

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Minority Parent Involvement In The IEP Process: A Systematic Model Approach

Robert Marion

Historically and legally, the function of education in this country has been vested in state educational agencies and chiefly delegated to local school districts; but, in reality, the family is the primary educator. Although this truth has been commonly accepted in regular education, it seems to have been forgotten in the education of exceptional children. Much of the current literature substantiates the appraisal that, until recently, parents of exceptional children have received little more than passing attention. Thus, educating the exceptional child has been considered the province of the professional educator and paraprofessional, with the parent playing a secondary role. The parent of a handicapped child generally has been expected to fulfill two roles in the educational planning process: (1) a loyal supporter of the educational system, and (2) a recipient of reports concerning the child.

Recently, however, there has been a renewed effort to re-examine the role of parents in special education programs, hastened by parents' complaints about incomplete screening procedures, inappropriate placements, and insufficient accountability. This concern culminated in enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975. Requirements of this legislation demand a more sophisticated teacher approach to working with parents of exceptional children. This is especially true for parents of minority children. PL 94-142 has given impetus for educators to expand the scope of their teacher training efforts in assisting teachers with their attempts to involve minority parents in the educational planning processes for their exceptional children.

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SETTING THE STAGE

How can we involve parents of minority children in the IEP process when we sometimes can't even get them (parents) to come to school? This question is the number one concern of teachers who work with minority parents of exceptional children in public schools. In light of PL 94-142, the question not only deserves a positive answer, but assumes that schools will increase their efforts to communicate with and involve minority parents successfully in educational planning for their children.

Two critical variables have shaped the perceptions of minority parents toward schools and special education: (1) the school, and (2) the family.

The Schools

In the case of minorities, notably Blacks and Mexican-Americans, the schools generally have not served them well. This is also true in the area of special education. While Anglo parents of exceptional children sought relief in the schools as early as the 1930s through the White House Conference on Children, parents of minority children were still struggling for recognition of equal

educational opportunity under a dual educational system. Thus, parent participation was of a mixed nature. In the North and West, where the PTAs were the dominant force for parent participation, minority parent involvement in the schools was minimal and the future of their children usually rested in the hands of white middle class parents. The South in the 1950s presented a different picture. With the dual system of education in effect, minority families had their own schools and were, for the most part, active participants in the PTAs. These separate activities were decreed by law to be conducted in isolation from those of the Whites; but even under these circumstances, parents generally felt a sense of community and loyalty to their schools.

With the advent of desegregation, conditions changed, making minorities suspicious of the mission of schools and special education. In the South, formerly active minority parents felt disfranchised as their schools were closed or transformed into lower level educational centers. Because of the sometimes violent nature of desegregation, these parents tended to no longer participate in PTAs and other school activities -- in effect muting their voices in educational planning for their children. At the same time, many minority children enrolling in previously all-White schools were labeled "mentally retarded" and began to appear in disproportionate numbers in special education classes. Although Black parents were not pleased with these actions, they had little choice but to endure such placements or watch their children suffer the consequences of being "pushed out" by the schools. If the children of desegregation were not excluded, they tended to become alienated, as illustrated by the large number of Black and Mexican-American youths who dropped out or failed to complete their high school education. Racial minorities in Northern schools fared little better. The children became trapped primarily in large urban schools as migration patterns resulted in a concentration of minority families in inner city neighborhoods. Many of these children also suffered from educational deficiencies derived from former attendance in substandard rural schools.

Therefore, parents of minority children had the unhappy experience of watching their children fall behind in grade level performance, often resulting in relegation to special education classes as "slow learners." Much of this labeling was based solely on IQ test scores. After having been so labeled early in schools, they frequently finished their education in the "general" or

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mentally retarded curriculum, which usually was tantamount to unemployment or welfare.

Under these circumstances, the unrest of the 1960s ushered in the decade of the educationally handicapped child. The sixties also marked the initial attempt by schools to allow minority parents to participate with educators in the decision making processes. Initiation of programs such as Title I and Headstart mandated that parents sit on advisory councils to ensure their involvement in education of their children. As these programs of parent participation developed, educators became increasingly aware that parents were indeed vital in determining the program's success. Separate studies (Smith & Brahce, 1963; Gordon, 1972; and Sullivan, 1970) served to demonstrate that parents' behavior and modeling in their various roles in the child's early years did influence intellectual performance.

These programs also revealed, however, that it was hard to involve parents meaningfully in the education of their children. Educators sometimes were frustrated because many parents refused to be guided by school establishment interpretations of the program. Despite this frustration, other studies (Grotberg, 1970; Jones, 1971) produced results that conclusively maintained the value of continued parent involvement in early educational programs of their children. The Grotberg study showed that the performance of children whose parents were assisting them at home, with or without the same materials utilized by the instructor in the classroom, was definitely superior to the performance of a central group of children who were not receiving help outside of school. Both groups of children, experimental and control, were exposed to the same instruction and materials in the classroom. Jones' (1971) study showed that in the case of low income families, low verbal ability often is wrongly equated with a lack of intellectual potential. Another study (Rodin, 1971) investigated the effect of various degrees of involvement of low income parents in pre-school programs. She found that active parent participation significantly increased the reading readiness scores of children.

In the case of Title I parent participation, most studies concurred that more rather than less parent involvement was to be desired. Chilman (1968) recommended that advisory committees be strengthened and provided with a necessary structure. Reyes and Gezi (1973) studied Title I programs in California and made 12 recommendations. Number 12 stated:

The majority of the consultants in the Division of Compensatory Education, California State Department of Education, felt that advisory committees are to contribute meaningfully to the compensatory education program, school districts must show that they are committed to the right of the community to share in the educational decision making process by earnestly seeking and implementing the advice of the school district advisory committee. Workshop and inservice training sessions for committee members should be provided to help them become more knowledgeable in the development and implementation of compensatory education programs and to aid them in developing the skills needed to evaluate such programs.

Based on these Title I and early childhood studies, one can see why it has become a challenge for educators to involve parents of minority children in special education.

Families and Special Education

While minority parent involvement with schools in general has not always been pleasant, similar experiences involving special education have been even less satisfying. As early as 1963, minority parents served notice that they were displeased with the placement of their children. In *Hobson v. Hansen* (cited in *Congressional Record*, 1967), a judgment was rendered against District of Columbia schools to stop the "tracking" of a disproportionate number of minority children into the general curriculum of their schools.

In the 1970s a series of cases underscored the mistrust these parents felt toward the schools and special education programs. *Larry F. v. Riles* (1972) contended that Black children had been placed in classes for the mentally retarded as a result of inappropriate testing procedures. Landmark litigation came in the form of the *Pennsylvania (PARC)* (1971) decision, to achieve the right to a public education and due process, and the *Mills* (1972) case, which accorded a free public education to handicapped children. Finally, in *Diana* (1973), Mexican-American parents challenged the placement of their children in classes for the mentally retarded due to language differences and solely on the strength of IQ tests.

The subsequent changing social order and shift in educational philosophy have caused minority parents to lift their aspirations concerning schools and special education. These changes also made Black and Mexican-

American parents take a different look at their family structures. Based on these insights, they found that their families had strengths that should be more highly regarded by educators than the pathological concept formerly accorded to them. Earlier, many investigators including Myrdal (1944) and Minuchin (1967) had assigned the following characteristics to low income minority families:

FAMILY STEREOTYPES	
Black	Mexican-American
Matriarchal	Patriarchal
Unstable	Cohesive
Lacking in productivity	Subservient-low
Multi-agency families	csteem
Low value of education	Multi-agency families
Pathological	Low value of education

Minority researchers not surprisingly argued against these negative stereotypes. Billingsley (1968) and Hill (1972) presented strong arguments for a different view of Black families. Hill's study listed five strengths of Black families that are persuasive arguments for adopting a more positive view regarding Black family attributes. According to Hill, these strengths are: (1) strong kinship bonds; (2) strong work orientation; (3) adaptability of family roles; (4) high achievement orientation, and (5) strong religious orientation. Hill concluded and asserted that an examination of Black family strengths could help in understanding the qualities that previously had been characterized as weaknesses. He argued that this understanding could lead to more constructive programs for meeting the needs of these families.

In considering Mexican-American families, Castenada (1974) and Flores (1972) found family solidarity to be a strength. Rubel (1971) and Murillo (1971) stressed expressiveness as a family asset. Evans and Anderson (1973) found high achievement orientation to be a family characteristic. Another source of strength was stated to be religious orientation (cited by Madsen, 1964). Finally, Murillo (1971) and Ramirez, Herold, and Castenada (1974) identified cooperation as a major source of strength among Mexican-American families.

Thus, a new picture of minority families emerged, emphasizing basic strengths of kinship, strong religious

and work orientations, adaptability of family roles, expressiveness, cooperation, and high achievement orientation. If these strengths are allowed, the same challenges faced by parents of educationally handicapped children in the 1960s are applicable to parents and families of exceptional children in the 1970s. This comparison can be depicted as:

1960s	1970s
1. Overemphasis on testing and IQ scores (culture-free and group)	1. Nondiscriminatory testing
2. Middle class values	2. Second class citizenship
3. "General" curriculum tracking	3. Least restrictive environment
4. Language differences, dialects, and second language	4. Primary language of the child and mode of communication
5. Individualized instruction	5. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Reflecting upon past history, one can understand the unwillingness of minority parents to accept decisions to place their children in special education programs or to become involved in IEP decisions. Whereas majority parents have viewed special education as an alternative, minority parents conjured up images derived from two commonly used labels: emotionally disturbed - which they interpreted as "troublemakers" or "hard to handle," and mentally retarded - with the implication of "dumb" or "not too bright."

Excluded from their consideration were the "good" labels, including visually handicapped, learning disabled, deaf, and physically handicapped, which carried lesser negative connotations.

With this background, the teacher's task in seeking to involve minority parents in the IEP process is twofold:

1. When a child is deemed in need of special education but is not receiving it, the old stereotypical images first must be erased and the parents in effect educated regarding the process;
2. When a child is already receiving special education services, the parents must become stimulated

or motivated to become actively involved in their child's education plan.

The preceding discussion of history and effects on minority families can be of assistance in enacting a model program to allow minority parents to maximally interact in and contribute to this process.

THE MINORITY PARENT PARTICIPATION MODEL

Conceptually, the model takes into consideration all the major requirements of PL 94-142 that effect parent-teacher interaction. These stipulations are to assure:

1. Extensive child identification procedures;
2. "Full service" goal and detailed timetable;
3. Complete due process procedures;
4. Regular parent or guardian consultation;
5. "Least restrictive" environment for all handicapped children receiving special education;
6. Nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation;
7. Policies and procedures to protect the confidentiality of data and information;
8. Maintenance of an individualized program for all handicapped children;
9. A surrogate to act for any child when parents or guardians are either unknown or unavailable, or when said child is a legal ward of the State.

Considering these guarantees, the model can be outlined in this fashion:

Step 1 Guidelines

Phone

The first contact is usually by phone. When working with minority parents:

1. Use the title *Mr.* or *Mrs.* when addressing the adult, for two primary reasons: (1) Minority parents are not always afforded the same courtesy and respect as some other people; and (2) they may resent or mistrust a person who gives the impression of wanting to become "too friendly" too soon.

This common courtesy can make the difference between a good or poor start to communication with the parent.

2. Put respect and courtesy into your voice. The professional should remember that a phone call from the school usually engenders a degree of fear or suspicion in the hearts of parents in general. A respectful, polite tone can do much to alleviate this fear.
3. Because prior contacts may have concerned problems only, be sure to discuss some of the child's good points before launching into a report of the problems. This approach: (1) lowers the anxiety level of the parent; (2) sets the tone of the discussion; and (3) enriches the role of the professional. When minority parents can tune into a helpful individual who treats them with kindness and respect, sigh unseen, and who can say a kind word about their children, they, like all parents, tend to be more responsive.
4. Use language that the parent can understand. This vocabulary will depend upon the articulation response and level of understanding that you perceive as the discussion progresses. Talk at the parent's level, and do not be condescending. People usually have "built-in antennae" that pick up the difference between a patronizing and respectful attitude. Respect and courtesy should continue throughout the discussion, both in tone and approach.
5. Ask parents to repeat parts of the discussion that you wish them to intelligently consume. This assumes good communication skills and the ability to be able to listen and respond appropriately at the parents' level. It also implies that the professional should be able to impart empathy toward parents who appear to be having difficulty understanding educational concepts with which the educator is intimate/familiar.

While the phone is commonly used as the initial conduit for reaching parents, it has special significance for minority parents. It can be perceived as a threatening instrument that brings more bad news or it can become an instrument for opening up communication

PARENT PARTICIPATION MODEL*

	<i>Procedure</i>	<i>Person Responsible</i>	<i>Documentation</i>
STEP 1	Contact parents	Classroom teacher or principal	A copy of written communication; log of contacts
STEP 2	Refer to Local Support Team (LST)**	Classroom teacher or principal	Form
STEP 3	Schedule LST to discuss child's educational needs	LST coordinator with teacher consultation	
STEP 4	Invite parents to LST meeting	LST coordinator with teacher consultation	Form
STEP 5	LST Meeting	Team members	
STEP 6	Summarize meeting in writing; send copy to parents	LST coordinator or designated team member	Form
STEP 7	Carry out recommendations of LST	Designated team member	Existing or modified parent permission forms as appropriate
STEP 8	Review recommendations and new data; requires return to Step 3 if data do not indicate that special education is needed	Team members	
STEP 9	Refer to Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD)***	Designated team member	Form
STEP 10	Continued parent contact (phone, written, home visits, parent groups)	Designated team member	Teacher records

*Adapted from Austin (Texas) School District

**Local Support Team — Site team that meets to discuss possible special education placement for the child

***Admission, Review, & Dismissal — Committee that places, reviews or dismisses students from special education

lines between home and school. Those who use the phone extensively in working with minority parents would be well advised to become familiar with Ivey's (1973) Attending Behavior Model, which leans heavily upon listening and response skills. In some instances school personnel may have to rely on a "third party" approach, involving use of a neighbor's phone if the parents don't have one.

If the phone does not suffice, written communication may become the next vehicle for parent communication.

Written Communication

Because the writer of the message is neither seen nor heard, this form of communication places greater responsibility upon the professional seeking to enlist assistance from parents. The following guidelines apply:

1. Attempt to find out the parents' educational level before sending them written communications. This information will help determine the wording of the message and increase the likelihood that it will be understood and well received at home.
2. Affix the titles of *Mr.* and/or *Mrs.* to all communications. Among minority parents, the title *Ms.* has not been widely acceptable. Generally speaking, this segment of the population tends to be traditional in many regards.
3. Be positive in approach. The same methods suggested for telephone discussion apply here: One should begin with some of the child's positive attributes before proceeding to the problem situation.
4. Guard against appearing condescending or superior to the parent. Be sure to re-read the message to assure that it doesn't contain educational "jargon" of the profession.
5. Be brief, but clear and precise. Minority parents often have said that they were not informed about certain problems or were not given the complete story. Also, they have objected to being asked to take time off work or home tasks for unclear

reasons. Caution, therefore, should be exercised to ensure that messages say what you intend, and do not lend themselves to supposition. The aid of a minority colleague could be sought in this regard.

6. If appropriate, include a "sign off" portion for parents. This provides a feedback mechanism to alert the sender that messages have been received.

Neither the telephone communication nor the written message should be taken lightly in working with minority parents; and Hurlitz (1969) earlier had reported the same finding in his look at the relationship between poverty and mental retardation.

Involvement of minority parents can be related directly to their early contact with educational professionals. Thus, continued minority parent participation in the IEP process is linked to initial and follow-up communication between home and school.

Step 2 Guidelines

When referrals are made to the Local Support Team (LST) that meets to discuss possible special education placement for the child, parents need to be informed about the situation. Phoning is the easiest but not necessarily the best method in this instance. If the contact person uses this approach, however, all of the procedures and cautions listed under *Step 1 Guidelines* should be observed. Written messages might substitute for the phone and, again, contact persons should follow the suggestions outlined under *Step 1 Guidelines*. The recommended approach here, though, is the pre-arranged home visit, because it best conveys the message that the school cares. It also allows educational personnel to meet parents face-to-face and to make some informal ecological assessments. Wiederholt (1978) and Larsen (1976) view this as an important component in parent-teacher relations. Further, home visits allow the contact person the opportunity to exchange information with parents about the workings of an LST or similar screening team. Finally, a face-to-face encounter aids educational personnel in developing "informed consumers" (Marion, 1978).

When visiting in homes with minority parents, one should consider the following suggestions:

1. Dress appropriately. Minority parents have had a tendency to ascribe the role of "expert" to the teacher (Barsch, 1969) and to respect the teaching profession in general. This view is worth upholding.
 2. Discuss and explain the purpose of the visit in layman's terms, for effective communication.
 3. Employ the Attending Behavior Model (Ivey, 1973) to achieve empathy and build rapport with parents.
 4. Be nonjudgmental concerning affairs of the home. First appearances can be deceiving. The most reliable indicator of minority family life is observation over time (Hill, 1972).
 5. Before leaving the home, ask the parents to repeat the salient information. This reduces misunderstandings regarding possible future placement of their child.
 6. Enlist the help of a reliable person as liaison, one who is sensitive to the needs of minorities. This is important in establishing effective communication. The person could be a minority staff member, social worker, other teacher, or counselor, who would be deployed during the home visit and might serve as a translator if necessary.
- b. It reduces the time needed to obtain written or verbal assurances of being present at the scheduled meetings;
 - c. It allows full explanation of the need for the LST meeting and provides an opportunity for an informal exchange of information;
 - d. It exceeds IEP requirements for "repeated efforts" to involve parents.
2. Be sure that the parents understand the "rules of the game." (If necessary, obtain the assistance of an aide from another program such as Headstart or the Teacher Corp to ensure that the minority parent fully understands the necessity of the meeting.) The contact person must assume the role of information exchanger with the parent, and the minority parent must become an intelligent consumer of information. Among information shared in this meeting, parents should be told the names of persons who will represent the school at the meeting, and their functions on the team.
 3. Encourage parents to bring a friend or advocate if they appear to be uneasy about appearing before the committee. Minority parents may be woefully uninformed about their rights. Therefore, the contact person should be ready to supply the information, in full detail, that will encourage the parent to attend.

Step 3 and Step 4 Guidelines

Steps 3 and 4 are combined in discussion because the scheduling and the actual team meeting must be approached together. According to Hill (1972), minority parents as a whole believe in the American Dream and therefore hold the idea that an education may be the best advantage they can offer their child. With this in mind, the following guidelines can be proposed:

1. Make a home visit, either as the initial home visit or follow-up visit. With minority parents, this has been shown to be the best avenue toward gaining their involvement in the IEP process. Several factors are in its favor:
 - a. It avoids misunderstandings about time and place of the LST meeting to be scheduled, since both parties are present;

4. Have a translator present if the minority parent's use of the English language is limited or if English is not the predominant language spoken in the home. This shows: (1) compliance with the spirit of PL 94-142, and (2) that the schools care enough about the family to facilitate communication in their own language.

Step 5 Guidelines

This first team meeting probably is the most threatening aspect of the IEP process for minority parents. To ease the transition from an anxiety provoking situation to a more open session of communication:

1. Initially, take time to put the parent at ease, rather than having everyone surround the parent immediately. The initial contact person is the most appropriate person to do this. Show respect and courtesy by gesture, voice, and attitude. If possible, a minority person sensitive to the specific situation should either be a part of the LST team or be asked to sit in on the meetings. This person also might serve as a translator.
2. Have only those persons on the team who are most familiar with the problem in attendance. Others would be "on call" as consultants to join the meeting upon request. The single greatest deterrent to minority parent participation is that they might feel overwhelmed when they walk into a meeting and feel all the school people are lined up against them. Numbers alone can give parents the impression that they are in a "can't win" situation.
3. Keep the discussion in layman's language, but don't try to use the idioms and phraseology unique to a minority group.
4. Treat minority parents as co-equals. Co-equal means, among other things, a respect for minority parent viewpoints. Extend the courtesy of listening and soliciting input from parents. In the past, school personnel often have *told* minorities what is going to be done rather than involving them in the decision making.

In brief, the LST meeting should be viewed as an informative, open situation in which the minority parent can be an active and willing participant.

Step 6 Guidelines

Summarizing the meeting is a critical step in the IEP process since parents and school personnel must agree upon the findings of the LST (screening) team. It is significant, too, because the parents' permission must be obtained to proceed. Together, parents and educators must agree upon what additional information is needed, whose decision it is to gather the needed information, and when and how the assessment is to be

completed. Specifically, this requires school personnel to:

1. Verbally summarize, with the parent, what was agreed upon in the meeting. It is important that minority parents play back or repeat the agreement. This allows minority parents to participate in the decision making process and gives all participants an opportunity to validate their views. Because minority parents often use this approach within their own families (Hill, 1972; Luderus, 1977), shared decisions are conducive to further participation in the IEP process. Joint decisions also alleviate the concern that minority parents often express about special education becoming a "dumping ground" for their children.
2. Give parents a written copy of the summary, and retain a copy for school records. Printed forms or other sheets with carbon backed material are suggested. A written copy assures that what has been verbally agreed upon does not lose truth in the translation from mouth to paper. It also confirms that schools intend to keep the faith in the American Dream (Coryers, 1970).
3. Examine critically the final written summary before sending to the parent to determine if:
 - a. Its content says what was agreed upon. Compare what was said with what was written; if discrepancies appear, contact the parent and other team participants to resolve them;
 - b. Its length is not exhausting to recipients; summaries should be logically brief and to the point;
 - c. Its practicality is unquestioned. A good yardstick is to check to see whether the summary answers the *what, whose, when and how* of the guidelines.

Step 7 Guidelines

This stage in the IEP process requires a decision on whether to terminate or to proceed with additional assessment. Prior to PL 94-142, minority parents felt

pressure either to agree to additional assessment or to face the prospect of having their children suspended from school (Hurley, 1969; Children's Defense Fund, 1974; Southern Regional Council, 1974). Thus, procedural policies of PL 94-142 afford minority parents the opportunity to agree or disagree with findings from the screenings.

If all parties agree that further assessment is needed, parents of minority children require particular attention. The following guidelines apply:

1. Competent professionals with an understanding of minority cultures should be placed in charge of assessment procedures. This helps ensure the use of non-biased, appropriate, and validated instruments. An example of a good assessment tool is Mercer's SOMPA, a multi-variable instrument for assessing minority students.¹ And many school districts have developed their own ecological assessment instruments, to include medical, sociological, and peer assessments; in other words, looking at a child in a total environment context.
2. The assessor must demonstrate cultural sensitivity in the evaluation sessions. For instance, whether to employ a male or female person in that role is important (Gay & Abrahams, 1974). Also, ecological assessment should be a part of the total picture of the child (Wiederholt, 1976; Larsen, 1976). Furthermore, individual assessment should be emphasized, rather than evaluation done in groups. Finally, the tone of the assessor in this stress situation should not be anxiety provoking (Larsen, 1976).

If all parties do not agree that further assessment is necessary, the situation can become troublesome for any or all concerned. If the parents disagree with the findings, school personnel face the task of convincing them that their child needs additional assessment to determine if more comprehensive services are necessary (Marion, 1978). In this case, the educational team becomes an advocate for the child in opposition to the minority parent, while the parents are likely to perceive the school as a villain attempting to usurp their rights as

parents. To work within this situation, the following guidelines are proposed:

1. Show respect for the parents' view. Attempts to "bully" them will only stiffen their resolve to maintain their position. This is one time that minority parents feel that they have control of their destiny and their child, and any attempt to force them to deal from a position of weakness likely will result in failure (Roche & Mink, 1976).
2. Try to impress upon the parent that assessment does not mean that schools are "labeling" their child. Fear and anger over past inappropriate placements have resulted in widespread minority opposition to special education (Marion, 1977), so educators should stress the purpose of additional assessment as being to benefit the child. If a time limit is in effect (e.g., 30-40 days), state clearly to the parent that these time constraints have been established to prevent exactly what they are afraid of labeling.
3. Assure parents that the ultimate outcome of the assessment will not necessarily result in special education placement. Moreover, inform them of their rights and guarantees under PL 94-142; i.e., that any decisions regarding final placement of their child must have their consent.
4. Provide for a translator or friend of the family to be present, if necessary, to ensure that the process is fair and democratic. This methodology helps to sharpen minority parents' perception that they do enjoy equality in the decision making process, and fulfills the spirit and intent of PL 94-142.

Therefore, at the end of Step 7, parents can decide to terminate the process, whereupon the student is returned to the regular classroom unless the school appeals the decision.

Step 8 Guidelines

Provided that parents have agreed to a more comprehensive assessment, new data and additional recommendations evolve through the LST and come back to the

¹Available from the Institute for Pluralistic Assessment Research, P.O. Box 55121, Riverside, California 92517

of the new data, parents again are involved in discussions regarding their child's placement, and should be afforded the following considerations:

1. Enlist those members of the team who are familiar with assessment procedures and results and are sensitive to minority concerns about testing and labeling of minority children to report, interpret, and discuss with parents the implications of this testing (Oakland, 1974; Jay & Abrahams, 1974).
2. Encourage parents' input into the discussion, making a special attempt to solicit their opinions and to ensure that their major concerns are not being lost in translation. Ivey's (1973) model that calls upon professional listening and response skills would be invaluable in this session.
3. Take steps to make parents comfortable when discussing the findings. Reduce the number of school personnel present so that parents do not feel threatened by sheer numbers. Those in attendance ideally would be the parent, the people most familiar with the assessment, and a translator or friend of the parent.
4. Make sure that parents understand the practical application of the findings; that is, the implications for the minority parent and child in the school environment. Members of the educational establishment should be aware of the consequences for minorities, especially if the findings show evidence of possible mental retardation or emotional disturbance and the related placements (President's Committee on Mental Retardation, 1971). Minorities have tended to resist these two placements particularly (Marion, 1978). Therefore, data should be definitive, impartial, and conclusive when used by school personnel in discussing these possibilities.

The initial step in providing services to the student with special needs is the referral process, triggered by a concern (usually by the classroom teacher) that a student's performance does not match academic and/or behavioral expectations. Then, the federally established policies of PL 94-142 must be translated into meaningful action that allows sequential steps from initial identification of eligible students to the actual delivery of services. Because minority parents, especially Blacks and Mexican-Americans, have been the most vocal in expressing their discontent with special education, schools

have reason to be particularly concerned about their participation in the total IEP process from the initial step to the conclusion of the process.

Steps 1-8 in the Parent Participation Model have designated the guidelines to be followed if a student is being considered for possible inclusion in special education. Steps 9 through 10 are presented for the educational professional who is working with minority parents of children already enrolled in special education.

Step 9 Guidelines

This is the step at which the student is first admitted into special education and the IEP is developed and implemented. It is also the step at which students already in special education have need of another look at the considerations given to an appropriate educational plan.

According to the mandates of PL 94-142, an IEP is required for every student designated to be in need of special services. The IEP is a management tool designed to ensure that exceptional children receive an education appropriate to their needs and that this education is actually delivered and monitored (Hudson & Graham, 1978). PL 94-142 requires and expects that an appropriate education will obtain the mechanisms to assure achievement of both the long-range goals and short-term objectives contained in the IEP.

The following components are to be included in each IEP:

- A statement of the student's present level of performance;
- Establishment of priorities;
- Determination of services to be delivered;
- Specification of evaluation procedures.

1. *Objectively state the student's present level of performance.* Minority student referrals or continuation should entail a comprehensive diagnostic document consisting of the students' instructional history, previous instructional problems, curriculum-related strengths and weaknesses, and non-academic behaviors. This kind of objective information should serve as a basis for identifying, referring, and continuing minority students in special education.

Identification of minority student needs must be based upon knowledge of what constitutes a handicapping condition. This is especially true for teachers who work with large numbers of minority students from "disadvantaged" backgrounds. Although that term is obsolete in its inference, enough of the old stereotype still exists to result in a disproportionate number of minority students being referred to and programmed into special education by regular education teachers who seek the "easy way out." In the past, verbal referrals could be made during coffee breaks, passing in the hall, or by telling special education teachers that, "I have one for you." Once placed in special education, minority students seldom were reappraised (President's Committee on Mental Retardation, 1971).

An evaluation of the accumulated diagnostic data should be done so that the IEP team has a valid and reliable basis for accepting or rejecting the decisions of the screening team. If the decision is rejected, the process ends and the student's present placement can be considered appropriate. If additional information is needed, however, minority parents should be involved as described in Steps 6 and 7.

2. *Establish priorities.* Minority parents should be fully involved as co-equals in setting educational priorities for their children. Guidelines for minority parent participation in Step 8 should be utilized.
3. *Determine delivery of services.* As a part of the IEP team, minority parents should:
 - a. Work together to determine what regular, special education, and related services are needed to successfully reach the long-term (annual) goals;
 - b. Determine with team members the specific special education and related services that must be provided;
 - c. Set the dates when specific services are to begin and specify how long these services will be provided.
 - d. Plan and list persons who are to be responsible for implementing those services;
 - e. Select any special instructional media and materials that might be needed;
 - f. Assist in describing to what extent their child will participate in the regular school program;

- g. Give joint justification for the educational placement the child will have.

In all of the above, minority parents are expected to be a part of the IEP team. This means that they must be informed of their rights, be informed and participating members, share co-equal status, and be afforded due process. To fully participate in the process, parents should attend all planning meetings. If parents are hesitant, a person who has stature in the community (e.g., priest or minister) might be enlisted to involve parents; or an intermediary from a program like Title I or Headstart might serve as a contact for working with elementary and preschool parents. At the secondary level, educational professionals could attempt to work with Title I and Teacher Corp. personnel to effect linkages into the minority community. This kind of repeated effort is consistent with the requirements of PL 94-142.

To achieve a more enlightened parent force, several techniques might be employed to enrich minority parents as intelligent consumers of information. Meetings could be held within the community to discuss service alternatives; PL 94-142, and implications for minority groups. PTAs might be enlisted to help disseminate information and to encourage minority parents to attend IEP meetings for individualized and personal attention to their children. Title I, Teacher Corp, and Headstart Advisory Committee members can be serviced to further their knowledge.

4. *Specify the evaluation procedures.* Information and data on students should be systematically collected, to allow parents and IEP team members to determine:
 - a. If long-range goals and short-term objectives are being met; and
 - b. If adjustments in the educational plan need to be made.

For short-term objectives, use the following guidelines:

 - Relate evaluation activities directly to the child's instructional plan.
 - Use standardized tests sparingly. They often do not relate to instructional activities.

ties but can be used in pre- and post-test situations.

- Utilize criterion referenced testing to determine student performance on specific behaviors.
- Measure whether specific objectives are being realized by combining teacher observation and the student's daily work outputs.

To determine if long-range goals are being achieved, use the following guidelines:

- Monitor services over time.
- Include parents in the monitoring process.
- Place needs of the child paramount in planning and design of the IEP.

Educational professionals should be mindful that a major obstacle to parent participation in the IEP process relates to a general and specific lack of information. For minority parents to contribute effectively to this phase of the process, schools might have to:

- Conduct community workshops to inservice low income and minority parents. Title I and Headstart programs have already demonstrated that this is an effective way to achieve minority parent participation. Most conventional parent organizations associated with handicapped children (e.g., NARC, ACLD) have proportionately low minority memberships. Thus, at present, such organizations cannot be considered significant information dissemination vehicles when minority parents are involved. Churches and community outreach organizations appear to have greater receptivity with minority populations.
- Encourage minority parents to prepare for IEP meetings that affect their child, by examining files and records regularly to ensure that they are accurate and up-to-date. Further, encourage questions concerning evaluation, to help prevent "railroading" of school options for expediency rather than according to the child's needs.
- Make minority parents aware of their right to bring along a helper to any meeting if that will make them feel more comfortable or secure; or teachers and other school personnel could suggest names and addresses of people who will be advocates for them and their children. School personnel

should insist upon fair treatment regardless of economic circumstances.

- Help parents understand the differences between the way special education functioned in the past and the new commitment of schools under PL 94-142.

Schools still are considered a vital part of the minority community, but there's a scarcity of minority professionals working in special education programs and institutions of higher education are not preparing large numbers of minority professionals in special education. Faced with this discrepancy between the large numbers of minorities enrolled in special education and an under-representation in the professional ranks, special education must take the initiative in preparing its own ranks for leadership in working with minority parents of exceptional children.

Step 10 Guidelines

During this phase, implementation of the IEP becomes operational, moving the IEP process into the front ranks. A sample pre-inservice program to prepare and assist teachers in working with minority parents is formulated according to two basic premises: (1) To assist educators and teachers in working with minority parents who are concerned about entry of their child into a special education program; and (2) To help the established professional carry out responsibilities of the IEP process with minority parents.

The following competencies can be expected of teachers and educators:

1. Knowledge of his or her development of minority parental attitudes toward special education;
2. Knowledge of theoretical positions concerning minority families;
3. Skills relevant to planning and designing an IEP for minority students;
4. Awareness of the roles of teachers and educators in providing leadership and supportive relationships to parents of minority students.

Since all educators and teachers cannot be assumed to have the skills needed to work effectively with minority parents, the following activities are proposed in conjunction with inservice training activities, to ensure teacher competency in working with minority parents:

1. Review the basic tenets of PL 94-142 and the implications for working with parents.
2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of minority families as a whole.
3. Review the Parent Participation Model and discuss specific strategies within each step that facilitate or impede the process of working with minority families.
4. Read and discuss case studies with respect to their implications for working with minority parents in the individual education plan process.

CONCLUSION

The IEP Minority Parent Participation Model is systematic in approach. It requires attention to certain factors and behaviors at specified checkpoints. Basically, the model:

1. Designates responsibility for parent contact, thus eliminating confusion in the minds of minority parents and professionals.
2. Records the numbers and kinds of parent contact, placing the accountability upon the educator and assuring that one is exhausting all means to involve the parent.
3. Makes provision for cultural differences, so that the professional is led to understand why minority parents may be defensive or non-communicative about school affairs, while allowing lines of communication to stay open.
4. Provides for different modes of communication, emphasizing that the educator should develop some understanding of dialectal and language difference and communicate in layman's terms.
5. Stresses the personal attention factor making the minority person feel like "somebody."
6. Supports parents through changing teacher roles, as advocate, ombudsman, or information exchanger.

The systematic approach of this model allows identification of specific minority parent concerns and enables them to be dealt with through the existing framework of schools. It also provides flexibility for individual schools to make whatever modifications they deem necessary to improve their working relationships with minority parents of exceptional children.

The suggestions here can be generalized for use with disinfranchised and economically impoverished parents as well. The advice of Barsch (1969) is sound:

There is no value to be found in an attitude of mutual helplessness for the middle ground is occupied by a struggling child seeking to find the highest possible level of personal integration. The learning efficiency of the child is a real issue in the situation, and it must be of paramount consideration.

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CLASSROOM FORUM

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I would like to be a
volunteer in the special education
class but am afraid it would
be too depressing.
Please enlighten me.

Is there a human being alive who doesn't get depressed at one time or another? Teachers are only human, and volunteers as teachers of exceptional children also are human.

When working with children, numerous factors cannot be controlled by the volunteer, but there are ways of coping with potential y depressing factors. The overriding consideration is to be realistic in terms of the current situation. Volunteers cannot possibly restructure the home environment of a child, nor can they totally eliminate the handicapping conditions present. Volunteers, however, can reduce some of the outward signs of frustration in children, by working with them on their self-concept and learning styles.

A child confined to a wheelchair may never become an active participant in team sports like football, basketball, and track; but that child should be encouraged to pursue sports interests through realistic activities within his or her capabilities. The child may be able to use math abilities to act as scorekeeper, or analytical skills to develop new plays or strategies. Peer acceptance may be difficult to attain at first, since the physically handicapped sometimes are expected to be excluded automatically from involvement with team sports. Aside from lack of public awareness and the resulting predetermined prejudices concerning the physically handicapped, is there any logical reason to exclude them from all aspects of sports?

Youngsters whose handicapping conditions are not so visible may have even more frustrating experiences resulting from the lack of public awareness and understanding. Children who appear to be "normal" in physical appearance may be shunned by others when they are unable to keep up with activities that involve certain mental processes. If a mildly retarded youngster is "bumped" from a team sport because of slow reaction times, that child may begin to think he or she is worthless in all areas. Herein lies a basis for frustration and depression on the part of teachers and volunteers.

In such instances, realistic alternatives could be explored by the volunteer and the student. Most individuals have a skill of some type which can be further developed to the point at which it can be a useful, productive outlet. Not everyone can be a star, but the individual can shine in alternative areas. The code of the Special Olympics, sponsored by the Kennedy Foundation, emphasizes this by stressing to participants that the important aspect of participation is the fact that they tried their best. Individual effort cannot be measured readily, and success is not always positively related to effort, especially with the handicapped. To know that one has tried to the utmost should give a sense of accomplishment, no matter how tiny the gain may seem. Special education volunteers need to keep this in mind when working with their students. It's not always whether the students gained or lost, but how they participated in the learning activities.

Unfortunately, this type of evaluation of a child has yet to be acknowledged in most reporting systems utilized by the public schools. Teachers, parents, administrators, and the children too want to see letter or number grades on report cards. Even youngsters in pre-school settings are tuned in to the prestige accompanying an "A" or

similar grading procedure; they want to see it on their papers and report cards, regardless of how unrealistic such systems may be in relation to the activities being evaluated.

How does one properly evaluate a child who is working up to present capacity — at three years below grade level? If the child receives an "A" in reading, for example, the parents and other teachers might interpret this to mean that the child is ready for grade level work in that area. If the grade is a "D," though, is this fair to a child who honestly is doing the very best possible? The above problems in evaluation can be depressing to those who work with exceptional children, because this type of evaluation is unrealistic in terms of the child's actual progress.

Some volunteers, then, might be more realistic in becoming involved in non-academic areas of learning such as social and emotional growth. Activities might be structured to enable the volunteer to work with a small group of children on social learning skills while the teacher works on a one-to-one basis with specific youngsters. Simple games can be used to reinforce social interaction, with the emphasis on enjoyment of each other's company rather than the outcome of the game in terms of winning and losing. By encouraging leisure time activities that reinforce social skills, volunteers can become a primary motivating factor in the overall growth of the exceptional children with whom they work.

Depressing? Certainly, volunteers along with everyone else will confront depressing situations in life. But as a volunteer, you can do much to brighten the lives of both the teacher and the children in a special class, based upon your realistic acceptance and willingness to try to improve that which can be improved. And that is *not* depressing!