology with the parents, they talked among themselves, pushed unread documents in front of parents to be signed, and disregarded their emotional presence. Reminiscent of Sharyf's words, "these people have no respect." Service providers and professionals are obligated to respect and to acknowledge the diversity of others so that there can be a change in the power of discourse.

Appendix A

Historical Outline

Important dates and events chronicled by Bennett (1979), Banks (1984), Smith (1998), Woods and Liddell (1992) document the Black experience in America.

- 1619 The first Blacks arrived in the English North American colonies.
- 1773 “Felix,” a Boston slave, and others petition Massachusetts Governor Hutchinson for their freedom.
- 1804 Ohio begins the restriction of the rights and movements of free African Americans by passing the first of several “Black laws.”
- 1808 The slave trade was legally ended, but illegal slave trading begins.
- 1829 David Walker published his *Appeal*, in which he harshly denounced slavery and urged slaves to take up arms
- 1831 Nat Turner led a slave revolt in which nearly 60 Whites were killed.
- 1857 The Supreme Court ruled in the Dred Scott Decision that slaves did not become free when they moved to free territory. It also held that Afro-Americans were not and could not be citizens.
- 1863 Many Afro-Americans in New York City were attacked and killed by largely Irish mobs that were protesting the draft laws and expressing antiBlack feelings.
On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in those states fighting the Union.
- 1866 The fourteenth Amendment, which made Afro-Americans United States citizens, was enacted.
The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was enacted. It extended the Afro- American’s civil liberties in several areas.
- 1870 The Fifteenth Amendment was enacted. It enabled many Afro-Americans to vote.

- 1896 In a historic decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, The Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional.
- 1905 W.E.B. DuBois and a group of Black intellectuals organized the Niagra Movement to promote civil rights for African Americans.
- 1910 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was organized. It successfully fought for Black legal rights.
- 1911 The National Urban League was founded to help the Black urban migrant adjust to city life and find jobs.
- 1914 Marcus Garvey organized the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey urged African Americans to return to Africa.
- 1917 Riots in East St. Louis, Illinois killed 39 Blacks.
- 1948 Commemorative stamp of George Washington Carver is issued by the U.S. Postal Service.
- 1954 In a landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that school desegregation was inherently unequal.
- 1955 African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, began a boycott that ended bus segregation in 1956.
- 1957 Martin Luther King and a group of Baptist ministers organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). National guardsmen were required to help integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- 1960 Sit-in movement began in Greensboro, North Carolina, which desegregated public accommodations facilities through out the South.
- 1961 The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) led “Freedom Rides” through the South to desegregate interstate transportation.
- 1963 More than 20,000 people participated in a “March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs.” Civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham, Alabama, led by Martin Luther King Jr., were violently attacked by police.
- 1964 The Civil Rights Act of 1964. An antipoverty act launched the War on Poverty.
- 1965 The Voting Rights act of 1965 was enacted, partly in response to civil rights demonstration.

- 1965-1968 Watts racial rebellion launched a series of racial disturbances, which took place in Detroit and Newark. A new wave followed the assassination of Martin Luther King JR, in 1968.
- 1968 Stokely Carmichael issued a call for “Black Power.”
- 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. The Kerner Commission issued an influential report stating that White racism was the major cause of the city rebellions.
- 1969 Louis Stokes is sworn in as the first African American congressman from the State of Ohio.
- 1971 Reverend Jesse L. Jackson organized People United to Save Humanity (PUSH).
- 1972 President Richard M. Nixon signed a bill that was designated to end busing for racial integration for the schools.
- 1971 African Americans were elected mayors of Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and other cities.
- 1980 Blacks organized the Black Independent Political Party in Philadelphia.
- 1987 The National Urban League’s report “State of Black America” blasted President Ronald Reagan’s policies, stating, “Black Americans enter 1987 besieged by the resurgence of raw racism, persisted economic depression and the continued erosion of past gains.”
- 1990 Lawrence Douglas Wilder of Virginia is inaugurated as the first African American to be elected governor in the U.S.

Appendix B

Litigation and Legislation

“There is one sin that slavery committed against me which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education.” Ex-slave

Litigation

- 1896 ***Plessy v. Ferguson.*** Ruled that laws requiring segregation were a reasonable use of state power.
- 1954 ***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.*** Ruled that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal.
- 1967 ***Hobson v. Hansen.*** Ruled that ability grouping was discriminatory and a form of racial segregation because so few minority students were included in “gifted and talented” programs.
- 1968 ***Diana v. State Board of Education of California.*** Ruled that Mexican Americans should receive evaluation tests that were not biased against them.
- 1969 ***Larry P. v. Riles.*** Ruled that the practice of intelligence testing for determining the placement of African American students in special education was discriminatory.
- 1972 ***Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.*** Ruled that special education be guaranteed to children with mental retardation.
- 1972 ***Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia.*** Ruled that the right to special education should extend to all children with disabilities.
- 1977 ***MLK Jr. Elementary v. Ann Harbor School District*** demanded equal educational opportunities under the law for Black students. They demanded the teaching of Ebonics in schools.

- 1982 *Rowley v. Hendrick Hudson*. Ruled that school districts provide those services that permit a student with disabilities to benefit from instruction.
- 1988 *Honig v. Doe*. Ruled that students whose misbehavior is related to their disability cannot be denied education.

Legislation

1890–1910 **Jim Crow Laws.**

- 1965 **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**. The primary focus of the Act was on children who were economically disadvantaged.
- 1968 **Handicapped Children’s Early Assistance Act**. Legislation focused on children with educational disabilities by establishing experimental demonstration centers.
- 1968 **Bilingual Education Act**. Required that schools offer programs for LEP students so that they may learn English effectively.
- 1973 **Rehabilitation Act of 1973**. Included Section 504, which defined and described basic civil rights of people with disabilities. discrimination by federally funded programs against individuals with disabilities.
- 1974 **Economic Opportunity Act Amendments**. Mandated that 10% of those enrolled in Head Start programs be children with disabilities.
- 1975 **Public Law 94-142**. Ensured that all children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
- 1986 **Public Law 99-457**. Included infants and toddlers, provided individualized family service plans (IFSPs), and suggested individualized transition plans (ITPs).
- 1986 **Handicapped Children’s Protection Act**. Guaranteed legal fees to parents to win their special education disputes.
- 1990 **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. Increased opportunities for minority and economically disadvantaged individuals to participate fully and benefit from IDEA; and increased the availability of transition services for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (Podemski, Marsh, Smith, & Price, 1995).
- 1990 **American with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. Prohibits discrimination in employment, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunication.

- 1997 **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997.** Increased family involvement in the education of their children, ensured that regular education teachers are involved in planning and assessing student's progress, and included children with disabilities in assessments, performance goals, and reports to the public.
- 2002 **No Child Left Behind Act.** Embodied four key principles—stronger accountability for students; greater flexibility for states, school districts and schools in the use of federal funds; more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and an emphasis on teaching methods that were research based and effective.

Appendix C

The Admission Review and Dismissal Experience

November 1999

Dear Program Director:

Thank you for agreeing to identify parents in your after school program that may be available to participate in the research study on intercultural communication and the involvement of African American parents with high school students in special education.

Intercultural communication refers to communication between people from different cultures. For parents to have meaningful involvement in schools, especially during Admission Review and Dismissal meetings, it is important that both parents and educators from diverse backgrounds understand all aspects of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of parents' perceptions when they discuss placement, types of services available, and identification of specific needs for their students when speaking with special educators and other school professionals.

Your program has been selected because of the parent involvement component of culturally and linguistically diverse parents. I am requesting that parents with high school students in special education participate in the study. Parents selected for the study will be compensated for their time and involvement.

Parents will be interviewed for approximately 2 hours. The interview questions will be in two parts: the first part will ask about their involvement in schools and the second part will question their feelings in regards to ARD meetings with special educators and other school professionals.

Identity will be completely confidential. Upon request, the summary research results will be made available to you and parents participating in the study. The results will be published as completion requirements for my dissertation and may be

presented at conferences. No individual parents' names or selection sites will be discussed in any summaries or presentations of this research.

The purpose of this study is gain insight and guidance about intercultural communication processes from African American parents with high school students in special education in order to facilitate parent involvement. Ultimately, these results may serve to strengthen parental initiatives with the creation of innovative pre-service teacher training, in-service teacher training, and parent workshops. It also may provide program directors with additional strategies in communicating with schools and preparing parents on how to communicate in diverse settings.

There are no foreseeable risks involved to your organization or to the participation of the parents in your program. If your parents agree to participate, please have them complete the attached form. I will collect forms from you and will contact parents to schedule a meeting time. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 442-5848 (h) or 463-9027 (w).

Thank you very much for your support.

Debra J. Johnson, M. Ed.
University of Texas Graduate School of Education

November 1999

Dear Parent:

As a Ph.D candidate at the University of Texas Graduate School of Education, I am conducting a research study on intercultural communication and the involvement of parents with high school students in special education.

Intercultural communication refers to communication between people from different cultures. For parents to have meaningful involvement in schools, especially during Admission Review and Dismissal meetings, it is important that both parents and educators from diverse backgrounds understand all aspects of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of parents' perceptions when they discuss placement, types of services available, and identification of specific needs for their students when speaking with special educators and other school professionals.

I have selected your school program because it requires parent participation within their program guidelines. I am requesting that parents with high school students in special education participate in the study. I am seeking parents for single interviews and/or participants as focus group members. Parents selected for the study will be compensated for their time and involvement. After receiving the enclosed form, I will schedule a time(s) and place convenient for you.

Parents will be interviewed for approximately 1-1 1/2 hours for the single interview and approximately 2 hours for the focus group interview. The interview questions will be in two parts: the first part will ask about your involvement in schools and the second part will question your feelings about ARD meetings with special educators and other school professionals.

Your identity will be completely confidential. Upon request, the summary research results will be made available to you and the program directors at the identified sites. The results will be published as completion requirements for my dissertation and may be presented at conferences. No individual parents' names will be discussed in any summaries or presentations of this research.

The purpose of this study is gain insight and guidance about intercultural communication processes from culturally and linguistically diverse parents with high

school students in special education in order to facilitate parent involvement. Ultimately, these results may serve to strengthen parental initiatives in schools with the creation of innovative pre-service teacher training, in-service teacher training, and parent workshops.

There are no foreseeable risks involved to your participation. Your participation is completely optional. If you choose to participate, please complete the attached form and return it to the program director. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at xxx-xxxx..

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Debra J. Johnson, M. Ed.
University of Texas Graduate School of Education

Appendix D

Excerpts from Single Interviews

Interview with Joyce

- DJ. If I have been at an *ARD* meeting with you, what would I have heard ?
- F. OK. Am I?... In the parent's room?
- DJ. Yes, in the parent's room.
- DJ. Uh, huh.
- F. First of all, we would have reviewed a period from the last *ARD*
- DJ. Uh, huh.
- F. Then, we would have gone on with, uhh... business, or the reason for the *ARD* being called.
- DJ. Uh, huh.
- F. Everybody would have been introduced. If, uhh... you know... I'm new, just coming in. So, that everybody would know everybody, and what role they played.
- DJ. Ohh, OK. OK, What would I have seen you do?
- F. What would you see me do?
- DJ. What would I have seen you do?
- F. (016) First of all, I would have greeted everybody.

DJ. Uh, huh.

F. And, thanked everybody for coming, first of all.

DJ. Uh, huh...anything else?

F. Ahh....no, not really.

DJ. What experiences would I have.... Would I observe you having?

F. DJ, it's kind of hard for me to answer that, because, I have worked both from the administrator's point of view and from the parent's point of view.

DJ. That's OK!

F. I've been trained in... Special Ed. and I hold a degree, but, I've worked 21 years with education and Special Education. And having a physically challenged child. I look for everything she needs, to be covered in her educational profit, and I have to say, it has been done!

DJ. OK

F. That may not answer the question, but...

DJ. No, that's OK!, that's good!

F. OK.

DJ. So, what reactions would I have observed from the *ARD* committee members?

F. You wouldn't have ...uhhh.... you wouldn't have seen any reactions. Uhh... believe it or not. The district I work in here and the district I worked in before I arrived was very astute to what this child needed. They were well versed in her needs, they were versed in additional needs that she needed, such as

speech, OT, PT, her technological needs, her needs for special attendance...uhh...they were aware of these. They gave me no hassle when I asked for them.

DJ. So you obviously have been working with them for a while?

F. A long time.

DJ. OK. So, what do you think about the *ARD* meetings?

F. I have no complaints with them. And here again, I don't know if it's because of who I am, instead of being just a regular parent off the street. I don't know if being an administrator has anything to do with it. But when we first started with our *ARD* meeting, they were very, very willing to work with us, even when I first arrived in the school district. And I have seen where I am now, that this district will do whatever is necessary to meet the needs of an individual child.

DJ. Humm, OK. What do you think about the *ARD* meetings?

F. They are too long. That is my biggest complaint as a parent and as an administrator. They just drag on and on and on. Too me, it seems that a pre *ARD* can be done or something can be done to cut down on the meeting time.

DJ. So what would you like to see happen as an *ARD* meeting then?

F. I'm a person where I want it short, sweet and right to the point. And I know that there are sometimes that you can't cut down on the law. You have to tell a person about their rights, you have to review, specially if it's an annual, or

you got to go back in and talk about the testing if the testing has been done, or....I don't know, I wish I had an answer. But I do know, they need to be cut down, you know, two and a half, three hours and I'm a wreck.

DJ. OK. So what do you think about the committee? The individuals participating in an *ARD* meeting?

F. I believe that if we cut these *ARD* down, the teachers wouldn't be so negative about having to come, because, you know... you take all of their conference periods.

DJ. Exactly

F. Forty-five minutes to an hour and it seems you ought to be able to get everything said and done in forty five minutes, instead of running into another class period. And they have other kids they need to take care of also, not that this child with special needs child isn't important. Don't get me wrong, They're important too. But you are sitting there with a classroom with twenty other kids that also need that teacher. (066)

DJ. Exactly. So what do you think about parents being involved in the....at the students school?

F. You mean actual involvement? Parent involvement In the school?

DJ. Uh, huh. yes

F. I'm a hundred percent for it. If I could get more parent involvement, it would make my job as an administrator a lot easier. I am constantly inviting parents to come on in, I try to make the building as parent friendly as I possibly can. I

can always find something for a parent to do. Just give me an idea of where you are comfortable as a parent and I can find something for you to do. My biggie is trying to push a mentor program.

DJ. OK. We always talk about cultural diversity and am sure you know... you've heard that term. What s your opinion of cultural diversity?

F. I believe that there are teachers and administrators and parents who are not aware enough of the diversity that we are seeing in our school. We need more sensitivity training for teachers and administrators and I don't know how we would go about getting parents more involved in it. But we definitely need more.

DJ. OK, and Intercultural communication? Are you familiar with that terminology?

F. just a little bit.

DJ. OK, what I'm talking about here is communication between groups that don't necessarily share the same cultural values, the same ethnic experiences, those who don't communicate on the same cultural level as you. So what would you give your opinion of Intercultural communication?

F. Here again, we need to do some sensitivity training, we need to do something with the cultural diversity, because , you know... we are living in a global society now, and where as, when I grew up it was a segregated area. You know.... you stay on your side of town and I stay on my side of town, the two shall never meet. African American schools with no Hispanic's there, no

Vietnamese there, no Whites there. And this helped to create the situation instead of all trying to work together as one. And I know it's hard, it really is hard, because when you are working with a child you know... Say for example, a Hispanic child, they say, well, you don't understand what I'm talking about.

DJ. Exactly.

F. But, then I can come back and say... Yes, I do understand, because I have Hispanic grandchildren. Yes, I do understand, so at least give me a chance.

DJ. Yes.

F. Give me a chance, explain to me what's going on, and then, if I don't react the way that you feel like I need to, then you come back and you let me know what I've done wrong. I am not too big to learn, I'm willing to learn. You know... if that's what it takes.

DJ. How do you feel about communicating with school professionals in an *ARD* meeting, and I realize that you are in, you know... you're wearing two hats here. But how do you feel about communicating as a parent?

F. As a parent it would never bother me, it would never bother me obviously because if I'm not going to fight for my child, and I will tell this to my parents that I deal with. You have to stand up for what you believe. And you're not always going to have all the answers. I don't ever have all of the answers, even when I'm wearing two hats. But here again, I'm willing to learn, and if I've made a mistake, I'm the first to admit that I made a mistake.

- DJ. So, what about in a Non-*ARD* meeting?
- F. You mean just at a parent meeting?
- DJ. Exactly, If you were in a conference with a parent. I mean, excuse me, with a school professional, and that it's outside of the *ARD* meeting.
- F. Right! That doesn't bother me. I love to talk.
- DJ. And I'm so happy.
- F. Ohh, I love to talk, and I can pretty much.... Well, like I said, I don't know everything, but I can talk about... A little of everything. But I do a lot of listening too. I learned a lot just by watching people talk and watching their movements. Body movements, their eye movements, you know...things of that nature. I've learned a lot from people.
- DJ. Yes, I think sometimes we don't take the time to look at those little points that really would impact us later on.
- F. Exactly. I can draw judgment by just standing, and looking and listening to someone before I even have a conversation with them, you know... I can pretty much figure out where they are coming from. (127)
- DJ. So to what extent you feel happy or anxious or afraid, intimidated, confident or confused, doing an *ARD* meeting? And this may not necessarily apply to you, but maybe some of these traits you do feel yourself as a parent. You know, because as an educator and as a professional you know what is happening. But as a parent do you ever feel, uhh.... happy or anxious or even

afraid about what's being said there. Or even a little bit intimidated about the group that you are working with?

F. No I do not, but I'll tell you what I do feel. I feel, I don't know if it's sympathy or empathy, for the parents that don't take the time to get involved in these *ARD* meetings. Because their child lives, you know.. in education are at stake. A lot of times they are too busy, or really just don't want to be there, or they feel intimidated, because maybe they are in a group with a bunch of professionals and here is a parent, a single parent who maybe didn't finish high school. I feel sorry for that bunch there. As a parent and as an educator I try to set people at ease if they need be. I don't ever try to look down. When I hold a parent conference in my office, it's very, very seldom that I sit behind my desk. I usually arrange my office where I can sit right next to a parent. Or right across from a parent. I don't try to wear the big hat. I'm the educator up here! Or I know it all! and you are the parent down there. I don't look at it that way, because without that parent and that child, I don't have a job.

DJ. So, how do you feel about communicating with individuals with the same racial background as yours? Is there a difference?

F. To be honest with you, there are times that I really, really feel intimidated.

DJ. Very Interesting.

F. And I'll tell you why. Because most of the time my own people would move down on me and I would feel like I am out to get them. That's not my job, you know.... My job there is to try to make....

DJ. Now, this is.... let me That as a parent? not as a professional, but as a parent?

F. Yes, as a parent. I've only been in this district since the first of September. And when I would meet parents in the hallway and stuff, they didn't know who I was. They thought I was just one of the new teachers coming on board. You know,.... and I had been there a while, before they realize who I was. And these people were real "buddies" with me, and these were not real "up-iddy" African -Americans, you know.what I mean?

DJ. Sure, sure I know what you're saying.

F. And, they always want to say, well, you think you're better than us. It's nothing like this. I never try to portray anything like that. I am there to help that child in whatever, Whatever! he is supposed to be doing there.

DJ. So when you are in a *ARD* meeting, and we are going to stick with ARD meetings here. How do you feel about communicating with individuals from a different racial background as yours?

F. I seem to get along better with someone of a different background than my own. The communication, the line of communication is there, they will look me in the eye and talk with me as a professional. Many of the African American I deal with, will not do that. They feel like, here again.... I'm out to get them. And even the ones that will

bring a liaison or an attorney with them, here again, ..they won't look at me. I'm just an object there. And I don't appreciate it, but, I'm still a professional with them. I don't look down on them that way, but, at least give me the courtesy to know who I am. I am conducting your *ARD*

Interview With Mary

DJ. She has a daughter who is 19 and is now attending community college. Could you tell me a little bit about, what I would have heard had I been in a meeting with you? At an ARD meeting?

M. Her needs as far as far as modification of her classroom work and her needs for physical therapy and her needs for special transportation.

DJ. Ok, go ahead, her needs for transportation...

M. Physical therapy and modification of her work assignments.

DJ. How many people were in attendance at this meeting? Usually and it varies I imagine.

M. Six to seven.

DJ. At this meeting, what would I have seen you do, how would you have been involved?

M. I would have been sitting there with the group and listening to what each individual person had to report. By individual person it could have been an individual therapist, or physical therapist, the principal, a counselor and whoever is representing the special ed. department at the school district.

DJ. Would there have been any reactions from the ARD members based on your communicating with them about your daughters? Placement or needs?

M. There was good communication. There was a few instances where maybe I didn't agree with some of their findings. At this point I don't know if you what to get to the part where I ARD'ed her out!

DJ. We'll get to that. But you did not agree to some of their findings? Did that have anything to do with the information that was imparted to you or the types of placement that they wanted to give you? Were you not satisfied with that?

M. I was not satisfied with some of the information that was given to me.

DJ. For example?

M. Well, they were always emphasizing on the needs. I was emphasizing on the need to modify her work and yet they never did. With me being new to all of this, Angela was expected to keep up with the rest of the class.

DJ. Will you tell me again what was her disability?

M. Spastic quadriplegia.

DJ. What do you think about ARD meetings? You can be honest.

M. They are useless honest!. I guess it depends on the severity of the disability. For Angela it was physical. I think if it would have been mental it would have been different.

DJ. How did they communicate this to you? You didn't feel that the meeting was as worth while as you had hoped or anticipated? What kind of communication was going on at that point, what do you think?

- M. There was one instance where I was really upset. Because the teacher that she had would not modify and Angela was expected to keep up with the rest of the class. That meant that we did homework for three hours every night and then it got to the point where the teacher made a comment to another teacher that Angela was a burden to her and her class. I knew that was not true and it got to me. I immediately went to talk to the principal about that.
- DJ. What would you like to see happen at ARD meeting?
- M. That the people that are involved, not so much the people that are involved in the school, but the people outside in the special ed. department, be more aware of what is going on and what really is the case and not what they hear.
- DJ. What do you think of the people who are actually participating in an ARD meeting?
- M. Some of them knew what was really going on and what was really happening, where as others weren't really involved and just part of the group/
- DJ. What is your opinion of cultural diversity?
- M. I've never had problems in that sense.
- DJ. What do you think of parents being involved at their children's school?
- M. I think it is very important.
- DJ. Why is it important?
- M. It's important so that they know how their child is participating. How... with a child with a disability they stand out and I feel they have to be part of the

group. I always got involved and made sure that Angela was always part of the group and not an outcast. She is able, you just need to give her a chance.

DJ. What is your opinion about intercultural communication. Briefly I gave you some information, but based on what I gave you and what you have heard. Just the term intercultural communication. What would be an opinion that you have of that?

M. I really don't have an opinion because I never really faced that.

DJ. What do you mean?

M. Because I don't know what you exactly are asking.

DJ. Ok, that is very good. I will clarify. As I said earlier, intercultural communication is communicating between individuals or groups of people who do not share the same culture or cultural value, or cultural commonalities as you or your daughter may share. Or other people in an ARD meeting, and we can look at it as being a strategy for improving communication and if that means having individuals be more aware of diversity.

M. If the individuals that are part of the ARD group are professionals. I never really looked at it that way. I say the group there and they were different cultures and different backgrounds.

DJ. So, it wasn't an issue. How do you feel about communicating with school officials in a meeting?

M. I'm the type of person where I'm going to speak my mind and stand up for my child. I'm going to voice my opinion and let them know what she needs or

doesn't need. To make sure they understand that this is what needs to be done for her.

DJ. Do you ever feel happy or anxious or intimidated. These are different they are not synonyms they are antonyms. Confident or confused during an ARD meeting. Did you ever experience any of those? We can take them one at a time. When did you feel happy at an ARD meeting?

M. I have felt happy when she was dismissed and they felt she no longer needed speech therapy. It wasn't because she had a speech problems, it was because she spoke very softly.

DJ. Have you ever felt anxious at an ARD meeting?

M. I went in to ARD her out. When we walked in and sat down we all introduced themselves and said.....

DJ. Ok, we were interrupted briefly. I was asking you about feeling anxious at the last ARD meeting...

M. They went throughout their progress reports. One person there was a liaison in the school or something. I was talking about wanting to ARD her out. That threw them back because they were not prepared for that at all and did not even know how to handle that. That lady that was with the school said that by her observation, Angela really wasn't doing that well. In my opinion I thought she was doing great and that upset me. They were thrown for a loop when I told them I wanted to ARD her out, because the only thing she really needed was the special transportation. With the physical therapy they really

weren't doing much for her. She was not comfortable with them coming and pulling her out of the class. She was at an age where she was not comfortable with the physical therapist touching her.

DJ. That is very interesting. You said that she spoke very softly and that was interpreted as not being..... tell me what was the interpretation of that?

M. I really don't know other than the fact that she spoke softly and that she needed to... I don't know.

DJ. You appear to be a soft spoken lady. Is that something that is inherited or cultural?

M. I believe it is inherited. As having a speech problem, she didn't because Angela started talking way before she was two years old.

DJ. So, that is part of how she was reared?

M. That is right. She was not a loud child. I think because she was not able to walk had anything to do with her speech. That was just her.

DJ. Could I go as far as saying... it's part of her culture so to speak. Her mannerism, the way she speaks, the way she talks. Her interaction with other people could be misconstrued if you don't know her as an individual.

M. Correct, that was her mannerism, that was her.

DJ. Has there ever been a time that you have been afraid? I guess part of that and being anxious would make you afraid of not having to receive the services you felt that she really needed.

- M. Afraid? yeah. When I told them I wanted to ARD her out and the only thing she really needed was special transportation. I was afraid that because she wasn't going to receive the other services, they were going to deny her.
- DJ. And that is really important. What about intimidated? Have you ever felt intimidated at an ARD meeting?
- M. No.
- DJ. What about confidence? and I can see that you have a lot of confidence, but are you pretty confident with what she should be receiving and what she should be getting?
- M. Very.
- DJ. Any time being confused during an ARD meeting?
- M. No, I always made sure that if I didn't understand something, I asked questions.

Interview With Cowboy

- DJ. What do you think about ARD meetings?
- C. Well, they are supposed to be there to help my son, and probably to help us as parents. Uhmm, they could be useful, You know, I probably have been in quite a few. My son is a person that has had as lot of problems, disciplinary problems, health problems, medical problems.
- DJ. So you think that the ARD meetings are helpful to an extent?

- C. Yes.
- DJ. Can you explain a little? How do they benefit you, and how do see they not benefiting you?
- C. They benefit me in learning about my son, his reactions to his teachers, his peers, uhmm.....his principal, sometimes it's a little embarrassing.
- DJ. How did the ARD meetings benefit you? Were they all beneficial?
- C. Probably these ones were. I've attended so many. They benefited me, sometimes they reinforced some of the things I already knew about my son. Uhmmm.... and probably ways that I need to react that he does or doesn't do in school.
- DJ. What would you like to see happen at an ARD meeting? What would you have liked to have seen happen?
- C. Probably...uhmm..... working to identify with his problems, I think a lot of times it could mean that someone's son is a trouble maker, uhmm....and I don't particularly think they identify with my son or myself.
- DJ. So, what do you think about the individuals that were participating in the ARD meeting?
- C. (pause).... well, they have a job to do, sometimes it felt like...
- DJ. I'm going to pause the tape.
- DJ. So, what did you think about the individuals participating in the ARD? in the ARD meeting?

- C. I don't think I can identify with them. I know that I can't identify with them as a black male who normally...normally most people are white. I'm trying to remember if I've ever recall seeing a black person at any of the ARD meetings?
- DJ. Is that right? So, what do you think about parents being involved in their students?
- C. They need to be involved. Normally I try not to get to involved, but as the father, I have to go. We adopted two children, and as a male black male, normally I was the only black male involved. Even at other meetings, whether they be ARD meetings, or not I just be sitting there.
- DJ. What would be your opinion of cultural diversity? What do you think about that? What do you know about it? I'm not going to ask you what you feel about it, but... I guess in a sense I am asking you that. What would be your opinion of cultural diversity?
- C. Well I know what cultural means , and I know what diversity means, and in terms with ARD..... there was none. No cultural diversity, like when you go in the schools there are primarily white children, when you walk through the halls, and there are no black pictures. Few black teachers and in the special ed. It's non existent.
- DJ. At the beginning I told you a little about intercultural communication. Have you ever heard that term before?
- C. Never.

- DJ. Well, just taking.....go ahead
- C. Intercultural ?.....
- DJ. Communication.
- C. Nothing from the ARD.
- DJ. OK.
- C. Uh.....
- DJ. How would you identify it?
- C. Probably , like at the ARD meetings, they're white people, and I'm black, and we having something in common with my son and their student. And a lot of times we incorporate those so that they can identify with him.
- DJ. So, how do you feel about communicating with the school professional in an ARD meeting? What would I have seen had I been sitting at that meeting. How do you feel about communicating with a school professional in an ARD meeting?
- C. I feel that it shouldn't be necessary for me to have to tell them the difference between probably how they would deal with a child and the way I would deal with it. I was raised differently than they are. Uhh... we have different standards. uh... the way.. you know.....we were disciplined, and the way we would trying to get a point across to my son, like doing his homework or a lot of times he could identify with what he was doing.
- DJ. So, how did you feel about communicating with school personnel in a non-ARD situation?

- C. Pretty much the same. It was the same situation and I get calls all the time. One time I felt that it was my son's fault. And a lot of times it was not necessarily his fault. But I would go in and.... asking, what has he done this time? or what hasn't he done?
- DJ. And again, this may be redundant. I've mentioned it earlier. To what extent do you feel happy, anxious, appraised, intimidated, confident, or confused during an ARD meeting? You mentioned earlier that that you didn't feel they understood where you are coming from as a black parent coming into an ARD meeting, so I'm really asking the same question again. This time I'm asking about specific attributes, feelings as far as being happy, being sad, feeling confident. Did you have any of those experiences at all going into the ARD meetings?
- C. A lot of times it was like I'm sitting at a table hearing ----- explaining some pretty basic things as to where I was coming from, and you kind of get used to it. I get used to it all the time. A lot of times I'm the only black parent. or there is a certain situation in the PTA meetings I'm the only black male. In a PTA meetings or if I'm sitting in the principal's office, some after school activities with my son, or listening to a music program. They immediately gave him the drums.... (laugh) and he didn't have a clue.
- DJ. So, how do you feel about communicating with individuals from the same racial background as yours? And we are still talking about being in an ARD meeting.

- C. Well, since it has never happened, I would have felt much more confident. I would have to say that some things are taken for granted, and I know where they are coming from and they know where I'm coming from.
- DJ. So, you think that, had you been exposed or sitting in an ARD meeting with people who look more like you, that you would have had a better response and better interaction with that ARD committee?
- C. Without a doubt . I would have gained more and resolved more. And could have gotten more of the problems resolved.
- DJ. So do you feel that your presence at the ARD meeting has really had an impact on your son's learning, or meeting your son's needs, just the fact that you were there?
- C. Uh.....yes. I try to be a good male role model for my son by showing up to this meetings. He would watch me, watch my reactions. Is daddy going to blow up? is daddy going to.... How is he going to handle this meeting?
- DJ. So, when you are in the ARD meeting, What do the members of the committee ask you? Or what did they ask you?
- C. They ask me for.... you know.... solutions. My reactions to what they were saying. Uhh..... courses about how my son reacts, how he reacts at home to discipline or suggestions, or instructions, or..... and what they thought I What I felt they could do to help.
- DJ. How would you describe their communication style with you during those meetings?

C. Uneasy, uhh.... I don't know if it's because ... they felt a lot easy with my wife when she was there, and they felt very unease with me.

Appendix E

Excerpt: Focus Group

- DJ. Intercultural Communication. I'm meeting with t parents who have or had children in Special Education in high school. I'm going to begin my questioning with Mr. B. Which is: What do you know about or what do you think about ARD meetings? and as you know, ARD stands for Admission for Review and Dismissal.
- B. My personal experience with ARD's were probably a bit gentle because my ex-wife is a certified resource specialist or speech therapist. What I did was to do trouble shoot in those meetings. What I would listen for, you know.. quality issues . Issues of how forthcoming were the people who were involved. And so, for the perspective of personal impact at ARD meetings, I thought they were helpful to see how it is that the educational institution was treating my son. What I come to learn about it was a little bit different. And that is that very few parents really understand the rules of the game as it relates to ARD meetings and so they go in with the idea of being instructed about what should happen with their children as opposed to coming to an understanding and bringing the people who are in the institution to understand what the special attributes of the child are. So they usually are pretty one-

sided with the people in the educational institution, you know.... being the experts and parents more or less looking for ways to fit into what's being put out at them by people who are administrators and depending who else is involved.

DJ. OK. Mr. C, do you want to add anything to that, what do you think about the ARD meetings? Mr. B brought out what he actually learned from it. Do you have anything to add to that?

C. My proclivity is that I really didn't know what was going on. And I was really easy intimidated. White people telling me what I should do or what I shouldn't do. It was confusing. And into this day, I'm still not sure of my role.

DJ. OK., OK. Ms. F, do you want to add anything to that?

F. Well, I also found it intensely intimidating, but I tend to ask a whole lot of questions, and so, I was able to satisfy my need for information to a certain extent. I found the ARD to be more productive and so more participatory at the elementary school level that I did at the high school level. At the high school level they just kind of.... went into a process and I thought that at the elementary school level they were asking for more input from us, the parents.

DJ. Good! Mr. S. what was your experience like in ARD meetings?

Mr. S. My son went to school where they said they had trouble from him. I've always been there for my kids...you know...I support them. So when they put him in special education we went to the meetings. It was a big joke!

These people have no respect. They bring in all these professional people and they try to tell you what to do for your kid. I don't know how all the system work but I know my son.

M. That 's how I feel. I know my daughter and what she needs, so I did not have a problem telling the physical therapist, the teachers, or anyone else sitting in those meetings. I usually got what my daughter needed. The meetings are good...but they should work with us more.

DJ. That's a good point. Ms. S. how do you feel about ARD's and Ms. K. we haven't heard from you.

K. Umm...I think that they are trying to help the children. Sometimes I don't understand everything...umm ...and there are people there that I don't know and sometimes they talk to each other. I mean...I'm sitting there and not knowing what to say.

Ms. S. I have grown kids and now I have this last one in high school so I know all about the schools. My son is in special education since the third grade so I went to many of those ARD meetings. They are all the same...half the time they pushing papers in front of you to sign and no one is really helping you to understand. I had to ask them, "what is this for"? how is this going to help J? I don't understand these people. it's the same thing year after year after year. It's a good that this is the last child...I am tired of dealing with them. They make it harder than it needs to be. I think it was easier in elementary school at least they treat you a little different. You get to talk with the teachers and they

give you more information about what your child is doing in school. In high school, they act like you don't have a right to be asking them questions. You know what...they don't know how to talk to us.

DJ Mr. H. Do you have something that you would like to add about your experiences or feelings about the ARD meetings?

H. Not really...but I can relate to what they are saying. You know a black man's experience doesn't sit very well (laughter)...we are the first in special education and once we show up for an ARD meeting or any meeting...you know...they want to talk to us crazy. One of the sisters said no respect. A black man gets no respect.up in that school house and you know...it makes it harder for our kids. It doesn't matter what grade their in.

DJ. Yes. Thank you.

DJ Mr.B did you see... did you have the exposure or the experience of the ARD at the elementary level or did it all just happen at the middle school and high school?

B. Most of my experiences were in the elementary level. I attended some ARD meetings in Jr. high and high school. But what we did was to have some comprehensive testing done at the University of Houston. That 's how it started out that was where the disability was discovered. There were some nerve ending development that was perception disability. It was like what he saw and what he could do. What he saw and what came out at the end was different. I think up until he was nine years old, he actually saw two-

dimensional. He did not see the two dimensional, so, it was at least the opportunity or the possibility for him to fall behind. And more than that, his mother who was able to address those issues, that he didn't fall so far behind. He still has some developmental issues now, some comprehensive issues, and they seem to be easing with time. Now that school is out he passed with A's. While during the regular semester the first time in Algebra he made a C. So as he goes on and he stretches, he starts to have all these issues being less and less.

DJ. So, go ahead...

H. A lot of it has to do with teachers outside of the ARD.

DJ. And that is just what I was about to ask you. Is that communication beyond the ARD's setting that... you know... Does it impact what is going to happen or has happened to any of your cases? You know.... your son being in the special education classes in high school. Was there any impact outside of the ARD session? I mean ... were you more involved there? Mr. C did you find yourself being more involved as a parent outside of the ARD?

C. In the school system?

DJ. Yes.

C. From time to time I had visits with the teachers. But if there was a problem, we had a visit with a teacher.

DJ. So, where did you spend most of your time as an involved parent? Would it have been in the ARD?

- C. In the ARD and just responding to..... Some of the teachers, who would involve us, were interested in working out problems with us and others....
- Mr. S. I spent a lot of time in the school. Me and my wife has to know what's going on with our kids. Whenever there is a problem and if there is not a problem...I want my kids to know that I'm there for them.
- Ms. S You know...I was very active while my children were in school. I went on the field trips when they were in elementary school but when they got up in high school I spent less and less time at their schools.
- DJ. OK. Great, and that leads to this question: Does that have anything to do, or do you perceive it that having anything to be with.... uhmm..... diversity and cultural issues and who you were and who you were related to or who you were communicating with? So I guess my question is, Did cultural diversity or issues of cultural diversity have any impact on your relationship or interaction with the school personnel whether in the ARD setting or outside of the ARD setting? Say, for a parent involved in a conference. I know that's a mouth full, but did you meet Did you say they were cultural issues when you were in the ARD?
- C. The problem with all this, is, that as a black male, I guess our people react to it. And as far as the ARD it seems that when I did have an involvement with teachers, there was always some kind of problem. I never recall talking to any teacher with positive roles, it was always the negative things.

- B. Yeah, my case was kind of interesting, because my ex-wife is white and my son is bi-racial, and like in the very same way I always sensed the difference, I was always ... I could sort of read it. And what I did was to literally play that role until I was ready to address the issue that was involved. It was always a big surprise...
- H. You right man, they are always surprised. They expect us to come one way and we come another.
- DJ. Was the surprise that you knew, as much as you knew.
- H. Yeah, I can actually use this, you now.... and follow the conversation with regard to what it was.
- C. Cultural issues always come into play when you meet with school administrators, whether they are white or black. It can't be helped.
- S. That may be true, but do you think we should have to stop being who we are to satisfy people who are culturally insensitive?
- DJ. So what is your opinion of Intercultural Communication?
- H. Oh, I think is, you know... for the most part an aristocrat joke. I don't think that, that is, well.....
- DJ. Speak your mind, I need to know exactly what you think.
- A. I think that, there is a lot of areas to work on, with regard to the Intercultural communication process. I think that the first thing that has to happen is, that, people who are part of the education institution have to learn the value, the positive value of differences. And because one manipulates the language one

way, does that at all have anything to do with ones understanding? And I think that educators tend to speak in ways and address issues in other ways that sort of tickle each others, uhh... middle class majority function and don't really pay any attention to, you know... what's real in somebody's life. And so, I think that for the most part, people in the education process, uhh.... tend to be more and pretty much close to the kind of information they can gain by being open to what's going on the life of the child in the extension of the child which is ____

DJ. Ms. F.? Thank you Mr. H. that was ... thank you..... So what do you say?

F. About Intercultural Communication?

DJ. Yes, what is your opinion of intercultural communication?

F. I think that generally speaking, he is right., but my experiences were not exactly the same as his. Probably... I don't know why exactly, but I know I did approach them as I said before, I asked a lot of questions because I need to understand. I gave the teachers a lot of information I thought it was important for them to know. These children had issues, these children are adopted. I didn't give the whole family background or anything like that, but I wanted to make sure they understand our kids.

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man can rise above the masses or
the condition of his people.

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Vita

Debra Joyce Johnson was born in Bronx, New York City on February 17, 1951, the daughter of Dorothy Mae Williams and Thomas J. Robinson. After completing her work at William Howard Taft, Bronx, New York City in 1969, she entered Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Education in May 1974. From October 1974 until May 1979 Johnson was employed with the Austin Independent School District as a sixth-grade teacher. From January 1980 to January 1997 she taught Grades 4 and 5, English as a Second Language and Spanish, and was assigned an assistant principal position. During the summer of 1984, Johnson attended the University of Houston and participated in the Multicultural Education Institute traveling to the University of St. Thomas in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Johnson entered the Graduate School of Education in 1988 at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, and received her Master of Education degree and her Educational Administration Mid-Management Certification in 1990. Johnson returned to Austin, Texas, in February 1997, where she was employed with the Texas Education Agency until January 2003. She is currently an instructor employed with Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Texas.

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