

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND
EVIDENCE OF PARENTAL INPUT IN IEP DOCUMENTS

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctoral of Philosophy

in Curriculum and Instruction

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

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American public schools must allow parents the ability to be involved in the collaboration and planning aspects of their child's individualized education program (IEP). However, many parents have reported feeling like an outsider in IEP meetings. Historically, families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds have reported barriers to participation in school-based meetings about their child. Although there is research that helps explain the barriers CLD parents face in IEP meetings, there has been insufficient qualitative research that addresses the experiences of CLD parents from southern Arizona. Further, there is a lack of research that identifies what parents remember from IEP meetings and examines the IEP document for evidence of parental input.

This study explores how CLD parental input is evidenced in the IEP document. Using abstraction and content analysis, the researcher identified themes as they emerged from two data sets: parental interview transcripts and IEP documents. The study reveals how the CLD parental input was documented in the IEP paperwork. Future research questions are offered, and the researcher intends to use this study to inform stakeholders better.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family. First, to my mother, Dr. Jill Bechtold, who loved me unconditionally every day of my life. She did not live to see this finished dissertation, but I know she knows it is done—and I am forever grateful to have had her love and encouragement for my first thirty years. She was, and will forever be, the reason I continue to learn. Thank you to my father, Dr. Edward Olszewski, who taught me to tell jokes and work hard. To my sister, Julia Olszewski-Jubelirer, who I consider my first real teacher. Thank you for playing “school” as kids, for making me learn my multiplication facts, and for rebounding for me. To Joshua Olszewski-Jubelirer who gave me the best gift of all: my two most perfect twin siblings. To my niece, Mary Olszewski-Jubelirer, who reminded me to think deeply about every experience. To my nephew, Martin Olszewski-Jubelirer, who reminded me to smile. To Amanda Stafford for cooking dinners, for being a listening ear, and for reminding me to keep going when things got hard. To Dr. Carmen Ortiz Henley for being my mom’s best friend and for teaching me about active and passive voice. To Bentley, Kingsley, Paisley, and Presley, who suffered through shorter walks due to me working on this paper. Thank you, family.

Thank you to Dr. Shadow Armfield, Dr. Everett Ramsay (formally Akam), Dr. Vicki Ross, Dr. Rebecca Nathanson, Naomi Foster, Sarah Streb Rolland, Mike Lopez, and all my other beloved professors, teachers, and coaches who nurtured my love of learning throughout all stages of life.

To my LEADERS cohort, thank you for the support and encouragement over the last 5 years: William Terrill, Christina Gabaldon, Candi Running Bear, Adriana Frates, and Develyn Biagas. Thank you to Judy Ulrich for being organized, responsive, and the best. Dr. Peterson—thank you for the opportunity to be part of this program and allowing me to complete a doctorate.

Dr. Markel, thank you for teaching me about qualitative research and sparking a love for listening to stories. Dr. Tu and Dr. Murray, thank you for your knowledge, guidance, and direction during the dissertation process. Without all of you, this would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge my Amphitheater Public School family, who supported me throughout this program. To Carol Tracy Kitchen for being the most supportive friend and first principal a young teacher could have hoped for. To Lynn Thacker, Adriana Beets, Rachel Morabito, Jennifer Peterson, Jen Martinez, Sarah Taouil, Kori Ball, Jen Stark, Jen Hinds, Rob Wolf, Kris McGraw, and all the other teachers and leaders who continue to give children the gift of a loving and supportive teacher.

Finally, a special thank you to the five families who participated in this study. It has been an honor to know you and to be a part of your lives. Thank you for trusting me to teach your children, for sharing your experiences, and for allowing me to learn from you. Without you, this dissertation would not exist.

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Dedication

“I had always thought that thesis acknowledgements were nauseating, but it is such an INCREDIBLE RELIEF to finally be DONE, that it is easy to wax effusive.”

A Dissertation by Jill E. Bechtold, PhD*

To Whom this Dissertation is Dedicated

*Bechtold, J. E. (1985). *High resolution spectroscopy of quasar absorption lines* [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. University of Arizona.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that segregation denied students equal educational opportunity, a violation of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005a; Warren & Supreme Court of the United States, 1953). Although this ruling was a response to segregation based on race, it would later be applied to the education of students with disabilities. As recently as the early 1970s, as many as 80% of students with disabilities did not attend public school (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Students with disabilities were segregated in separate institutions or received no education. It was assumed that students with disabilities were incapable of being educated with the general student population in public schools.

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), which has since been renamed and renewed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1986, 1990, 1996, 2004). IDEA guarantees all students access to a free public school education and mandates that public schools provide specialized services and aids to all students that need them. The goal is to enable all students to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) possible, that is, in a way that enables students with disabilities to be educated with the general student population. IDEA (2004) codified a major change in the overall philosophy, approach, and ultimate goal of education for students with disabilities in the United States.

A central tool in achieving equal education for students with disabilities under IDEA (2004) is the requirement that schools formulate an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each qualifying student. An IEP is a written document reviewed and approved at least annually by all the stakeholders in the student's education: teachers, service providers, the educational

agency, and the parents of the student, and, when appropriate, the student him/herself. It lays out the academic and functional goals for the student and enumerates what specific services will be provided to help the student achieve these goals.

The participation of the student's parents in the IEP process and the student's overall education is essential to achieving successful educational outcomes. Parental involvement in the formulation of the IEP is thus required by the IDEA (2004). Parents are the primary advocates for their child and should be involved in any decisions about the services to be provided.

Statement of the Problem

There is little doubt that parental involvement profoundly influences student achievement (Frew et al., 2013; Hayes, 2012; Kim, 2020; Sheehey et al., 2014; Wilder, 2014). Culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of students with disabilities, however, can face many barriers to participation in their child's formal education (Al-Hanson & Gardner, 2002; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Salisbury & Dunst, 1997; Sileo et al., 1996; Thorp, 1997; Wertsch, 1991). Studies have found that parents are dissatisfied with their level of involvement in the IEP meeting (Lo, 2008; Rueda et al., 2005). Indeed, only 56% of families feel that IEP meetings directly benefit their child (Fish, 2008, p. 12), and only two-thirds of the IEPs examined had services or goals aligned with parental input and concern (Kurth et al., 2019). These numbers are low given that parental involvement in the formulation of the IEP is federally mandated by IDEA (2004).

Although research has been conducted regarding the experiences of families during the IEP meeting (Fish, 2008; Kurth et al., 2019; Lo, 2008; Olivos et al., 2010; Osher & Osher, 2002; Rueda et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2015), there has been little qualitative research addressing the

type of input given by CLD families during the IEP process. In addition, the extent to which CLD parental input is subsequently conceptualized in the IEP document has not been studied.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine how parental input is evidenced in the IEP document. Specifically, the researcher examined how parents from CLD backgrounds describe their input during IEP meetings. This study also reveals how the CLD parent input is documented in the IEP paperwork.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in southern Arizona describe their input in an IEP meeting?
2. What evidence in the IEP document of culturally and linguistically diverse students from southern Arizona supports parental input?

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the existing literature on parental involvement in the IEP process and the understanding of the IEP process itself. In addition, the information gained through this study can directly educate and encourage district IEP meeting practices to include CLD parental input as a driving force when developing IEPs. Finally, this study may bring attention to the use of parental input when designing and implementing IEPs.

Definitions of Key Terms

Annual IEP Process – the time between the first communication inviting parents to the annual IEP meeting and the moment when the final copy of the annual IEP is distributed to parents.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse – individuals from a non-dominant racial, ethnic, or linguistic group.

Culture – the ways of believing, feeling, thinking, acting, or belonging to a group.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – a written document that acts as a contract between parents and schools documenting specific components of a student with a disability's unique educational plan.

Special Education – the name given to the type of education provided to students with disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study is that the researcher is currently employed by the school district where the study was conducted. Therefore, to maintain objectivity, the study includes only anonymized IEPs from schools where the researcher does not currently work. This way, the researcher will not be able to identify any stakeholders on the actual IEP document.

A second limitation is that the researcher is a special education teacher and school site special education facilitator. The researcher has attended IEP meetings as a special education teacher, general education teacher, and legal educational agency representative. Further, the researcher was chosen as one of six special education facilitators in the district to be an IEP writing coach. That is, the researcher was given the task to be specially trained in the legality of writing compliant IEPs. Subsequently, the researcher was tasked with becoming specially trained in writing legally compliant IEPs. As directed, in these roles, the researcher had been involved in soliciting parents' input, training IEP writers, and representing the district and its interests.

Another limitation is that the data will be from one suburban school district in the state of Arizona. Even though IDEA is a federal law enacted to provide federal standards for the

education of students with disabilities nationally, public education in the United States is largely controlled at the local, state, and city levels. Variations in funding and resources, and variations in the percentage of CLD families among school districts certainly exist. The same study might find a different outcome in a majority-minority urban school district or a rural school district with little cultural diversity.

The last limitation is that the researcher is a white, middle-class individual. The researcher is of Polish and Japanese descent and was born in America to two native-born American parents. English is the only language spoken by the researcher and is the only language in which she is literate. The researcher, therefore, does not have the personal experience of being from a minority or CLD background.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

There is extensive academic literature on the education of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and their students with disabilities. This chapter includes special education legislation in the United States. It is important for the context of this study to understand the history of special education laws, which has ultimately resulted in the current law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004). Following the history of the special education section, this chapter presents a detailed description of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) which is a key component of how IDEA (2004) is implemented in today's public schools. Next, this chapter reviews the literature on the IEP document as the physical record of IDEA (2004) implementation.

IDEA (2004) requires parents to participate in the construction of their child's IEP. The chapter this discusses potential barriers faced by CLD parents that may inhibit their participation in the IEP process. Literature on the suggestions for school personnel to aid CLD parental involvement and participation in special education processes is also discussed. Finally, to better understand the context of this study, the demographics of the suburban school district in which the study was conducted are presented.

Special Education Legislation in the United States

The culture of a society is demonstrated through the values underlying its policies (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012); special education legislation in the United States is no exception. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004; PL 108-446) was not conceived overnight. For many years, the eugenics movement believed that non-White individuals and those with disabilities were inferior (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Indeed, it was not until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that education for children with disabilities was

recognized as needing to be equal to that of non-disabled peers. In addition, advocacy groups throughout the Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968) lobbied for a change in the state of education for students with disabilities (Harry & Klingner). Since then, several acts of legislation passed by Congress, and Supreme Court case rulings, have supported the education of students with special needs alongside the general student population.

First, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (PL 89-10) attempted to equalize educational opportunities for children with economic differences (Clair et al., 2007). Then, the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1970 (PL 91-230) amended the earlier legislation and allowed local education agencies access to a grant program that helped provide services for students with disabilities (Clair et al., 2007). The following year, the decision published by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) proved that students with intellectual disabilities benefit from educational opportunities and programming.

More importantly, *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* stated that all students must be provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE), and the state could not deny students FAPE based on their intellectual disability (Clair et al., 2007; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b). FAPE at this time was defined as a student's right to be educated in "a free, public program of education and training appropriate to the child's capacity" (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) ensured FAPE to all students with disabilities, asserted that this should be done through a funded program, defined specific disabilities covered by the act, and described fair assessment guidelines (Clair et al., 2007).

The first Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; PL 10-476) was enacted in 1990. It was the first education act to use person-first language, replace the word "handicap"

with “disability,” require transition planning, and emphasize the expectation of school staff to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Clair et al., 2007). IDEA was amended in 1997 (PL 105-17) and became crucial in strengthening the role of the parent during the IEP meeting. It also required that educational assessments be fair and explicitly consider the unique strengths and needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Clair et al.). In 2001, President George W. Bush reconstructed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) through his No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Harry & Klingner, 2014). NCLB focused on students’ reading and mathematics achievement in the third through eighth grades (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Finally, in 2004, President Bush signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (PL 108-446).

All the aforementioned legislation set the groundwork for IDEA (2004). IDEA is an act designed for “zero reject” (Clair et al., 2007, p. 524; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012), meaning that if a student with a disability did not satisfy the requirements under IDEA (2004) for obtaining specialized services and instruction, they might still receive special education services through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) or through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (PL 101-336; Clair et al., 2007). The zero-reject policy reflects IDEA’s roots in the Civil Rights Movement and the belief in equality (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012).

IDEA (2004) also requires a non-discriminatory evaluation. Specifically, the assessments and evaluation materials must not discriminate with racial or cultural bias; must be provided in the language that is most likely to yield the most accurate information of what the child can do academically, developmentally, and functionally; and must be administered by a trained and

knowledgeable person in accordance with the instruction provided by the producer of the assessment (Wright & Wright, 2011).

IDEA (2004) also continues the previously established provisions for free appropriate education (FAPE) and least restrictive environment (LRE). FAPE requires that a child with a disability not only have an education that meets his/her unique needs but also allows the child “to benefit” from said instruction (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b). Further, IDEA (2004) requires that these specialized services be provided at public expense, under public supervision, and without charge to the family (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b; Wright & Wright, 2011). FAPE services must meet any standards of the state’s educational agency, include appropriate preschool, elementary, and secondary school education, and be provided in collaboration with the student’s individualized education program (Wright & Wright, 2011).

The description of LRE remained the same in IDEA (2004). Schools are still required to educate students with disabilities with students who are not disabled “to the maximum extent appropriate” (Wright & Wright, 2011). LRE states that a child may only be removed from a general education setting if the nature or severity of the child’s disability is such that even with the use of supplementary aids and services the child cannot participate in the regular class (Wright & Wright, 2011). LRE’s intent is to provide choices for students with disabilities through a continuum of environmental settings through which they would receive services (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Students with higher needs are given access to more intensive services to provide truly individualized educational experiences.

Finally, IDEA (2004) has provisions regarding parental involvement (Wright et al., 2013) and dispute resolution (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b; Wright & Wright, 2011). The definition of “parent” was expanded upon in IDEA (2004), to mean that a parent is a natural, adoptive, or

foster parent, a guardian, or an adult acting in the place of a natural or adoptive parent of a child (Wright & Wright, 2011). Parents are required and equal members of the IEP team (Wright et al., 2013). Parents can also file for due process to protect their child's right to FAPE. A parent or the local district may initiate a due process hearing (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b). Due process can be initiated regarding the "proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation or educational placement of a student or the provision of a free, appropriate public education" (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005b, p. 656). Due process cannot be denied and must be presented as a procedural safeguard to students and parents (Wright & Wright, 2011).

The Individualized Education Program

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is an essential component of the educational program for students with special needs. The IEP is a legal document written by a team composed of parents, teachers, service providers, a district representative, and the student him/herself (Wright et al., 2013). IDEA (2004) requires that parents be members of the IEP team, be involved in the IEP process, and provide critical input in the many decisions made during the IEP meetings. IEP meetings stand as a platform for the team members to discuss, share, and plan an educational program that is individualized and specific to the child's unique strengths and needs (Fish, 2006) and guarantees specific direct instructional opportunities for the child with an exceptionality. This specially designed curriculum aims to allow a child to participate in age-appropriate activities and progress academically and functionally in the general education curriculum. Specifically, IDEA (2004) aims to create educational goals "developed based on the strengths of the child; the concerns of the parents; the results of the most recent evaluation of the child; and the academic, developmental, and functional needs of the child" (Clair et al., 2007, p. 528).

An IEP document is the written summary of everything discussed during the IEP meeting. This document stands as the legal written agreement between the team members to provide specialized curriculum and instruction. Included in the IEP document is a list of who was present during the meeting as well as who may have been consulted; the student's present levels of academic and functional performance (PLAAFP); annual goals that the child can reasonably accomplish in one year; special education and related services, also known as supplementary aids and services (SAS), that will be required; the extent to which the student will be participating with their non-disabled peers; transition services; statement of the age of majority; as well as a statement of how the child's progress will be measured and how the parents will be informed of progress.

The IEP Document

The individualized education program (IEP) document is the “written statement for each child with a disability” (IDEA, 2004; 20 U.S.C. § 614(d)(1)(A)(i)). IDEA (2004), in alignment with No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2001), required specific components to be present in the IEP document to be in accordance with the IDEA legislation. The required components of the IEP document, as previously mentioned, are discussed here in detail.

The first required component of an IEP document comprises the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, better known as the PLAAFP section of the IEP. IDEA (2004) requires that the IEP team base all other decisions on the content of the PLAAFP because it describes the needed baseline levels of performance of the child with a disability when the IEP is created. The PLAAFP should list the student's strengths and needs in all academic areas and functional areas. Functional areas include communication, fine and gross motor skills, behavioral skills, social-emotional skills, and skills in other daily life activities

(Wright et al., 2013). The data in the PLAAFP should be collected from various sources, including standardized assessments, classroom observation, progress toward previous goals (if applicable), and parental input (Wright et al., 2013). The PLAAFP is the cornerstone for the rest of the IEP document.

Based on the baseline data from the PLAAFP, the IEP team then creates the second required component of the IEP document, the measurable annual goals. These annual goals should be written to make any progress, or lack thereof, clear and measurable (Wright et al., 2013). The term “measurable” means that the team can clearly count, observe, and document the progress made by the child. This progress will allow the team to know exactly when the IEP needs to be adjusted and modified (Wright et al., 2013). The goals are based on the unique needs of the child with a disability and do not list every single content area the child is expected to learn throughout that school year (Wright et al., 2013). Rather, the IEP’s goals should be specific to the skills needed to access the child’s next incremental step toward accessing the general education curriculum. Again, it is important to note that the strengths and needs of the child, the PLAAFP, are developed as a team that includes the input and concerns of the parents of the child with a disability.

The third IEP document requirement includes the methods and frequency of data collection and reporting (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). Explicitly stated in the IEP document should be the type of data collection required to document the progress of the annual IEP goals. Further, the IDEA (2004) legislation requires that the IEP team determine how often, through quarterly or other periodic reports, the data will be reported home to parents and documented in an official IEP goal progress report (Gartin & Murdick, 2005).

Based on the annual goals, the IEP team can determine what specialized services, including supplemental aids and services, need to be provided to the student in order for him/her to make progress toward the goals. This is the fourth required component of an IEP document (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). The services offered need to ensure that the child with a disability can make appropriate advancements toward attaining their annual goals, allow the child to be involved in, and make progress toward, the general education curriculum and classroom activities, as well as permitting the child with a disability to be educated with and without students without disabilities (Gartin & Murdick, 2015). The statement of specialized services must include all specially designed instruction, including adapting content, methodology, and delivery of the instruction to the child with a disability (Wright et al., 2013). In addition, these services may include special education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services (Wright et al., 2013). These services must be documented in writing the IEP.

The fifth required component of the IEP document, according to Gartin and Murdick (2005), is a statement of general education involvement. That is, the IEP team must determine to what extent the child with a disability will and will not be educated alongside their non-disabled peers. This statement is based on the description of the annual goals, special education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services previously determined necessary for the child with a disability to make progress in the general education curriculum (Gartin & Murdick, 2005).

Accommodations and modifications are the sixth required component of the IEP document (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). Specifically, the IEP team must determine what accommodations and modifications are necessary for the student with a disability to participate in district and state assessments. IDEA (2004), aligning with NCLB, focuses on academic

achievement in the general education curriculum. Without the presence of accommodations and modifications, it could be argued that the results of an assessment are based on the child's disability rather than their actual achievement in the academic content area (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). Accommodations change how the child accesses an assessment regarding changes in presentation format, response format, and test settings (e.g., extended time and a different location). Modifications alter the level of the instructional content and performance criteria, and can even include alternative assessment means (Wright et al., 2013). Therefore, the team should determine both accommodations and modifications as vital to the student's progress in the general education curriculum.

According to Gartin and Murdick (2005) the seventh required component of an IEP document is documentation of the dates and times of service. That is, the IEP document must explicitly state the beginning and ending dates of the current IEP as well as the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of the specialized services (Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Wright et al., 2013).

The eighth and ninth required components of an IEP, according to Gartin and Murdick (2005), both relate to the adult life of a child with a disability. Transition services and a statement of the age of majority must be documented in the IEP. The transition requirement under IDEA (2004) states that a child's IEP team must consider and thoughtfully plan for transition into the community. This transition could include but is not limited to, transition into a job, higher education, or assisted living facility. Transition planning must begin with the first IEP to fall within the year the child turns 16 (IDEA, 2004). However, it is expected that discussion within the IEP team on transition occurs long before the student's sixteenth year. Similarly, the statement of the age of majority must be documented in the child's IEP. IDEA (2004) changed

the wording of the law: “beginning not later than 1 year” before the child reaches the age of majority. That is, the parents of any child with a disability must be informed of the transfer of educational decision-making rights from the parent to the child with a disability at the age of majority. In most states, the age of majority is 18 years old (Wright et al., 2013). However, there are exceptions where a child might write a statement allowing parents to continue to make educational decisions, parents can obtain a grant of authority, or parents can obtain educational power of attorney over their child with a disability (Wright et al., 2013). In these cases, the parent would continue to make educational decisions for their child with a disability past age 18.

The final two required components of an IEP document are the description of the IEP team members, and the record of attendance by the IEP meeting required attendees (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). The IEP team membership is unique to each individual child; however, the teams must include the child’s parents, at least one of the child’s general education teachers, at least one of the child’s special education teachers or service providers, a district representative, an individual charged with interpreting the instructional implications of evaluation results, any other individuals that are deemed to have knowledge about the child, and the child his/herself, as appropriate (IDEA, 2004; Wright et al., 2013). A single individual may represent multiple required team members. For example, the principal might be both the district representative and the general education teacher if the principal is also a general education class teacher. In practice, such a case is rare (Wright et al., 2013). Finally, the IEP document must have a written notice of the requirement for team attendance. That is, the IEP team, including the parents, must agree in writing that the presence of an absent IEP team member is optional to continue with the IEP meeting (Gartin & Murdick, 2005).

The next section describes the existing literature regarding the development of quality IEP documentation (Flannery et al., 2015; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Rowland et al., 2015; Ruble et al., 2010) and the existing literature on compliant IEP development (Hott et al., 2021; Kurth et al., 2019; Landmark & Zhang, 2012).

Quality IEP Documents

The first study found when conducting an exhaustive literature review on this topic was Rowland et al. (2015). These authors were interested in determining if an IEP for students with communication-related disabilities was legally compliant and high quality. The authors could not find an existing tool to determine the quality of IEP documentation, so they developed a clinical guide to fill that need, naming it “Design to Learn IEP Development Guide.” The goal of this guide is to “remind the IEP developer to consider whether the proposed goals are focused/precise, measurable, and student-centered; foster active participation; are functional and educationally appropriate; and consider whether the entire IEP is of high quality” (Roland et al., 2015, p. 61). Unfortunately, subsequent studies using this tool as a quality indicator were not found.

A second study examined the quality of IEPs for students with autism (Ruble et al., 2010). The study’s participants were 35 teachers of students with autism. The authors constructed an IEP Quality measure in accordance with IDEA (2004) requirements and National Research Council (2001) recommendations regarding the education of students with autism. Results demonstrated that the IEP Evaluation Tool constructed by the authors was a valid way to measure IEP quality for IEPs written for students with autism (Ruble et al., 2010). However, the results also indicated that the overall IEP quality was poor regardless of child characteristics or teacher identity, including years of experience teaching. Even more remarkable was the finding

that the IEP quality actually decreased with the number of students a specific teacher taught with autism (Ruble et al., 2010). That is, the quality of the IEP document of the first student with autism that Teacher A taught was higher than the quality of the IEP document of the thirteenth student with autism that Teacher A taught.

In another study that examined the quality of IEP documents, Flannery et al. (2015) explored the impact of professional development on the quality of the transition components of IEP documents for 27 secondary teachers. The authors evaluated 302 IEPs collected before and after a professional development program. Findings showed that there was a positive effect of quality transition components of the IEPs examined following professional development (Flannery et al.). Similarly, Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker (2000) found a positive effect on the quality of IEP goals when teachers attended IEP goal writing training.

Compliant IEP Development

Individualized Education Program (IEP) documentation compliance is laid out in the IDEA (2004) legislation previously discussed. Districts can be audited by the state where they reside for IEP legal compliance. If a state finds that a district does not meet compliance standards, the district must participate in a Compliance Action Plan (CAP) to fix the mistakes found in the examination of the IEP documentation. Often the CAP will include professional development training to district staff on the legal requirements under IDEA (2004) that must be present in an IEP document.

Research has also been completed in the area of IEP document compliance and development (Hott et al., 2021; Kurth et al., 2019; Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Schmitt et al., 2014). For example, Hott et al. (2021) explored the IEP documents of students in rural school districts. The students in their study included only students with social, emotional, or behavioral

needs. Hott et al. specifically looked for evidence of congruence between the students' PLAAFP and the students' IEP goals, and whether the IEP document conformed to both the procedural and substantive requirements for development. The authors found that only 4 of the 95 IEPs examined included all the necessary components and legal congruence to the students' PLAAFP (Hott et al., 2021).

Similarly, Kurth et al.'s (2019) qualitative study used content analysis to identify congruence between parental concerns and IEP goals and supplementary aids and services for students with autism named in the IEP document. The findings demonstrated that only two-thirds of the time were concerns and input from the parents directly related to the generation of goals and services on students' IEPs. The authors found that there were limited opportunities for parental involvement in the development of the IEP document. Both Hott et al. (2021) and Kurth et al. (2019) found that not all IEPs being written for students with disabilities follow the letter of the law.

Another IEP compliance study by Landmark and Zhang (2012) found a need for higher levels of IEP legal compliance regarding transition planning in IEPs. These authors specifically examined the IEPs of students from African American, European American, and Hispanic students. Results showed that there was evidence associated with the probability of an IEP being compliant based on the disability category of the student and ethnicity. Specifically, the students of African American descent were found to have lower levels of compliance in their IEPs than students of European American descent. The authors suggest that schools may need to change their practices regarding IEP planning and meetings to accommodate and better encourage the parental participation that IDEA (2004) intends.

In 2014, Schmitt et al. conducted a study focused on the alignment of language disorder symptoms and IEP goals for primary-grade students. This alignment is mandated by the IDEA (2004) law. Study personnel personally assessed each child participant on language measures, grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and literacy skills. Then, those assessment results were compared to a content analysis of the IEP goals for that same student. The study found limited alignment between a student's language disorder symptoms and the IEP goals targeted to address those symptoms.

Family Participation in Special Education

Much research has been done on parental involvement's effects on student achievement (El Nokali et al., 2010; Hayes, 2012; Kim, 2020; Sheehey et al., 2009; Wang & Cai, 2017). Additionally, parental involvement is a "multidimensional concept" (Wang & Cai, 2017, p. 58) in that there are many ways for parents to participate in their child's educational journey.

Hayes (2012) examined parental involvement in relation to student achievement in urban African American adolescents. Specifically, the study explored whether there were involvement behaviors that could predict the achievement of students. Do specific involvement behaviors impact students at different ages? Do family demographics influence parental involvement behaviors? His study suggested that parents of students with learning or behavioral challenges need even more contact with the school than general education students, to best monitor student progress.

More recently, a parental involvement and student achievement meta-analysis was conducted in east Asian countries (Kim, 2020). This study was an exhaustive examination of 15 observational studies reflecting 101 separate aspects of parental involvement and student achievement. Kim's meta-analysis was important because it demonstrated that parental

involvement is a positive factor in student achievement regardless of cultural, ethnic, or racial background, comparing her own meta-analysis to those conducted in the United States.

Within special education, the IEP team meeting is where parents and the child's teachers meet to collaborate and discuss the strengths and needs of the student with a disability (Dabkowski, 2004). Panferov (2010) gave two examples of how school-engaged CLD parents advocate for literacy and academic success. They did this by tapping into the unique experiences of the CLD parents' own lives and schooling. Similarly, Callicott (2003) named person-centered planning (PCP) as a culturally sensitive collaboration method that resulted in lifting barriers common to parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Parental Perceptions of the IEP Meeting

Fish (2008) used qualitative methods to investigate parental perceptions of the IEP meeting. Fish used survey questions aimed at parents not from CLD backgrounds whose children received special education services. Generally, the results of the Fish study were that parents have positive experiences toward the IEP meeting. Further, most parents in the Fish study agreed that they clearly understood IEP processes and special education law (Fish, 2008). However, when asked if they felt the IEP meeting benefited the student, only 56% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the meeting was beneficial to the student (Fish, 2008, p. 12). Moreover, only 65% of parents surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their parental decisions influenced the outcomes of the IEP meetings (Fish, 2008, p.12).

A 2008 study by Lo examined the level of participation and the experiences of five Chinese-American parents involved in the IEP meeting. Lo (2008) utilized observations and interviews as data collection sources. Overall, the results of this study suggested that Chinese-American parents were dissatisfied with their level of participation in their child's IEP meeting

(Lo, 2008). Further, they named language barriers and disrespect by professionals as reasons for their dissatisfaction. Lo's study involved a specific CLD population and used qualitative methods to collect data. Lo documented how the parents felt about their level of input and involvement but did not explicitly address how the school did or did not use parental input while designing the IEP for students.

In another study, Rueda et al. (2005) used several focus groups to gain the perspectives of Latina mothers of young adults with developmental disabilities as they navigated the transition IEP meeting process. Sixteen Latina mothers were interviewed. Through this qualitative study, the authors aimed to compare the views of Latina mothers with the implicit and explicit assumptions that then governed the practices surrounding transition planning. The authors used a question protocol given to participants in their native language of Spanish, then translated by a bilingual team member familiar with the local community before being reviewed by other bilingual team members. The team identified themes simultaneously with data collection. Despite IDEA (2004) law insisting that parents are critical to the IEP team, Rueda et al. (2005) found that Latina mothers felt that the IEP team preferred when they were less involved and even less informed about what was happening with their child at school.

Barriers to Participation by CLD Families

Many potential barriers to participation by culturally and linguistically diverse parents have been identified throughout the literature (Al-Hanson & Gardner, 2002; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Olivos et al., 2010; Salisbury & Dunst, 1997; Sileo et al., 1996; Thorp, 1997; Wertsch, 1991). Barriers to participation faced by CLD families include the following:

- language differences (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Holman, 1997; Sileo & Prater, 1998; Thomas et al., 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001)
- lack of relevant information (Thorp, 1997)
- the teacher's unfamiliarity with minority cultures (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; Sileo et al., 1996; Thorp, 1997)
- past negative educational experiences of the parents (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005; Thorp, 1997)
- unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; Bailey et al., 1999; Zetlin et al., 1996)

It is important to understand these barriers as they relate to parental input and possible reflection on the IEP development process.

Language

Al-Hanson and Gardner (2002) discussed barriers to immigrant parents' participation in the educational process and possible tactics to help bridge those barriers. The first barrier they named was that of language. Lack of English-language proficiency may cause parents to feel inadequate when communicating with school professionals (Holman, 1997). This communication is both verbal and written. Thomas et al. (2000) explained that parents from non-English speaking backgrounds might not be able to read the special education reports sent home from their child's school. Even when reports are translated into a family's home language, the parent may be illiterate in that language (Thomas et al., 2000). Such a situation can impede a family's ability to adequately understand their child's disability (Al-Hanson & Gardner, 2002). Therefore, professionals must assess their understanding of language differences and make a

concerted effort to provide support and aid to help families communicate with the educational staff (Sileo & Prater, 1998).

Even when a family speaks English, there still could be cultural language differences within their use of a language. Several dialects of English exist and are spoken across the United States (Fogel & Ehri, 2000)—for example, the differences between Standard English (SE) and Black English Vernacular (BEV). The school might use SE when communicating verbally or in writing with families. However, a family who speaks BEV would have dialect differences in the way words might be pronounced, how their verbal and written sentences are structured grammatically, and even which words are chosen to express ideas (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Other examples of non-SE include Hawaiian Creole English, Chicano English, Caribbean English Creole, and Alaskan English.

The use of any of these or other dialects could cause difficulties with communication and collaboration with school professionals. When a parent feels intimidated by a language barrier, they may be less likely to reach out to the school to get their needs met, questions answered, or their voice heard. A language barrier can thus cause parents to have a lack of information and understanding regarding their child's IEP.

Lack of Information

A lack of information occurs when parents of students with disabilities do not have frequent communication about their child's progress (Al-Hanson & Gardner, 2002). Thorp (1997) reported that parents with disabilities often feel that they do not receive enough information regarding their children. Further, when limited information is communicated home to families, it is often in English rather than the family's home language (Thorp, 1997). A lack of information can impede a parent's ability to make informed decisions regarding their child. For

example, a parent who only receives quarterly updates on their child's progress because of a lack of translation services might not be aware of their child's lack of progress soon enough. It is important that school staff communicate and provide information to families on a frequent basis and in a language the parents understand.

Teacher's Unfamiliarity with Culture

According to Al-Hassan and Garder (2002), "as the school population has become increasingly diverse, the teacher population in the school environment has remained unchanged with the vast majority of teachers coming from middle-class Euro-American backgrounds" (p. 55). Most teachers are from the dominant Euro-American cultural background, and the majority of students are from minority cultural backgrounds. The result is a disproportionate cultural and linguistic difference between students and teachers (Sileo et al., 1996). In order to bridge this barrier, the school personnel need to make an active effort to learn about their students' cultures and traditions (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002).

Further, professionals can be insensitive to cultural diversity or simply lack knowledge and information about cultural differences (Sileo et al., 1996). For example, in many American families, both parents are in a democratic relationship. That is, both parents have equal say in decision-making regarding the child and education. Such is not the case in all cultures. Some cultures rely on a matriarchal or patriarchal family system. Teachers need to be familiar with how parents in the cultures represented in their classroom typically share decision-making responsibilities. When teachers do this, they help parents be equal partners with the school team in educational decision-making.

Negative Educational Experiences

Some parents may have had their own negative experiences within the educational system (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; Pérez Carreón et al., 2005; Sileo et al., 1996). These negative experiences can trickle down to how the parent participates in their child's educational experience. Thorp (1997) explained that teachers must create a trusting relationship with their students' parents for the parents to engage in their child's education process. For example, if parents are never invited into the classroom, they could feel unwanted or undervalued as important members of their child's team. Another example would be telling parents to speak only English to their child with a disability even when the home language might be different (Thorp, 1997).

Immigrant families often express satisfaction with their children's schools in America partly because they are often from a country where the schools are poorly staffed, or education may have been costly (Pérez Carreón et al., 2005). Moreover, the isolation that immigrant families often feel when arriving in a new country can further exacerbate their own negative educational experiences. Social community and social support networks are vital for families as they navigate the intricacies of American public schools. A family new to the country might not have solidified their involvement in these social support networks before enrolling their child in school. If their child struggles in school, it can trigger immigrant families to remember their own negative experiences in the school system. This can create a barrier to involvement in their child's educational experience.

Unfamiliarity with the U.S. Educational Practices and Laws

Families new to this country or the U.S. educational system may not understand their legal rights regarding special education (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). For example, a family

may come from a developing country that does not have special education laws mandating that certain processes occur. These families may not know that there are legal mandates in the United States that govern how, when, why, and where students receive special education services.

Bailey et al. (1999) argued that learning about community outreach centers and resources is vital yet challenging for immigrant families. Community services can help educate families on special education law and their rights as parents of a child with a disability. Understanding the special education system in the United States can empower parents to ask questions and involve themselves in their child's educational planning and development of an IEP.

Suggestions for CLD Parent Participation

Given the barriers to parental involvement that were just described, a review of the literature also finds suggestions or recommendations to help solicit CLD parental participation (Conroy, 2012; Gerzel-Short et al., 2019; Thorp, 1997). These recommendations will now be discussed chronologically by the date of publication.

Thorp (1997) named four strategies for improved partnerships with parents from CLD backgrounds: The first is that professionals must know, understand, and explore their own cultural experiences, values, and attitudes. Second, professionals need to actively seek to learn about the cultural experiences, values, and attitudes of the families they service. Third, classroom teachers must evaluate their classroom settings and curricular strategies through a culturally and linguistically responsive lens. Finally, school professionals must examine ways to provide opportunities for family involvement within the service system.

Conroy (2012) also gave recommendations for teachers when soliciting the involvement of parents from CLD backgrounds. Conroy named the use of informal and formal meetings and interactions as an important step in involving parents from CLD backgrounds. That is, the

teacher should make an effort to have opportunities to talk and discuss the child with the parents in informal ways before asking a parent to sit down and meet formally with the school. Further, Conroy suggested that school personnel learn about how a family's culture perceives disability. Perceptions of disability vary significantly from culture to culture.

Gerzel-Short et al. (2019) discussed ways to engage families from CLD backgrounds. The authors suggested first creating an embracing environment. That is, the school should welcome parents into a school culture that is built upon an equitable home-school collaboration model. Specifically, the authors suggested an environment that honors all cultures. Gerzel-Short et al. (2019) also suggested that the school staff find ways to engage families in learning within the home setting. They suggested developing "toolkits" (p. 122) that allow families to participate in home learning activities. Finally, Gerzel-Short et al. (2019) suggested that schools engage in behavioral strategies that identify and reconcile any differences in school and home behavioral expectations.

Use of Cultural Brokers

School professionals often turn to translators and interpreters for help when a non-English-speaking family needs to communicate or collaborate with the school. Translators are trained in changing the written English language into another language or the second written language into English. Interpreters are called upon to navigate the interchange between spoken languages. Whether using a translator or an interpreter, it is important that the cultural nuances of language be conveyed or reconciled. This is the job of a cultural broker.

A cultural broker is more than just a language translator or interpreter. They are the bridge between the school and home cultures, world views, and possible lifeworld that can be present in an interaction (Penn & Watermeyer, 2012). Teachers, paraeducators, and even young

adults and children have been called upon to be cultural brokers in educational settings (Kitchen et al., 2013; Martinez-Gomez, 2021; Weiss, 1994).

Kitchen et al. (2013) discussed using Indigenous teachers as cultural brokers. Indigenous teachers have a unique and crucial role in negotiating the mainstream school system culture while not losing their own cultural values. They must navigate the content they teach, the methods used to teach that content, and the way they balance the use of Native culture and mainstream culture in their classrooms. One way to do this is to educate CLD teachers on the importance of being cultural brokers able to “work between two worlds while remaining grounded in the richness of their own culture” (Kitchen et al., 2013, p. 131). Although it might be ideal for a teacher to be a cultural broker between the school and home cultures of their students, teachers sometimes must rely on other members of the school community to be the cultural brokers.

The use of other school staff as cultural brokers might be beneficial to school and family communication. For example, classroom aides have gained more attention in their role as paraeducators (French & Gerlach, 1999; Weiss, 1994). For CLD paraeducators, this role can also include being a cultural broker for students and families as they navigate the mainstream public school culture. Weiss (1994) asserted that a paraeducator as a cultural broker could block out potentially damaging elements while simultaneously facilitating communication between families and schools. In this way, paraeducators as cultural brokers reduce stresses that can be generated by opposing philosophies when the home and school cultures interact.

Sometimes there are no adult cultural brokers available. In these cases, families and schools often call upon the student or sibling of the student to act as the language interpreter and cultural broker (Martinez-Gomez, 2021). Although this is a common practice, especially for non-

formal conversations and interactions between the home and school, it should be used cautiously. There have been many positive and negative effects of using young adults and children as language interpreters and cultural brokers. On the one hand, the child is being asked to use listening comprehension and verbal communication skills on an adult level to facilitate communication between two adults. Although this can benefit the child long-term, helping their language skills in both languages, being asked to perform language interpreting, and acting as a cultural broker also can be detrimental to the child's psychological and mental health development (Martinez-Gomez, 2021). For example, Kam (2011) found that there were negative feelings of acculturation stress among teenage Mexican American language brokers. Further, Kam & Lazarevic (2014) found that young Latino immigrant children were more prone to marijuana and alcohol use when they were frequently asked to be cultural language brokers.

Although using cultural brokers is important when communicating with CLD families, research suggests that cultural brokers need to be trained adults who are familiar with both the culture they represent and the school's cultural interests.

Demographics of Study Location

This study was situated in a suburban school district in the southern end of Arizona. The Arizona 2020 Census reported that 76% of the study location county residents identify themselves as White alone or in combination with another racial group, 5.3% of residents identify as Black or African American alone, or in combination, 5.4% of residents identify as American Indian and Alaska Native alone, or in combination, 4.4% of residents identify as Asian alone, or in combination, 0.4% of residents identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, or in combination, and 25.4% of residents identify as some other race alone, or in

combination (American Counts Staff, 2021). Additionally, 35.7% of the population in this county identified as Hispanic in ethnicity on the 2020 Arizona Census.

Summary

Special education legislation in the United States has mandated parental involvement since the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Since then, the law has evolved as the surrounding cultural influences of society have changed. Emphasis has been placed on creating equitable opportunities for students of all abilities and from all backgrounds. The literature reviewed in this chapter tells the story of the special education legislation throughout the history of education in the United States and how culturally and linguistically diverse parents face additional barriers when it comes to participating in the special education planning for their children with disabilities.

Also reviewed is literature regarding the legal components of an IEP document guaranteed under IDEA (2004). A lack of research is evident in the area of cultural and linguistic parental input reflected in the goals and supplemental aids and services of IEP documents. Further, there is little research on the presence of a culturally responsive framework being identified in IEP documents as an artifact that proves that student home culture was considered when developing the specialized programming. Knowledge surrounding these missing pieces of research will inform school districts and personnel on the need to consider parental input in implementing specialized designed goals and instruction to better align with the intent of IDEA (2004).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the purpose of the study as guided by the research questions. The rationale of the study's methodology, setting, and inclusion criteria for the IEP documents and parent participants is described, and reliability and validity are also discussed. Finally, possible limitations are presented.

Restatement of Purpose

This study aimed to explore how parental input is evidenced in the IEP document. Specifically, through parental interviews, the researcher examined how parents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds described their input during IEP meetings. This study also used content analysis to determine how CLD parent input was documented in the IEP document.

Restatement of Research Questions

This study was conducted using content analysis and the naturalistic paradigm. This qualitative method was used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in southern Arizona describe their input in an IEP meeting?
2. What evidence in the IEP document of culturally and linguistically diverse students from southern Arizona supports parental input?

Research Design

Naturalistic Paradigm

The IEP documents in this study existed in the naturalistic paradigm defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) because the IEP documents would exist as they are whether the researcher was or was not conducting this research (Potter & Hepburn, 2022). The data collected from the IEPs

naturally occur in the social constructs and settings of the educational setting, regardless of the researcher's study.

Another identifying feature of the naturalistic paradigm is that the researcher is often involved in a self-identified group or community (Salkind, 2010). In the case of this research, the researcher found the topic of the study while working for the district where the study took place. Although the researcher took steps to separate herself from the data and acknowledge her predetermined biases, the topic was born because the researcher is a part of the community where the data were collected.

Salkind (2010) affirmed that the aim of naturalistic inquiry is not to create generalizable findings. Rather, the aim is to develop deep insights into the human experience within a particular group or community. The researcher in this study hoped to identify evidence of interaction between parents and the IEP writer through the content analysis of the IEP document. That is, the researcher's aim was that of naturalistic inquiry. The researcher sought to "describe, understand, and maybe even change" (Potter & Hepburn, 2022, p. 449) the way that parental input is evident in the IEP document.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that research in the naturalistic paradigm is subject to error because humans are the instruments, and the researcher must interact with the participants (e.g., during the interview) to gather data. Suggestions to add validity to naturalistic paradigm research include member checking of interview data, debriefing by peers, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The validity and reliability section below describes the validity and reliability of the present study.

Content Analysis

A content analysis was chosen as the most appropriate type of methodology given the research questions. Content analysis is situated in the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Meaning is interpreted from text data through content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Text data can include verbal, printed, and electronic text (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The researcher used inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) in a conventional format (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

There are three phases during inductive content analysis: the preparation phase, the organizing phase, and the analyzing process and reporting results (see Figure 1). First, in the preparation phase, the researcher selected the analysis unit and made sense of the data as a whole group. Then, in the organizing phase, the researcher used open coding, coding sheets, grouping, categorization, and abstraction to analyze the data (see Figure 2). Finally, in the reporting phase, the researcher demonstrated a model, conceptual system, conceptual map, or categories derived from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Inductive content analysis requires that the researcher use open coding, create categories, and then use abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Open coding means that the categories or themes are derived from the data. Open coding enabled the researcher to write notes and headings in the margins while reading the text data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) word for word (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This inductive coding style allowed the researcher to keep as open of a mind as possible while creating original codes the first time the data were reviewed (Saldaña, 2021).

Abstraction groups initial codes into generic categories, and then further organizes them into a single main category. These initial notes and headings highlighted the exact wording from the text that appeared to capture the key thoughts or concepts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Figure 1

Preparation, Organizing, and Resulting Phases in the Content Analysis Process (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008)

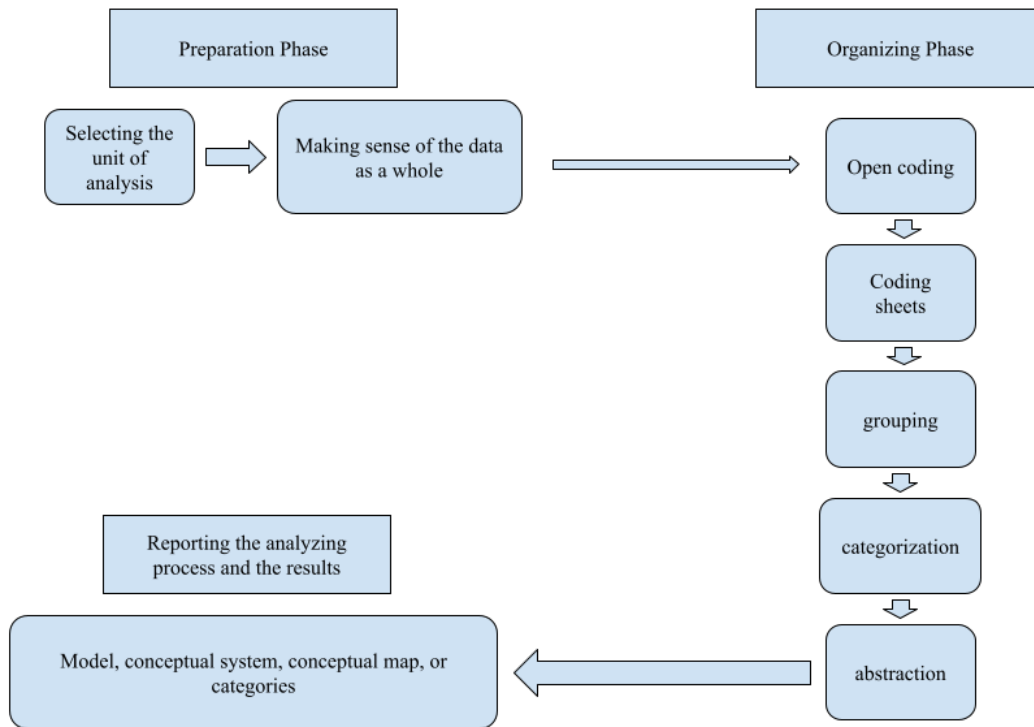
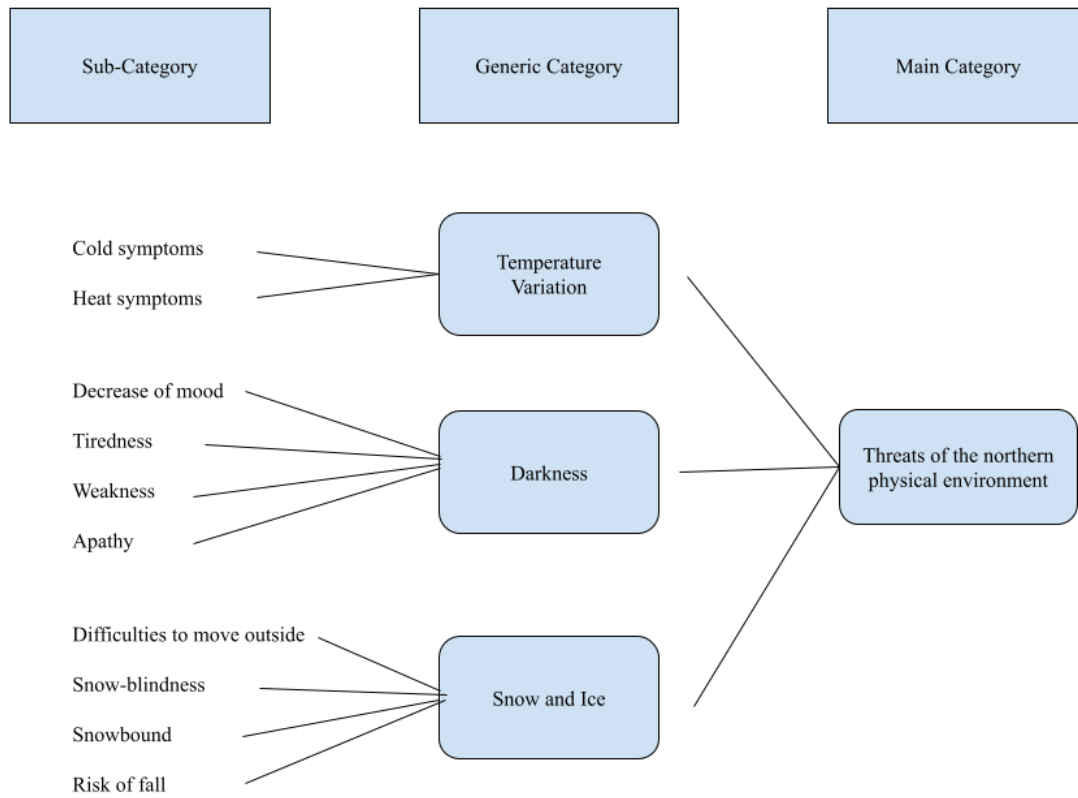


Figure 2

Example of Abstraction from Elo and Kyngäs (2008).



The text was then read through again, and the researcher continued to write as many notes and headings in the margins as necessary to describe all aspects of the content of the texts (Cole, 1988; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). These included the researcher's first impressions and thoughts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When this step was completed, the researcher collected all the content from the margins and categorized it (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These generic categories represented multiple initial codes. Then, the researcher linked and organized these initial codes into more meaningful groups (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These groups were then discussed in relation to relevant theories in the study discussion.

Setting

The research took place in a large, suburban public school district in southern Arizona.

Data Sources Inclusion Criteria

The data sources in this study included IEP documents from five CLD students and five parental interviews. The following IEP inclusion criteria were established:

1. The IEP was written for a student from a CLD background in grades K–12.
2. A parent or guardian was present at the IEP meeting and willing to be interviewed.
3. The IEP must be an annual document.

As defined in Chapter 1, CLD was determined to mean any student from a non-dominant racial, ethnic, or linguistic group. For this study, that meant individuals from non-White or non-English speaking backgrounds. Therefore, this definition excluded students whose enrollment paperwork indicates that they are “non-Hispanic White” individuals. In addition, this definition included students whose enrollment paperwork indicates that their preferred language is English even if their home language is indicated as non-English (i.e., a bilingual student).

A parent or guardian must have been present at the IEP meeting to be considered for this study. The researcher interviewed the parent or guardian about their experience within 2 weeks following the IEP meeting. If a parent was absent, then the researcher could not do this interview, and triangulation data would be lost.

Finally, the IEP meeting and document must have been that of an annual IEP. These inclusion criteria excluded addendum IEP meetings, annual IEPs tied to triennial evaluations, and initial IEPs tied to initial multidisciplinary education team (MET) meetings and evaluations. The information shared by families and service providers (i.e., the school) can be very extensive at MET meetings because the entire student's educational and developmental histories are being reviewed before the IEP is discussed. Keeping the IEP inclusion criteria for this study to annual IEP meetings allowed the researcher to avoid any influence that the MET meeting would have on the type and scope of input given by the parents and school teams during the IEP meeting and, therefore, the information documented in the IEP document itself.

Recruitment

Following NAU IRB and district approval, purposeful sampling, consistent with the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was used to find and solicit participants for this study. The researcher asked the appropriate people in the district to run a search in the online IEP database for annual IEPs that were within a 2-month period. The individual from the district was also given the criteria for including IEPs in this study. Finally, the individual from the district was asked to identify all the annual IEPs approaching the pre-determined 2-month period of students from CLD backgrounds. These requests were made through email (see Appendix A).

The recruitment email sent by the district personnel requested that families interested in participating in the researcher's study or interested in finding out more about the study contact

the researcher directly. The researcher's name, email, and cell phone number were given to all potential participants. The hope was that at least five parents would respond that they would participate. The first five responses were used in this study. If fewer than five families had agreed to participate, then the researcher would have asked the district personnel to contact the next families meeting the inclusion criteria. This contact was also done through an email (see Appendix B). This email could have been translated into the family's home language. The use of a non-English language was determined case by case based on the home language preference of the family according to the school district's enrollment records. However, all families in this study indicated English as the home language and did not request that any written or verbal language be translated or interpreted into another language.

The email recruitment occurred from the researcher's Northern Arizona University (NAU) Google email account rather than the professional one she used while working for the school district involved. Any correspondence with the school district personnel and the families involved in the study occurred through the researcher's NAU Google email account. This way, the researcher was separated from any district affiliation during recruitment. Further, the emails were sent while the researcher was not being paid by the district (i.e., non-contract times). Finally, the emails were sent from a computer owned privately by the researcher. These measures were taken to help avoid any potential conflicts.

Interview Materials

The researcher conducted all study-related tasks during non-contract hours with the school district where the study occurred. The researcher was sure to use only her personal computers and devices throughout the research project. That is, the researcher conducted interviews in a secondary location away from district property and recorded the interviews on

non-district devices. Included also was the use of her NAU-affiliated Zoom account rather than her district-purchased Zoom account to conduct or record any interviews that took place virtually. Further, the researcher used only the NAU Google Drive and NAU Google products provided to her as a student of NAU rather than the Google Drive and Google products that were also available to her through her employment with the school district.

Ideally, the researcher hoped that the interviews would take place in person and would be able to be recorded on an audio-only setting. However, participant preference was used to determine whether the interview for each participant would be in person or virtual. Each participant was asked for their language of preference for the interview. An interpreter would have been required for participants who requested that the interview take place in any non-English language. However, in the case of this study, no participants asked for any interpretation during the interview process.

The interviews were recorded onto the password-protected Zoom cloud regardless of whether the interview was in person or held on Zoom. Using Zoom was a simple way to ensure that the transcriptions were from the same type of recording regardless of the interview mode. Once transcribed, the transcriptions were kept in the researcher's NAU student, password-protected Google Drive. A second backup copy of the transcriptions was kept on a removable hard drive in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked home. The IEP documents were given to the researcher in print form and were kept in the same locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked office. If the IEP documents had been given to the researcher electronically, then the researcher would have kept them stored on her password-protected Google Drive and a backup copy on the external hard drive. The interview materials also included the interview protocol (see Appendix C). The attached interview protocol is in English; however, if needed in

a non-English language, a translator would have been used to translate the questions into the parent's preferred language.

Interview Protocol

“Interviews are one of the richest sources of data in a case study and usually the most important type of data to be collected” (Hays, 2014, p. 229). The researcher aimed to gather the perspective of five CLD parents through a short interview. Questions for the parents included participants sharing their cultural and linguistic background and their recall of what was discussed and shared in their child's IEP meeting. The interviews were designed to help answer the first research question: How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in southern Arizona describe their input in an IEP meeting? The answers given by parents helped the researcher to answer this question by providing the researcher with the parental voice. Parents were asked to specifically recall what was discussed at their child's IEP meeting and tell the researcher about which topics they brought up to the team. Specifically, the researcher sought to identify what type of input was given by CLD parents and in what form that input was given (e.g., written communication, verbal communication).

After the interview was completed, the researcher used the automatically transcribed Zoom meeting. The researcher listened to the transcription and made appropriate changes where the automatic transcription software had made mistakes. This text was then sent back to the participant parent for member checking. Member checking, which is a reliability and validity tool used in qualitative research, is described in detail in this paper's reliability and validity section. Once returned to the researcher, or once the 2-week participant-allotted response time had expired, the transcribed interview text then underwent content analysis as described previously for the IEP documents.

Bracketing Interview

According to deMarrais (2014), a bracketing interview is how a researcher gets “at the assumptions and beliefs the researcher brings to the study” (p. 58). The researcher was a special education teacher in the school district where the research was conducted. Therefore, it was important that any preconceived assumptions about the study’s subject matter be investigated and identified before the study began. The bracketing interview allowed the researcher to understand her own experiences as a special education teacher. Specifically, she was able to understand how her job relates to soliciting parental input, facilitating IEP meetings, developing collaborative IEPs, and writing IEP documents. This allowed the researcher to identify when her own biases on the subject matter might have appeared in the data and to deal with them, so as to not contaminate the data with predisposed ideas.

Dr. Sherry Markel of Northern Arizona University organized and led the bracketing interview. The interview took place over the phone on the evening of Tuesday, May 17, 2022. Topics discussed included the researcher’s career in education, her personal cultural connections, her thoughts on immigration, her experience surrounding IEP meetings, and her hopes for her research.

The bracketing interview showed that the researcher has limited experience in education due to only having been a teacher for 8 years. The researcher taught at two different elementary schools within the same school district during those 8 years.

The researcher is from the area in which she intends to do research. She has lived in southern Arizona her entire life except for the 3 years she spent in Northern Arizona for her undergraduate degree. The researcher has strong ties to the community in southern Arizona, having spent her entire life working with families in various aspects of education—starting at age

16 when she was a summer camp special education advocate. Over the 14 years since that first educational experience, she has continued to be involved with southern Arizona families through camps, coaching opportunities, and teaching. The researcher's life experiences in this setting give her a general understanding of the surrounding community culture.

When asked about her personal cultural connections, the researcher stated that she had few multicultural experiences. However, when she continued to discuss her childhood experiences and educational experiences, it was clear that she had been exposed to many different cultures growing up. Prenatally, she lived in Chile with her family. Her parents moved back to the United States just in time to give birth to her in America. Her parents traveled to Chile multiple times per year until the Covid pandemic of 2019. Her parents speak enough Spanish to have lived comfortably in Chile during their sabbatical and their annual visits for work. The researcher commented that her sister also speaks Spanish, though she has yet to learn to be fluent.

The researcher also has ties to the Jewish community in Southern Arizona, although she is not religious. She began preschool at 6 weeks old and attended the Jewish Community Center preschool through kindergarten. There, she was exposed to Jewish culture and religion as well as the Hebrew language. The researcher never learned Hebrew during this time beyond the basic prayers. She continued to be involved in the Jewish Community Center until she was about 26 years old. The researcher also had other multicultural experiences throughout her K–12 educational career that she failed to mention during the bracketing interview. These included extended studies in world religions; field trip experiences including the Tohono O'odham Children's Shrine in Southern Arizona, a local mosque, and historical downtown Tucson; and the researcher attended Catholic high school as a non-Catholic.

Dr. Markel then asked the researcher about her views on immigrants and people from CLD backgrounds. The researcher spoke fondly of her childhood once again. She explained that she believes that immigrants built America. The researcher's paternal grandmother traveled to the United States by boat when she was about ten years old. Her grandmother traveled from Lithuania to New York, knowing no English, to live with her uncle and have a chance at a better life. She left her entire family behind and started a new life here in the United States. The researcher was taught through this immigration story, and personal experiences with her grandmother, that one must be very brave to live their dreams. The researcher also mentioned that her mother is of Japanese descent. She explained that every Friday growing up, they had sushi as part of their dinner. The researcher's exposure to Asian culture was mainly through food.

Next, the researcher was asked about her own IEP experiences. The researcher described her district as filled with caring individuals who try their best to meet every student's unique needs. However, she mentioned a gap in the district personnel's desire to serve families and their ability to do so. The researcher thought that coaching experiences might help district personnel gain the knowledge, understanding, and skills to serve their community better. The researcher also mentioned that parents should have some coaching or support while navigating the special education and IEP processes.

When asked about the most challenging part of an IEP meeting, the researcher shared that she often feels that the school pre-makes a plan and presents it to the parents at the IEP meeting. She feels that the IEP meeting should involve the parents more and that the IEP plan should be developed as a team during the IEP process and meeting. However, with case managers running the IEP meeting in her district, it can be easy to take over and present data and information on

behalf of the general education teachers and related service providers. Such a practice delivers the feeling that only one voice is represented throughout the meeting and on the IEP document rather than a collective team voice.

The researcher mentioned that parents and teachers, including herself, easily get distracted and pulled off topic. For example, since the Covid pandemic, the researcher shared that many parents want to talk about their trauma and often pull the conversation away from their child's disability. She also shared that her favorite part of an IEP meeting is when all team members walk away feeling like they had a successful meeting, are happy about the conversations that took place, and feel that there is a good plan for the child moving forward.

Finally, the researcher discussed her hopes for her research. She shared that she wants her research to remind or inform school staff about the importance of parental voice and input when designing a plan for their child. The researcher wants to empower school districts to see parents as co-creators of the child's plan and not as people the school needs to counteract. The researcher strongly believes that as a teacher, having a good relationship with the parents of the children you serve is essential. This relationship is fostered by frequent, open, and honest communication.

In summary, the researcher was exposed to multiple cultures while growing up, although she is from a White, middle-class background. She has spent her entire life in the community where she has conducted her research. This gives her a unique understanding of the surrounding community culture. The researcher's limited teaching experience in number of years is offset by her many roles within the school district, which have allowed her to participate in more than 100 IEP meetings in various capacities. She has worked with many families from various CLD

backgrounds throughout this time and has generally found her experience within the district to be positive.

Data Collection/Analysis Procedures

During Spring 2023, the researcher followed the above-mentioned recruitment procedures to acquire five participants and five IEP documents. The participants had to agree to participate within 2 weeks from the child's IEP meeting. The reason for this constraint was that there needed to be some time, though not too much time, between when the IEP meeting occurred and when the researcher interviewed the parents. Further, the IEP document must have been completed by the school staff and sent to the researcher as part of this data collection. As hoped for, the researcher received the IEP document around the same time as the interview occurred.

Following this timeline, the data were acquired by the researcher beginning in mid-March 2023. The researcher coded the first IEP document received to obtain preliminary codes, and then after the first interview was completed and transcribed, the researcher coded that data for preliminary codes as well. The researcher then used these preliminary codes to guide the remaining data coding. The researcher added more codes as they appeared in the data throughout the remaining data analysis. The researcher hoped to be able to obtain all five IEP documents and all five transcribed interviews by the end of March 2023.

Reliability/Validity

This research was situated within the naturalistic paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a naturalistic researcher use methods such as member checking, debriefing by peers, and triangulation to validate the data. Therefore, for this study the researcher employed

member checking of the interview transcript, a second, peer review of codes, and data triangulation.

Member checking asks the participant to verify that the data are true and trustworthy (Doyle, 2007). Member checking is a tool often utilized by qualitative researchers as the qualitative researcher often is both the data collector and the data analyst (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher allowed each family to read over the interview transcript to make sure that what they shared during the interview was what they wanted to say and asked them to delete anything that was possibly misspoken or needed to be added to their answers. The researcher sent the transcribed interview back to the family within a week of their interview. The family had up to 2 weeks to respond with any changes or additions. The final discussion in the next chapter documents any changes, additions, or deletions. The data analysis in this study was based on the transcripts after they had been through member checking.

Reliability also had to be achieved both with the IEP document data and the interview data. Therefore, the researcher trained one of her graduate student peers in the inductive content analysis and abstraction protocols discussed above. The graduate student peer was also completing his dissertation through qualitative methods, so he was familiar with coding and qualitative data analysis. Training in inductive content analysis and abstraction occurred over the Zoom platform due to living in separate states. This training included an explanation of methods, an example, and a question/answer session.

Once trained, the researcher and second reviewer individually coded the first IEP document and the first interview transcript. They then compared the initial codes and, if necessary, discussed initial codes until agreement on initial codes occurred. This agreement included agreement on code definitions. This way, when the researcher continued to code the

remaining four IEP documents and interview transcripts guided by the initial codes, another reviewer had already agreed.

Another source of reliability and validity of the data was the use of triangulation between the two sources of data: interview transcripts and IEP documents. The IEP document represented a summary of the discussion at the IEP meeting. The parent interview represented what the parents remember and said about their input during the IEP meeting. There should have been an alignment between what the family recalled during the interview and what was evidenced in the IEP document.

The social validity of this study was determined by its outcomes. School districts can use the knowledge gained from this study to recognize whether their own teachers are using parental input when designing and implementing IEPs for students from CLD backgrounds.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

In this chapter, the researcher presents her analysis of the qualitative study focusing on how parental input was evidenced in the IEP document. First, the recruitment process is detailed, and then the reader is introduced to each participant. In this study, a participant could be a single parent and their child's IEP document, or a participant could be a set of parents and their child's IEP document, as described clearly later in this chapter. The researcher then describes the structure of each individual interview, followed by the analysis of the IEP documents. The common themes that emerged from both data sets are reported through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm. Validity of the data is discussed, and finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

Recruitment of Participants

Initially, upon the researcher's request, the English Language (EL) District Coordinator, Special Education Records Specialist, and the Executive Director of Student Services sent out a blind carbon copy (BCC) email to all potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher if they wanted more information on the study or if they intended to participate. The initial recruitment email specified that potential participants should contact the researcher directly using her NAU email or personal cell phone number. Thanks to the initial email communication by the school district personnel, potential participants were allowed to communicate with the researcher by one of three modalities: text message, telephone call, or email communication. This process is explained below.

Recruitment by Text Message

The recruitment email was sent to families the Friday before the school district's Spring break. After 6 days of waiting, the researcher received her first response from a potential family via text message. Sometime later, two more potential participants reached out about the study

through text messages. All three families signed up to participate in the research study. Specifically, Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 4 chose text messages as the medium for initial communication with the researcher. Participant 3 initially reached out through email; however, she provided her cell phone number to the researcher and requested that the researcher text her more information about the project. As a result, Participant 3 is included in text message recruitment. It was through text messages that the interview location, time, date, and medium were determined for these four participants.

Participant One asked to meet the researcher at a public, outdoor location. A Starbucks coffee shop location was chosen based on Participant 1's work location on the day of the interview. The time was also determined based on the time when Participant 1 completed her work shift. The researcher, who was on Spring break herself, could make these arrangements easily without rearranging her own schedule.

Participant 2 texted the researcher 7 days after the initial email request. He asked that the Zoom platform be used for the interview. He also asked that the interview occur during the work week because weekends are busy for his family. The interview time was determined by Participant 2, requesting that the interview take place when he was off work. The researcher was able to rearrange her own work schedule to meet the needs of Participant 2.

The third participant who responded to the initial request did so through email after 11 days. In that email, she asked that the researcher continue communication with her through text message. The researcher and Participant 3 spent 3 days organizing an interview location, time, date, and medium. Participant 3 requested a Zoom interview. The initial time originally agreed upon by Participant 3 and the researcher did not work for Participant 3 at the last minute.

Luckily, Participant 3 could name another time that worked for her, and the researcher requested that time off from her work to do the interview.

Participant 4 also contacted the researcher 11 days after the initial email recruitment was sent. Over only 2 calendar days, Participant 4 and the researcher were able to solidify a location, time, date, and medium for the interview. The participant requested that the Zoom platform be used and gave a time and date when she was available. The researcher could request leave from her work to make the date and time requested by the participant work.

Recruitment by Email

Two participants (3 and 5) initially communicated with the researcher by email. However, Participant 3 asked in her initial email that the researcher text her to give her more information about the study. Therefore, Participant 3 is included in the above recruitment information that took place through text messages.

Participant 5 initially reached out to the researcher 11 days after the initial recruitment email was sent to families by the school district personnel. This participant agreed to participate in the study as Participant 5. Participant 5's interview location, time, date, and medium were determined through email communication over 3 calendar days. Participant 5 requested that the Zoom platform be used to conduct the interview. Additionally, this was the only participant who requested an evening time for the interview. The time determined was based on the participant and the researcher's work schedules.

Participant Profiles

Data were collected from five families for this study. Due to the uniqueness of each family unit, the individual family makeup is described first, followed by the demographic information that the families reported on their child's enrollment documents with the district.

The self-identification of the parent participants is also reported. Finally, special education eligibility and services are described for each child whose IEP document was analyzed. This section uses pseudonyms for the parents involved in the interview and the child whose IEP document was analyzed.

Family Makeup

Understanding the unique family makeup of each of the five family units in this study is important. The five family units participating in this study are discussed below

Family Unit 1 – Alicia and Nick. The first family unit consisted of a mother, father, son, and daughter. The mother and father are the biological parents of the son and daughter who live in the current household. The father was married and had two children with his previous wife. It was unclear during the interview if the children from the two marriages ever see each other. During the interview with the mother of this family, she reported that the father was not actively involved in his previous relationship's children's lives. The mother was the parental participant in this study and will be called Alicia. The son's IEP document was analyzed, and he will be called Nick.

Family Unit 2 – Manny and Francisco. The second family unit consisted of a mother, father, daughter, and son. The mother and father are the biological parents of the son whose IEP was analyzed as part of this study, and he will be called Francisco. The father was the parental participant and will be called Manny. During the interview, Manny described his family as a "blended family." He reported that the daughter living at home is his biological daughter from a previous relationship. He also reported that his wife had two boys in her previous relationship. These two boys live outside the house and were not considered part of his current family unit. The daughter, who still lives at home, attends a school district different from the focus child.

Family Unit 3 – Luis, Katelyn, and Matthew. The third family was also identified as a blended family. Both the father and stepmother participated in the interview and will be called Luis and Katelyn. Luis reported that he had been divorced for 5 years and that the stepmother had known his son for about 6 years. The son whose IEP document was analyzed will be called Matthew. Matthew spends time with both his father/stepmother and his biological mother's family. Luis and Katelyn reported knowing each other since childhood. Luis was best friends with Katelyn's brother growing up. When asked about other children in the house, the parents reported that their three nieces and Matthew's two half-sisters are regularly in and out of the house.

Family Unit 4 – Martha and Henry. The fourth family unit consisted of a mother, a father, and two sons. It is the younger son, whom we will call Henry, whose IEP was analyzed, although both boys in the home utilize IEPs within the district. The mother participated in the interview and will be called Martha. Martha reported that she married her husband late in life. They could not have children, so they investigated fostering and adopting children soon after marriage. She reported that since a young age, she always saw herself adopting a child or children, which seemed fitting to her. The family began fostering Henry when he was about 13 months old. They adopted him 6 months later. Their older son joined the family not long after they adopted Henry. He was a sibling pair who initially had a biological younger sibling, a female, who would also be available for adoption. However, due to the sister's fit in her current foster home, Family Unit 4 could only adopt the boy. He joined the family as the older brother. Martha shared that the boys "hit it off basically from day one. They have always had a fondness for each other, and I would even go beyond that and say more of a deep love."

Family Unit 5 – Jade and Tyra. The fifth, and final, family unit consisted of a mother, father, son, and daughter. The mother, who will be called Jade, participated in the interview, and it is the daughter, whom we will name Tyra, whose IEP document was analyzed for the purposes of this study. Jade shared that she and her husband had met in college and “been together ever since. Eighteen years.” They could not conceive children, so they went through in vitro fertilization treatments, and as a result, they conceived their son. Jade reported that they “couldn’t do that again. So, we decided to adopt. And that’s when we got my beautiful Tyra.”

Demographic Information

All five children who participated in this study attended the same Title 1 public elementary school and were between the ages of 9 and 11. Four of the children are identified as male, and one is female. Their ethnicity, race, and home language, as identified by their district enrollment records are described below, followed by the parents’ self-identification of their family’s demographics. The researcher then explains each participating child’s special education identification and services.

Ethnicity, Race, and Language. In order to participate in this study, the child had to be identified in their enrollment documentation as being from a culturally or linguistically diverse (CLD) background. The exclusion criteria were being non-Hispanic and White only. Four of the children were identified as being from Hispanic-White backgrounds, and the fifth child was identified as being from a Non-Hispanic-Black/African American/White background. According to their district enrollment paperwork, all five children spoke only English at home.

Self-Disclosed Demographics. This study took place through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm. As discussed in the methodology chapter, an identifying feature of the naturalistic paradigm is that the researcher is often involved in the self-identified group or community

(Salkind, 2010). In the case of this study, the researcher had previously been a special education teacher at a school attended by all of these students. The researcher had even been the classroom teacher for a few of the participants. At the time of the research, however, the researcher worked at a separate school site and was not actively involved in the student participants' educational plans, IEP writing, or daily school activities.

Following the aim of the naturalistic paradigm to develop deep insights into the human experience within a particular group or community (Salkind, 2010), the researcher shared aspects of her personal identity with the participants. It was important that the researcher and the participant be situated in the same community and human experience. The researcher did this by sharing personal information about her identity and allowing the participants to ask her questions about her own life experiences.

The researcher shared with each participant about her family's culture. She shared that when she thinks of culture, she thinks of her family gathering around the dining room table to have dinner every night. She recalled eating food prepared by her family at home. She shared with each family that her father was of Polish descent and her mother of Japanese/Native Hawaiian descent. Traditional Polish foods and the researcher's favorite food, sushi, were regular foods enjoyed by the family. Meals were used as a time to catch up on each other's days and lives. It was a time when the researcher's family gathered each day to unwind.

After sharing her own family culture, the researcher asked each participant, "How would you describe your culture?" Alicia, Manny, Luis/Katelyn, and Martha all reflected on their own family gatherings around the dining room table. Luis and Katelyn reported that dinner is an extended family event. Grandparents, cousins, brothers, and other family members eat dinner

with them each night. Jade shared about the importance of larger family gatherings in their family's culture that revolve around holiday celebrations.

Alicia and Manny self-identified as having one or both parents of Mexican or Hispanic descent. Luis self-identified as Hispanic and Scottish and identified Matthew as "German and Hispanic." Martha and Jade both adopted the child involved in this study and discussed both theirs and their child's racial and ethnic identities. Martha shared that her husband is Belgian, and she is also of Northern European descent. She said that as far as culture goes, they seem to mix food and culture from Europe with the southern Arizonan culture. Specifically, Martha explained, "We love the Mexican culture. We love food, the Mexican food, the art, the music, the people. I mean, we're in southern Arizona. So, if you didn't like it, you should not be here." Jade shared that she is Jamaican and "pretty much everything White. German, Scottish, Swedish, everything. So, my mom is kind of a mutt in that respect." She identified her daughter, Tyra as, "mixed. Black and White. Bio mother was Black and White. And then the father is White."

Culture also included the family's home languages. Three of the families reported speaking non-English languages at home. Alicia and Manny both reported speaking Spanish regularly in the home. Alicia stated that the kids "hear us speaking Spanish sometimes. You know, things that kids shouldn't know, like adult problems. Sometimes we say them in Spanish, but we have noticed that they've started to pick up words, and both of them ... will say stuff [in Spanish] too." When asked about languages spoken at home, Manny responded, "Spanglish. Spanish and English ... I [speak] to them more in English than Spanish. My wife speaks to them more in Spanish than English." Martha reported that her husband's first language is French but that she feels that they have "probably dropped the ball on their [children's] ability to quickly learn French." She went on to name many words and phrases that the children know in French

such as “good night, good morning ... dog, cat, horse.” Martha’s children seem to be able to name objects in French, rather than converse fluently in French. The other two participants, Luis/Katelyn and Jade, did not report speaking a non-English language at home.

Special Education Eligibility and Services. The first child, Nick, was a 10-year-old male student. Through the special education department, and confirmation through the parent interview, the researcher was informed that Nick received special education services as a student with autism. Nick is placed in the district’s Cross-Categorical Multiage program, where he has reading, writing, math, social/emotional/behavioral special education services and receives speech/language therapy. He was recently discharged from occupational therapy. Alicia reported that it was Nick’s fifth year in the school district, the fifth year attending his current school, and the second year in his current special education program.

Child 2, Francisco, was a 9-year-old male student. Francisco received special education services as a student with a specific learning disability in reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation, basic reading skills, and mathematics problem-solving. He received special education services in reading, writing, math, social/emotional/behavioral supports, and speech/language therapy. He is currently placed in a district program called Extended Resource. Manny reported that this is their son’s second year in the school district and third classroom placement since starting in the district. He was most previously in the same Cross-Categorical Multiage program that Nick attended. Francisco was retained in kindergarten at his previous school site.

Child 3, Matthew, was a 10-year-old male student. Matthew received special education services under the category Other Health Impairment. He is placed in the district’s Cross-Categorical Multiage program. He receives special education services in reading fluency, reading

comprehension, written communication, mathematical operations, adapted physical education, and speech/language therapy. Luis and Katelyn reported that it was Matthew's sixth year at the school and sixth year in the district. Katelyn shared in the interview that she also graduated from the same school district.

The fourth child, Henry, was an 11-year-old male student. Henry received special education services under the category of Other Health Impairment. He received specialized instruction in reading, writing, and math. Henry is not currently placed in a district program. He spends 80% or more of his day in the general education setting and is pulled out of that setting by a special education teacher for his special education services. Henry has been in the district for 8 years, having attended the district's special education preschool program. He has been at the current school for 5 years. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he attended the district's online school for his first third-grade year. It was at this online school that Henry was retained in third grade.

The fifth child, Tyra, was a 9-year-old female student. Tyra received special education services as a student with Other Health Impairment and an Emotional Disability. Tyra attends the district's Extended Resource program. She has been in the district for 4 years; this is the second elementary school she has attended. Her older brother has been in the district for 8 years. Tyra received specialized academic instruction and services in decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, written communication, and mathematical operations/fluency. Due to how her Emotional Disability manifests, Tyra also requires behavioral supports and services, including targeted adult support throughout her school day and a positive behavior support plan.

Structure of Interviews

The parents in this study participated in a single interview within two weeks of their most recent IEP meeting experience. The interviews were scheduled based on the parents' preferences for in-person or virtual interactions. Four of the parents chose the Zoom platform as their preferred meeting location, and only Alicia asked for an in-person interview in an outdoor, public location. The participants were asked to suggest a time and date to the researcher for the interview. The interview was scheduled if the time and date worked for the researcher. If the time and date suggested by the participant did not work for the researcher, then the researcher responded to the participant with an additional five dates and times when she was available. In that case, the participants could name a time and date that worked for the researcher based on her schedule.

The interviews, which lasted between 10 and 38 minutes, were focused on the participant's family, child, culture, and experience in their most recent IEP meeting. The interviews ended by allowing participants to tell the researcher any information they felt was missing from the interview, along with the ability for the participant to ask the researcher any questions. Only Alicia took the opportunity to ask the researcher questions about her personal and professional life. Luis also took the opportunity to discuss his religion and how he is trying to teach his son his religious values.

Analysis of IEP Documents

This research project explored how parental input is evidenced in the IEP document and identified how or whether the information shared by parents was included in the IEP document. The IRB process determined that the researcher should only receive access to the parental input statements documented in two sections of each child's IEP document. In the district's IEP

writing software, these two sections are titled, “Parent/Adult Student’s Input on Student’s Current Academic Achievement” and “Parent/Adult Student’s Input on Student’s Current Functional Achievement.” If parental input was evidenced elsewhere in the IEP document, it was not included in the scope of this study. The two parental input statements were analyzed for similar themes and compared to the recalled memories shared by the parents during their interviews with the researcher. These themes are discussed below.

Overview of Themes

The researcher and the second reviewer individually coded the first IEP document, Nick’s, and the first interview transcript, Alicia’s. The two researchers worked together to compare the independently derived initial codes; they had slight disagreements with the initial codes. The researcher then used these initial codes to guide her coding of the other four participants’ interview transcripts and parental statements. Themes then emerged through the abstraction process. The initial codes were combined into the broader themes of Family, Progress, Input, and Trust. These themes are defined and discussed below.

Figure 3

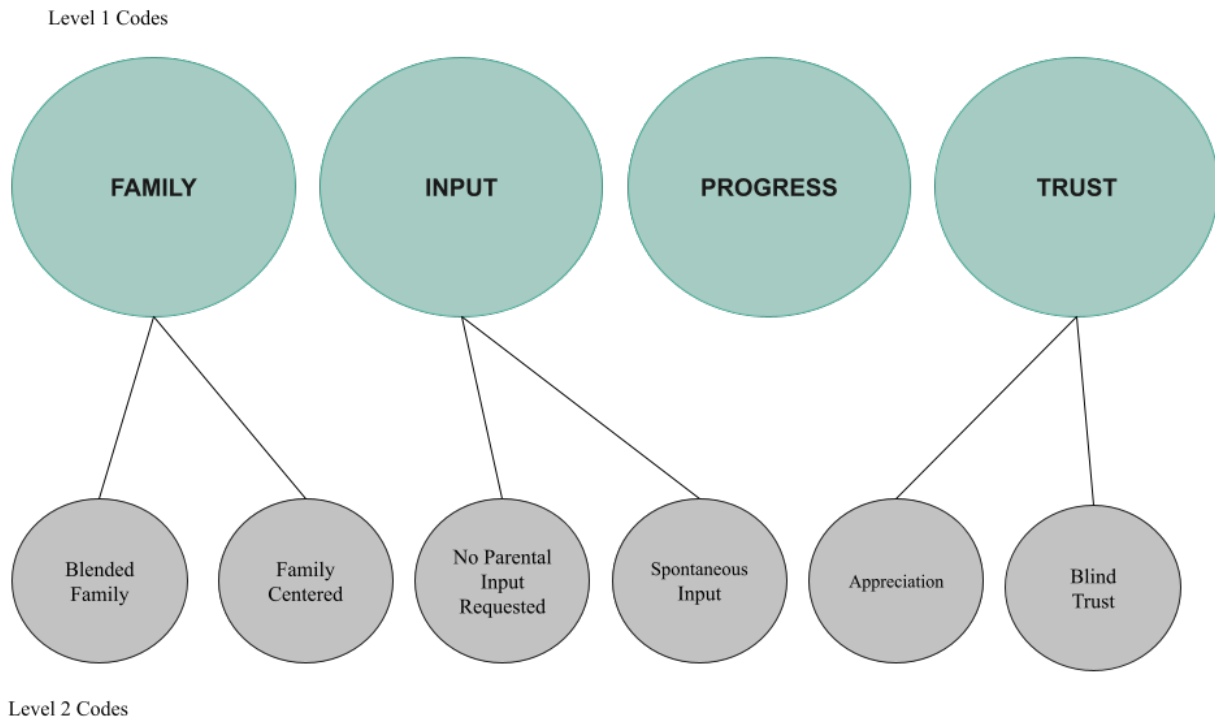
Table of codes/themes with definitions.

Code Name	Code Level (1 or 2)	Code Definition
Family	1	A group of adults and children living together.
Input	1	What parents shared about their child during the IEP process and how they reported that information.
Progress	1	Moving forward or increasing levels.
Trust	1	The feeling of security the parents feel about the school and believing fully that the school has their child's best interests in mind.
Blended Family	2	Includes couples with previous relationships that produced children and couples that had adopted children.
Family-Centered	2	A strong sense of family being one of the most, if not the most, important aspect of each parent's lives.
No Parental Input Requested	2	The recollection of not being asked to share information.
Spontaneous Input	2	Input requested at the meeting.

Appreciation	2	Admiration and respect for another individual.
Blind Trust	2	The belief that another individual knows better or is more informed or qualified than you in a specific situation.

Figure 4

Diagram of codes/themes with levels.



Family

Through the analysis of the interview transcripts, there was a clear theme of the importance of the family unit to each participant. Some participants recalled memories from their own childhoods, and others focused on the family they created. All five participants reported having a family-centered life and being part of a blended family unit. Therefore, the first theme, Family, consisted of two sub-themes: Family Centered and Blended Family.

Family Centered. All five family units consisted of a two-parent household and at least one other child in the home. A strong sense of family was one of the most, if not the most, important aspect of each parent's lives. Alicia explained that teachers have often praised her and her husband for their dedication to their children to the point that she felt uncomfortable. She reported, "We get compliments, and we always feel uncomfortable. I don't know what to say. It feels like ... we always want to do what is best for our kids, and it feels normal to us to want to give 100%. So, when people, you know, praise you for that, it just feels a little awkward because, like, I would do anything [for our kids] again and again and over and over ... I feel like it makes me feel uncomfortable and it makes me want to cry because, like, I will do anything for them. Right, you tell me what to do and I'll do it."

Alicia was not the only parent to express how important family is to them. Luis stated, "We are family-based oriented." Unlike Alicia and Luis, the other three parents did not specifically state that they felt their family was family centered. Rather, Manny and Martha shared their daily routine of checking in with one another and the importance of daily time to talk. In his interview, Manny discussed their daily routine when they get home from work or school. Manny said, "The kitchen table is where we talk about our problems and in the living

room while my wife is making dinner ... The first thing I do when I get home is, “How was your day?” ... We sit down [at] the table. We [eat] dinner and we talk about what happened during the day.

Similarly, Martha discussed how “all of our meals are together. We always eat at the dinner table ... We do use it as a time for all of us to ask each other how our days were. And we review the days.” Martha and Jade both spoke about holidays as a time when the family comes together to focus on each other. Martha spoke of a “wholesome ... upbringing with, you know, homemade cookies for Christmas.” Jade’s family seemed to take holidays a bit further. Jade shared, “So, Thanksgiving and Christmas are huge for us. It’s usually about 60 people. So, cousins, aunts, uncles. Yeah, it’s intense ... two times a year that we all get together. So, that it’s just loud and exciting. We dance. It’s just crazy. So, we really love that.” All five parental participants conveyed to the researcher the importance of family and how they created a family-centered childhood for their own children regardless of their previous relationships and family units.

Blended Family. The data revealed that all five families described themselves as what the researcher named “blended family.” This theme took two forms: couples that had previous relationships that included children, and couples that adopted children. Both types of blended families blend two or more biological families together to create their current family unit.

The first three participants reported that at least one of the parents had been previously married and had previously had children with another partner. For example, after the interview, Alicia shared that her husband had two children from his previous relationship. Manny described his family by first naming his wife. Then stating, “I have a little girl. She’s 10 from a previous relationship. [My wife] has two boys from her previous relationship.” Similarly, when asked to

tell the researcher about his family, Luis reported, “I’m divorced for about 5 years now, and I had Matthew with my ex-wife. And Katelyn met Matthew when he was about 4 years old. So, she’s pretty much been his mom ever since. And he just turned 10 last year. So, it’s just like a big, giant family between mine and hers.”

The other two families shared their struggle to conceive children and how adoption was the means to growing their families. Martha explained, “Well, [my husband] and I got married late in life, and we couldn’t have kids. So, we adopted. And I have always, since I was probably a teenager, thought I would adopt anyway. So, it kind of came full circle in my life to be an adoptive parent.” Martha went on to describe the foster and adoption stories of both of her sons. Henry was fostered by Martha and her husband at 13 months and adopted 6 months later. Her older son has a biological sister, and when they started fostering him, they decided to adopt the sibling pair. However, due to her fitting in well with her original foster family, the sister was adopted by a different family. Martha shared that the biological sister and her son still see each other regularly, blending in yet another family with their own.

Jade’s family also turned to adoption when having biological children was no longer an option for her family. Jade shared, “We had to go through in vitro with our son, and then we couldn’t do that again. So, we decided to adopt, and that’s when we got my beautiful Tyra.”

Whether through divorces and marriages or through adoption, all five family units were the product of the blending of biological families.

Progress

Analysis of the interview transcripts and the IEP document parental input statements revealed a consistent pattern of expressed progress for four of the participants. This progress was expressed by teachers and parents alike. Alicia, Manny, Luis/Katelyn, and Jade all proudly

reported during their interviews that their child had made progress, improvement, or gains in the last year. Only Martha did not directly state Henry's progress during the interview. Only three participants' IEP documents mentioned improvement or progress in the parental input statements. Nick's IEP document contained the words "improving," "progress," and "more" when referring to his academic skills, functional performance, and use of strategies to calm down at home. Similarly, Matthew's IEP document used the words "growth," "progress," and "more" when referring to Matthew's academic skills, functional skills, and time spent reading at home. Tyra's IEP document also contained the words "progress" and "improvement" when referring to her academic and functional needs. For these four families, the IEP process seemed to be positive and focused on the growth and progress the child has made over the past year.

Input

Participants were prompted in the interview to tell the researcher what they shared about their child during the IEP process and how they reported that information. There were two clear sub-themes to the type or style of input collected from the parents as part of the IEP process: No Parental Input Requested and Spontaneous Input.

No Parental Input Requested. Sadly, although previous research supports this finding (Kurth et al., 2019), two of the five families reported not being asked for input. Alicia tried to justify the lack of collaboration between the school and home team members by saying, "His current teacher is very distant in a sense. So, I wasn't really asked for any input." The researcher found this interesting because Alicia was reported to have given input during the IEP process based on the data documented in Nick's IEP document. Drawing on the researcher's own experiences in IEP meetings in this same district, it might have been the case that as the team was discussing Nick during the meeting, Alicia or her husband agreed with team members or

shared short statements with the team. These may have been the statements recorded in the IEP document. However, the parents were likely not specifically asked to share input during the IEP process.

Manny also reported, “They didn’t ask for my input. I just, I was listening to them.” This sense of teachers and school staff knowing more than the family and the family being a passive audience during the IEP meeting is well documented in the existing literature (Harry et al., 1995; Kalyanpur et al., 2000). This statement by Manny was also evident in Francisco’s IEP document. The two sections where the school team was to document parental input statements were left blank on Francisco’s most recent IEP document. Again, pulling from her own experiences in IEP meetings in this same district, the researcher believes this could have been because, as Manny stated, he was listening to the teachers and did not offer any input.

Spontaneous Input. The other sub-theme that the data revealed was that parents reported sharing their input spontaneously at the IEP meeting. They were not solicited for input before or after the meeting. This on-the-spot input could mean that parents could not share their total input with the IEP team due to insufficient time to gather their thoughts. Further, it is well documented in the existing literature that this type of formal school meeting often has parents feeling overwhelmed and insufficient (Conroy, 2012). The information shared during the meeting might have been less complete or concrete than that shared under a less stressful situation.

Luis/Katelyn, Martha, and Jade all reported that they gave input during the meeting and that their input was spontaneously verbalized during the meeting. There was no communication from the parents before, after, or in writing other than what Katelyn called “the mandatory signatures.” That is, the only written communication given during the meeting was the request for the parents’ signatures on the IEP document that was typed fully by the school team.

Trust

The theme of Trust was also determined to have two sub-themes: Appreciation and Blind Trust. Trust, for this study, is the feeling of security the parents feel about the school and believing fully that the school has their child's best interests in mind. Parents in this study qualified Trust both through their appreciation for the teachers and through reporting a lack of communication that the teaching staff often offers.

Appreciation. Three participants reported a sense of appreciation for teachers and schools through their interviews. Alicia shared, "I love the teachers' input ... We love the IEPs. Like as parents, I feel like it gives you a perspective of where your kid is and it is good to see them grow, too. Like to know it doesn't all depend on you. Like for me, I love knowing that my kid is in good hands. Like at school. That I can trust that he is learning and stuff." Martha also shared her appreciation for the school and the teaching staff. She expressed that she and her husband are "so grateful" for the school Henry attends and the teachers he has had. Jade's appreciation for the school and teachers was expressed as the need for the school and home to be a team. Her experience communicating and collaborating with school staff seemed to be very positive. She seemed to be heard as a parent and she appreciated that the school wants to know what she has to say. When asked what she shares with the school team at the IEP meeting, Jade reported, "I usually share that we go through the same things, because things that go on at school like behaviors will be shared. And I just want to make sure that you guys, [the school] ... always know that we're in this with you guys. We experience the same things. We experience the same frustrations and hardships and love, and all the good stuff as well as you guys every day at school, too. So, I really love being a team with the schools because that's the only way kind of ... that whole, 'takes a village' type of thing because it can be difficult at times." Although Jade

felt that the teaching staff valued her input and wanted to be a team with her, that was not the case for the three parental participants, who explained that their trust in the school was blind trust.

Blind Trust. Despite being grateful for the teachers and appreciating what teachers do each day, Alicia also talked about her trust in teaching being blind trust. She informed the researcher that she only sometimes knows what is happening with her child at school. She again tried to justify that it was okay that teachers kept communication from her when she said, “But again, we don’t need to know ... [you don’t want to] helicopter your kids even. But I do sometimes feel a little out of the loop.” The feeling of thinking that the school does not want parents to know about their student’s daily experiences is also well documented in the research (Rueda et al., 2005). Manny’s explanation of why he blindly trusted the school was due more to not being asked to give his input simultaneously than disagreeing with what the school was saying. He shared that he just sat and listened to the teaching staff during the meeting and liked what they had to say.

Similarly, Martha also felt that the IEP team knew best for her child in that setting. IEP meetings have been documented in the literature as intimidating for parents (Conroy, 2012). Martha explained her own experience, “But even for me, as someone with a master’s degree, and you know two bachelors, I find that the IEP is complicated. And it’s just overwhelming ... There’s so much, too much information, and you kind of just find yourself nodding. And you know, you’re just trusting these people that you know, you kind of know, but not really, to just know what they are supposed to do and do the right thing.”

Although Martha is highly educated, she still finds the IEP meeting to be a complicated and confusing time. During another moment in the interview, Martha laughed about how

sometimes she finds herself making a grocery list while the teachers present the information in the IEP meeting. She explained that it is easier to just zone out and think about something that she feels less overwhelmed by, like making a grocery list. Unfortunately, due to this zoning out, Martha is blindly trusting the teaching staff to have Henry's best interests in mind when designing and implementing his special education programming.

Validity

Following the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher used member checking, a second data reviewer, and data triangulation to validate the data. These validation methods are discussed below.

First, the researcher sent the transcripts of each interview to the participant within 24 hours of their interview. The participant was asked to engage in member checking, which is the process of having the participant review the interview transcript. The researcher asked each participant to make sure the transcript reflected what they remembered from the interview, whether it was everything they wanted to share, and to let the researcher know whether they wanted to add or remove any of the transcription data. Only one participant responded to the researcher's request for member checking. Participant 4, Martha, responded to the request by text message. She told the researcher that the transcript looked good and that she had no alterations. No other participants responded to the request to participate in member checking.

The second way in which the researcher ensured data validity was to have a second reviewer independently code the data of the first participant. When the researcher and the second reviewer had each developed initial codes for Participant 1's interview transcript and the corresponding IEP document, the two compared codes. Any disagreement in coding was discussed, and agreement on codes was reached. For example, the second reviewer coded the

father as being from Phoenix, and the researcher coded the father as being from California. Following the methodology of this study, the researcher and second reviewer discussed the differences and reconciled them before the researcher continued with the other four participant data sets. In this example, the two researchers reconciled the father being from California because he was born there, even though he had spent most of his life in Phoenix.

This study included data triangulation from two data sets: the interview transcripts and the IEP documents. The researcher could compare the two texts and draw conclusions from that comparison. Specifically, the researcher found that two of the five families reported having not been asked for input at the IEP meeting. However, according to the IEP document data, only one of the five families reported no parental input at the IEP meeting; just one IEP document had blank parental input sections. If the researcher is operating under the impression that the IEP writers would have recorded parental input if it had been given during the IEP meeting, then this section would have been filled out for three of the five families in this study.

Of the IEP documents that had recorded parental input, there were only slight inconsistencies between what the parents remembered sharing during the IEP meeting and what was recorded in the IEP document. The common inconsistency between all data sets was that the parents recalled sharing more information with the school team than what was recorded in the IEP document. For example, Martha recalled telling the IEP team about the family's recent trip to a cabin. On this trip, the family played two games: Monopoly and Scrabble. Martha recalled that her son, Henry, is a good reader and shies away from math. She remembered telling the IEP team at the meeting that Henry beat the rest of the family during their Scrabble game. However, he needed much assistance from the family to calculate change and count money during their Monopoly game.

The IEP meeting occurred less than 24 hours before the interview, yet there is no mention in the IEP document of this story given by Henry's mom about how his academic skills manifest at home. This story would have been appropriate to include in the IEP section titled "Parent/Adult Student's Input on Student's Current Academic Achievement." From there, the teacher could have used that information to develop IEP services and goals for counting money and making change. Someone reading this could argue that the IEP writer did record all input given by the parent during the IEP meeting. In that case, the parent's recollection during the interview was inconsistent and the IEP document was not missing information. It is not the place of the researcher to have an opinion on which data source caused the inconsistency, rather to simply point out that the inconsistency existed between the data sets.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the analysis of the parental interviews and the students' IEP documents. First, the chapter discussed the recruitment process and then introduced each participant or family unit. The researcher then described the structure of the interviews and the analyzed sections of the IEP documents.

The researcher had originally started this research with the intent of answering two research questions:

1. How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in southern Arizona describe their input in an IEP meeting?
2. What evidence in the IEP document of culturally and linguistically diverse students from southern Arizona supports parental input?

Following the analysis of the interview transcripts and IEP documents, the researcher was able to not only answer these two questions, but also name and define common themes that emerged

from both data sets. The themes derived from the data were named Family, Progress, Input, and Trust. In this chapter, these findings and theme definitions were validated and reported through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research study aimed to explore how parental input was evident in the IEP documents of students from culturally or linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. The researcher also used parental interviews to examine how parents from CLD backgrounds described their input during IEP meetings. These two data sets were intertwined and compared.

In this chapter the researcher discusses how the findings relate directly to the research questions. She addresses how the amount of data collected allowed her to generate themes seemingly unrelated to the original research questions. Research implications are discussed, and research limitations are disclosed. Finally, because the current research left the researcher with many questions, the need for future research is examined.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher began this study aiming to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in southern Arizona describe their input in an IEP meeting?
2. What evidence in the IEP document of culturally and linguistically diverse students from southern Arizona supports parental input?

As a novice qualitative researcher still completing her graduate program, the researcher was naive about the scope and density of the data she would collect from both data sets. Although the data collected from the parental participants and the IEP documents collectively enabled the researcher to answer the research study questions, the researcher found herself enthralled by the rich data that the parents provided through the telling of their stories. Themes emerged from the data that were seemingly unrelated to the two research questions yet held great importance for the researcher and how she personally related to each family. The following discussion of the

two research questions is followed by the themes that emerged through content analysis of the data sets.

Discussion of Research Questions

The two previously stated research questions guided this study. The researcher used the data from the parental interviews and the data from the IEP documents to answer both questions.

Parental Input Descriptions

The researcher analyzed the parental interview transcripts to answer the first research question. Parental input in this study fell into two main categories: parent input not being gathered or reported, and parent input being gathered verbally during the IEP meeting. As documented in the previous chapter, two families explained that their input was not sought during the IEP process. The other three families recounted the input they remember giving during the IEP meeting. The content of that input was described in the previous chapter. When the researcher asked how the parental input was relayed, all three participants reported that the input was given verbally, spontaneously, during the meeting. They could not think of thoughtful responses or generate input that might have been more helpful for the team due to the spontaneity of their responses.

Further, the parents were unaware that they could communicate with the team before or after the meeting. It seemed to be the understanding of parents that all information would be communicated during the IEP meeting only.

Going into the parental interviews, the researcher expected that the amount of parental input given during the IEP meeting would be reported as less than the input given by the school team during the IEP meeting. Because the researcher is a special education teacher in the same district, it has been her personal experience that the culture in an IEP meeting is that teachers

report on the yearly progress of the child, stating the strengths of the child, and then addressing the areas of need the child still has at school based on the child's disability. In the researcher's personal experiences, parent input is not often incorporated into the IEP document except as an afterthought or an aside to the data reported by the school team. Parents might share information verbally during the meeting, which may or may not make it into the written IEP document.

Based on the data in this research study, the teachers who ran the IEP meetings and wrote the IEP documents do not necessarily consider parental input to be pertinent to the academic programming the child receives while at school. The two answers to the first research question did not surprise the researcher due to her involvement in the same district and her personal experiences in IEP meetings. However, it should be noted that the IDEA (2004) law does require that the IEP team consist of at least one parent and that the parent be an equal team member. If this law were to be followed in practice, the IEP teams represented in this study would have to increase the soliciting of parental input and find a way to not only document that input in the IEP paperwork, but also use that input when designing and implementing the child's educational programming.

IEP Document Evidence

The second research question focused on the evidence of parental input as documented in the IEP paperwork. The researcher found that four of the five IEP documents provided to her had evidence of parental input. One of the participant's IEP documents had two blank parental input sections. The four IEP documents with parental input are discussed below.

The IEP paperwork analyzed in this study ranged from 12 to 17 pages of information. The IEP writers were special education teachers in the district. The teachers write the IEPs based on data collected from multiple sources. These sources might include general education teachers,

parents, special education teachers, standardized test scores, attendance records, discipline records, grades, and even the child him/herself. The part of the IEP the researcher accessed through the IRB process was just the two sections where parental input could have been recorded. These two sections were titled “Parent/Adult Student’s Input on Student’s Current Academic Achievement” and “Parent/Adult Student’s Input on Student’s Current Functional Achievement.” The range of length of these two sections in the data set for this study was zero to seven sentences. That is, the IEP document with the least amount of parental input evidenced had zero sentences written about the input parents gave during the IEP process. Conversely, the IEP document with the most parental input showed that the document had seven parental input sentences.

This finding is appalling to the researcher for a few reasons. The first is that the law (IDEA, 2004) clearly states that parents are allowed to be active members of the IEP team. In the case of zero sentences documenting parental involvement in the construction of the IEP document, the parent in the study, Manny, recalled that his input was not asked for during the meeting. He remembered being a passive audience member, just listening to the teachers and school staff tell him about his child’s strengths and needs at school. He mentioned that he agreed with the school team and did not feel the need to give any input because of his agreement with what the school team members were reporting.

The second reason is that if a parent appears to be silent during a meeting, the best practice for the person running the IEP meeting is to request input or at least ask the parent if he or she has any questions throughout the IEP meeting. Manny did not report any recollection of being involved verbally in the discussion at his child’s meeting. If a parent does not want to communicate verbally during the meeting, the teachers should make and document an effort to

involve the parents in other ways. These efforts might include asking for input before the meeting, having informal communications with the parent and including those in the IEP document, or allowing some time between the physical meeting before asking the parents whether they had any follow-up questions or input to share with the team. Allowing other ways for parents to give their input, voice their concerns, or ask questions of the team might solicit more parental involvement in the IEP process. Parents might be more apt to give input if they have more time to think through input rather than being asked to give input verbally and spontaneously during a meeting.

Even in the case of the IEP paperwork with seven total sentences documenting the parents' input into their child's educational programming, the percentage of the total IEP as determined by the school personnel is way higher than the percentage represented in those seven sentences. In the case of this study, it was Tyra's IEP that documented seven sentences of parental input. The total length of her IEP paperwork was 17 pages. IDEA (2004) requires that parents be equal team members. Given that the seven sentences were merely the length of a single paragraph and that the rest of the 17 pages most likely consisted of input from the school staff, parental input was not equally considered when designing and implementing her special educational programming.

As previously discussed, the researcher in this study did not have access to the complete IEP documents for each of these participants. As a result, there were only two sections from which the researcher could collect data. The limited access to the entire IEP document is discussed later in the chapter.

Discussion of Themes

The content analysis and abstraction processes were used to develop the themes for this research project. The researcher began by making notes in the margins of the transcribed data sets. These notes were then classified into a generic category. The researcher then combined the generic categories into one of the four themes. The second observer did the same for the first set of data, that is, Alicia's interview and Nick's parental input IEP sections. The four themes derived from the data analysis were Family, Progress, Input, and Trust, as discussed below.

Family

The interview began with an introduction where the researcher shared a little bit about herself and introduced the reason for the research. The researcher then took each participant through three rapport-building questions. It was mostly from the answers to these questions that the researcher learned about the family structures and participants' home cultures. Starting each interview with the participant talking about their family, a subject that they know intimately, allowed participants to relax a little, knowing that the researcher was genuinely interested in the stories and experiences that she was about to hear.

During these rapport-building questions, the researcher also learned that at least three of the families did not mention speaking a non-English language at home when enrolling their child in school. This could have been for many reasons, which were outside the scope of this study and the researcher's interest for the purposes of this study. For this reason, follow-up questions about language were not made or answered.

Additionally, the researcher hoped that by starting each interview with a discussion of the family unit, she would position the participant as the expert in the conversation. Many families report that during the IEP meeting and other interactions with school staff, they often feel like

the school staff are the experts on teaching and learning their child experiences. The researcher wanted to create a different atmosphere in her interviews. She wanted the families to be positioned as the experts on the topic of discussion.

Progress

Words that convey movement forward or in a higher direction were isolated and presented as evidence of progress. These words included “improvement,” “more,” and “growth.” The word “progress” was not used by any parent during the interview process. Rather, descriptive words, sentences, or phrases were used by parents that portrayed a sense of progress over the last year for their child. Hence, “Progress” emerged as an unspoken theme in the data.

This theme was a pleasant surprise for the researcher. She was expecting to hear about the child’s needs and the parents’ concerns. It was a positive experience and discovery for the researcher to see the focus from the IEP documents and the parents’ recollections on growth and the child’s relative strengths. The IEP should incorporate student strengths as a backbone for the services designed to assist or fill in student needs. It was refreshing for the researcher to read about and hear about each child’s strengths and progress over the last calendar year.

Input

The theme of Input is discussed as two sub-themes: No Parental Input Requested and Spontaneous Input. The researcher, sadly, was not surprised when the first two participants did not remember being asked for input during their child’s IEP process. However, it was only when the researcher heard the memories from the fourth participant that she wondered if the first two participants were also feeling overwhelmed and stressed during the IEP meeting and maybe forgot being asked for input. Even if the reader assumes that all five participants were at some

point asked during the meeting to share their input or whether they had any questions, the second sub-theme would still exist.

Spontaneous Input was specifically discussed in three of the interviews, where the parent recalled being asked to supply input for their child's IEP. No parent recalled being asked before the meeting to come prepared with input or to provide input to the school in writing; not to do so disadvantaged the parents during the meeting. The teachers, service providers, and other school staff collected data throughout the year on the student. The school knows what they will report before the meeting occurs. Parents are often not in the same position. That is, unless the parent spends time in the special education world, the parent may not come prepared with topic points or prepared statements to report to the school team. The parent is often being asked to spontaneously develop relevant information to share verbally at the IEP meeting.

The research suggests that parents should be given the same opportunity as the school team to develop pre-determined statements before the IEP meeting, giving an equal voice. Further, some parents might feel too intimidated to speak during an IEP meeting in front of many other team members. Allowing parents to have written communication that is then shared with the IEP team, possibly by a meeting facilitator, is a way to bridge any public speaking barriers that exist.

Trust

The Trust theme was also split into two sub-themes: Appreciation and Blind Trust. Appreciation was evident even during the recruitment process. The initial recruitment communication was sent out to families the Friday before the district's Spring break. It was not until 6 days later that the researcher heard from the first participant. An entire week passed by before the researcher heard from other participants. Most participants did not respond during the

district's Spring break. The researcher attributed the delay in initial responses to the participants' appreciation for teachers and awareness of the importance of teacher time off. Sure enough, the last three families contacted the researcher when the district's Spring break was over and teachers and students returned to school.

The families also conveyed appreciation through additional comments with the researcher. When asked to share any information the researcher did not specifically ask about, a few participants expressed their gratitude for the teachers in their child's life. Similarly, when given the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions at the end of the interview, Alicia seemed genuinely interested in the researcher's current job and life.

Four of the five participants' interview transcripts contained words of admiration and gratitude for teachers and schools. Three of the participants conveyed a sense of Blind Trust. That is, three of the five participants reported that they remained quiet and allowed the teachers to carry on much of the conversation. There was a sense of "teacher knows best," as described in the existing literature (Harry et al., 1995; Kalyanpur et al., 2000). The present research adds three more personal accounts of this Blind Trust to the existing literature on family and home relationships.

Implications

The researcher conducted this study intending to use the data gathered to inform district IEP practices and shine a light on the importance of parental input during the IEP process. The information gathered by the researcher in this study may not be able to be generalized to other districts across the United States due to the small sample size. However, the researcher hopes to present the data collected to the district stakeholders in which the research took place. In doing this, the researcher can give a voice to these five families. In addition, the special education

district-level administration, school site-level administration, special education, and other service providers can learn from the data gathered and presented in this study. Finally, this study highlights the importance of gathering parental input and documenting parental input in the IEP paperwork as part of the design and implementation process of a student's individualized education plan.

The experiences shared by the families in this study reiterate some of the findings presented in the literature review. For example, some parents in this study did not recall being asked for input. Further, at least one parent in this study suggested that the school team preferred it when the parents were less informed about what was happening at school, to the point where the parent felt separated from the school team.

The data sets also demonstrate that many parents felt the school had their child's best interest in mind when participating in the IEP meeting. Parents in this study blindly trusted the school to do and act in a way that would benefit their child. Many parents spoke about how the teachers know what is best for their child at school and therefore did not need to consider the parent's voice. This is not the goal of good parent-school collaboration and communication and is far from the intent of IDEA (2004).

Upon completing this study, the researcher intends to use this body of work to inform and possibly even change the meeting norms in her employment district. In addition, the researcher looks forward to improving her own communication and collaboration methods with CLD families. In doing this, she hopes to be able to educate other special education teachers and school staff on ways to solicit more and better parental input—parental input that could be used to help drive the design and implementation of the individualized education program.

Limitations

Before data collection, the researcher named four potential study limitations. The researcher is employed by the school district where the research took place, the researcher is a special education teacher, the data are all derived from a single school district, and the researcher is not from a CLD background. The researcher discovered a few more limitations that must be addressed throughout the study. The biggest two are related to the recruitment process and timeline for the research.

The first limitation remains the same. The researcher is currently employed by the school district where the study was conducted. To maintain objectivity, it was planned that the study would include only anonymous IEPs from the schools in the district where the researcher does not currently work. This was to help ensure that the researcher could not identify any stakeholders in the IEP document. This objective was achieved. The district employs the researcher at one of its three high school campuses. The Title 1 public elementary school where all the participants happened to go to school is different from the researcher's current employer.

Despite not currently working at the school site where the child participants attend school, the researcher previously worked there. The researcher has been the classroom teacher for four of the five participants. The researcher's specific relationship with each family is discussed here in detail.

The researcher taught Nick for three years and was Nick's first special education teacher. The researcher had spent these three years building relationships with Nick and his family. Specifically, Nick's mother, Alicia who, was interviewed for this study, was the primary contact for the researcher when communicating with Nick's family. When she was Nick's teacher, the researcher had often emailed, called, and texted Alicia regarding Nick's academics and

behaviors. At the time of this study, it had been two years since Nick was in the researcher's classroom.

As for Francisco, the researcher had been his teacher during the 2021-2022 school year. This study took place in the Spring of 2023. Therefore, Francisco had been out of the researcher's classroom for almost a complete school year at the time of this research. Unlike Nick, Francisco had only been in the researcher's classroom for one school year. During this time, the researcher had many written and verbal conversations with Francisco's parents. However, the researcher only recalled meeting the family a few times in person due to the COVID-19 restrictions on the school campus during the 2021-2022 school year.

The researcher's longest relationship with a participant was with Henry and his mother, Martha. The researcher had known the family since 2014, when Henry's older brother was placed in the researcher's classroom. The researcher then taught Henry's older brother for three school years, followed by teaching Henry for another three school years. Between the two boys, the researcher was the special education teacher and point of contact for the family for five full school years. The most recent year was the 2019-2020 school year. In addition, the researcher had many contacts with Martha during the 2020-2021 school year as a special education teacher at Henry's online school and was involved in a significant IEP meeting at the end of the 2020-2021 school year for Henry's older brother. That being said, the researcher had not taught Henry directly for three years at the time of this research study.

The fourth child that the researcher had previously taught was Tyra. The researcher taught Tyra for about two months during Tyra's kindergarten school year in the Fall semester of the 2019-2020 school year. Tyra was transitioned out of the researcher's class during the Spring

semester of that same school year. At the time of this study, the researcher had not had contact with Jade, Tyra's mother and participant in this study since the Fall of 2019.

The only study participant that the researcher did not directly teach was Matthew. The researcher did know Matthew's stepmother, Katelyn, as a teenager and, more recently, as an adult outside the school district. Both the researcher and Katelyn played and coached basketball in the local community. Katelyn's stepson, Matthew, had never been in the researcher's classroom. However, in the researcher's capacity as the Special Education Facilitator of Matthew's school campus, the researcher had observed Matthew or been involved in IEP meetings for Matthew prior to this study. At the time of this study, it had been over two years since the researcher had contact with the family in any capacity.

Despite the past personal connections of the researcher and the participants, the natural paradigm allows for this as the researcher is situated in the data. The researcher took measures to separate herself from potential participants through the recruitment process; however, there could be researcher effect noted in the data. Parents could have shared more information with the researcher due to their previous relationships with her. Further, those who knew her through the educational system as a teacher, could also have shared information that they thought the researcher wanted to hear. That is, the parents could have held back negative comments during the interviews since they may have connected the researcher with her employment in their child's school district. The participants could have withheld comments due to not wanting to upset the school system or speak badly about other employees that the researcher may have known.

The reason that all five families reached out to participate in this study may have been that upon receiving the initial email from the district personnel, the families recognized the

researcher's name and reached out to participate because they had positive interactions or a previous relationship with the researcher. No other potential participants contacted the researcher, perhaps because they did not know of the researcher, or reaching out to a stranger was uncomfortable, or they were simply being too busy to respond. This limited the data set and potential participants. This limitation is important to recognize as the rapport-building statements and questions during the parental interview may not have been as necessary as they would have been for a participant who did not have a previous connection to the researcher. The five participants might have been more at ease sharing their stories because of their familiarity with the researcher. It would be important in future studies, given more time to recruit participants, to have participants whose first interaction with the researcher was during data collection.

This point leads the researcher to another limitation not foreseen initially. As a novice researcher, it took a lot longer than anticipated to be approved by the NAU IRB. The length of the approval process left the researcher with less than 4 weeks to recruit participants, collect data, and write up her findings. Given the passage of more time, the researcher might have been contacted by families not included in the present study. That is, the researcher could have found participants who did not have personal connections to the researcher herself. The speed at which the research was conducted could also mean that the researcher missed potential participants from other diverse backgrounds. Her data sample could potentially have been more diverse, represented more cultural/ethnic backgrounds, or included members of the community who speak non-English and non-Spanish languages. Again, it makes sense that the first five potential participants to respond to recruitment efforts recognized the researcher's name and felt comfortable reaching out and participating. Given more time to recruit participants and conduct

the research, the researcher might have the opportunity to collect data from many different perspectives.

The second limitation described in Chapter 1 was that the researcher is a special education teacher and a school-site special education facilitator; this has remained true throughout the course of the research study. As part of her district-level job, the researcher attended IEP meetings as a special education teacher, general education teacher, and legal educational agency representative. Further, the researcher was chosen as one of six special education facilitators in the district to be an IEP writing coach. In this job capacity, the researcher was charged with learning the legal components of an IEP and reviewing IEPs written around the district. None of the IEP documents in this study were part of the researcher's IEP coaching experiences. None of the IEP documents analyzed in this study had any input or corrections from the researcher in her various district capacities. Further, the IEP documents in whole or in part had never been seen by the researcher prior to the data collection of the two parental IEP input sections.

The third original limitation remains the same. The data were collected from a single suburban school district in Arizona. As previously discussed, even though IDEA (2004) is a federal law, the public education agencies in the United States are largely controlled at the local, state, and city levels. Therefore, variations in funding, resources, and the percentage of CLD families among school districts exist; the same study completed in another school district might find different results. In addition, due to only five participants contacting the researcher and agreeing to participate in the present study, the researcher accepted these five participants. As previously discussed, the five participants were from the same Title 1 public elementary school. There are four total special education teachers at this elementary school, and any one or

combination of those four special education teachers could have been the teacher who facilitated the IEP meetings recalled in this study. Similarly, any of the four special education teachers could have been the teacher who recorded the information shared in the IEP documents that were analyzed. Unfortunately, all this created a very small sample for the present study. In future research, having a more diverse and larger sample would be important.

The last limitation given in Chapter 1 also remained the same throughout the research project. The researcher identifies as a white, middle-class individual. During the research project, the researcher learned not only that she is of Polish and Japanese descent, but also that her mother identified as part Native Hawaiian. Despite having a mixed background, the researcher speaks only English and considers herself part of the non-Hispanic/White racial and ethnic category. She has no personal experience being from a minority or a CLD background.

Questions for Further Research

In her professional life as a special education teacher, the researcher prides herself in building relationships with families. This was made clear by the speed with which five former families reached out to the researcher to participate in her study, and further by the flexibility many took regarding their schedule to find time to be interviewed. The researcher does not believe this would happen between strangers. This research experience left the researcher with many questions.

The first lingering question concerns the limitation of all data sets being from a single Title 1 public elementary school. How would the experiences be different, or the same, if families were members of a different school community? How do other special education teachers facilitate communication and collaboration in an IEP meeting? Would collecting data from a different school site demonstrate different types of parental input, or how that input is

evidenced in the IEP documents examined? The researcher is left curious about finding the answers to these questions. The researcher would love to interview more families and have a more comprehensive data sample.

The second future question to be explored would be a comparative study between family experiences from CLD backgrounds and non-CLD family experiences. Based on the existing literature, one can assume that there would be a difference in experiences between these two groups of individuals. The researcher wonders about these experiences and would like to know if either culture or language plays a role in the type of input collected by the school team and how that input is evidenced in an IEP document.

Finally, the researcher wonders about the school team members' perspectives. It would be interesting to also interview the school team members before or after the IEP meeting. Alternatively, experiencing an IEP meeting as a non-participating observer would add depth to this body of research in the future. The researcher could then triangulate data from the parent memories, teacher memories, IEP document, and notes from the observation into future research. This would allow the researcher to paint a fuller picture of the IEP process and potentially find areas where school staff and parents can improve their collaboration and communication.

Concluding Remarks

The researcher began this study wanting to give a voice to CLD families about their experiences in an IEP meeting. Parental input and involvement in children's educational programming are of special interest to the researcher. At the onset of the current research, the researcher aimed to bring attention to using parental input when designing and implementing IEPs. When she can share this information with her district supervisors, she hopes this research will do just that.

The goal of this study was to show that, no matter how much attention the teachers, administrators, and all the school and district participants focus on the inclusion of the parental participants, unless the theory is carefully and diligently put into practice, the outcome will be such as was revealed by the parents in this study. Therefore, a concerted effort must be made to involve the parents and to do so in a way that is comfortable for them. Ideally, school staff would try throughout the school year to build relationships with families. Additionally, introducing a short rapport-building session before and after the IEP meeting would go a long way in addressing this shortcoming and will no doubt be a more pleasant way to conclude the meeting.

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Appendix A

IEP Document and Participant Recruitment Email to District

Subject: IEP Research Project

Body:

[Insert name of recipient(s)]:

My name is CJ Olszewski and I am a current Northern Arizona University (NAU) graduate student working on my dissertation research project. I am also a special education facilitator at Canyon del Oro High School in the Amphitheater School District. For this project, I am working under the capacity of being an NAU graduate student. I am hoping to gain access to IEP documents as well as parental contact information. I have already gone through both the NAU IRB as well as Amphitheater Public Schools' research proposal board review.

In order to collect this data, I will need you to run a report on your IEP writing software to generate a list of students (K–12) whose annual IEPs are due in January and February of 2023. Then, I will need you to narrow down the IEPs to those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CLD).

Criteria for these students:

Inclusion: The adult must be a parent or guardian of a student with a disability enrolled in K–12 public school. The child must receive special education services under IDEA law. The child and adults must be from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Specifically, individuals from non-White and/or non-English speaking backgrounds. This definition excludes students whose enrollment paperwork indicates that they are “non-Hispanic White” individuals. This definition will include students whose enrollment paperwork indicates that their preferred

language is English if their home language is indicated to be a non-English speaking language (i.e., a bilingual student). Exclusion: individuals from a non-culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Please send the recruitment email to families before the IEP due date. My goal will be to have five families agree to allow me to analyze their child's IEP document as well as for them to participate in a short interview after their annual IEP meeting.

Feel free to contact me with any questions. I appreciate your help in obtaining these documents and contacts.

Thank you,

CJ Olszewski

Northern Arizona University

Appendix B

Parental Participation and Permissions Email (English)

Dear [insert name of parent(s)]

My name is CJ Olszewski and I am a graduate student with Northern Arizona University. I am currently working on my final research project and hoping that you would consider participating in my study.

My study is focused on analyzing the IEP documents of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. I would like to ask your permission to use your child's most recent annual IEP document with [name of district] as part of my research.

I would also like to ask you to consider participating in the research project as someone whom I interview. The interview will consist of 8 questions. You will decide if you would prefer to do the interview in person or on Zoom. The interview will be recorded so that what we talk about can be transcribed. An interpreter will be provided so we can converse in the language of your choice.

Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you for considering participation in my study.

Thank you,

CJ Olszewski

Northern Arizona University

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Introduction to interview:

Hello [name of participant]. Thank you so much for talking with me today. My name is CJ Olszewski and I am talking with you today as part of my dissertation research for Northern Arizona University. My research is focused on how parental input is conceptualized within the IEP document. In order to complete my research, I felt it necessary to get the personal experience of parents through interviews. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Rapport Building Questions:

1. I am from Tucson and have lived here all my life. My parents were professors at the University of Arizona, that's why we lived here. I have an older sister who is also a teacher. Can you tell me a little about your family?
2. Tell me about your child (the one whose IEP document is being analyzed, strengths, needs, abilities, disabilities, etc.).

Since you mentioned other children, how many children do you have?

How long has your child been at this school?

How long has your child been in this district?

I see you have multiple children, how long have they been in this district?

3. My family's culture seems to revolve around the dining room table. We always ate dinner together each evening, often with food from my Polish or Japanese descent. We used this time as a family to talk about our days which often meant talking about school. How would you describe your culture?

What languages or customs do you affiliate with?

Parent Input Questions:

1. Tell me about what was discussed at your child's IEP meeting (academic levels, functional skills, child's disability).
2. Tell me about what you shared about your child (input, concerns, comments, questions).
How did you report this (communication prior to the meeting, during the meeting, after the meeting, written or verbal)?

Closing Questions:

1. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
2. Do you have any questions for me?