

Minority Parents as Cultural Mediators for Education: Deaf Parents Mentoring Hearing Parents of Deaf Children

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Abstract

Connections to communities can enhance the knowledge, power, and efficacy of families as well as schools. In this paper we will describe a community-based project that works to establish links for cultural communication, mediation, and understanding among families of minority (deaf) children, Deaf community members, and school personnel in a deaf education program (see endnote 2). Through this depiction and analysis we shed light on the power of community-family-school relationships for children's education. Specifically, this paper describes the Deaf Parent- to-Parent Project, an initiative intended to bridge the cultural gaps between the Deaf community and the hearing parents and school personnel who are nurturing and educating deaf children. Throughout a series of workshops and the informal interactions that accompanied them, Deaf parents acted as resources and mentors to hearing parents raising deaf children, as well as to their schools.

Introduction

Schools are increasingly recognizing their responsibility for educating all children. As schools seek support for the goals of equity and excellence for all, the discussion frequently turns to the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy: curriculum and instruction that is rooted in children's cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994). But, in order to base pedagogy in culture, the school and its teachers must first have some understanding of the relevant cultures, and must be able to take the perspective of the families and communities of their students.

School personnel acknowledge the challenges when educators and children are from different cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds. Teachers who, historically, were often born and raised in the same communities as children now often come from cultural backgrounds and geographical locations far removed from those of their students. While teachers may believe they understand children and child development, there is often a gap between their understanding and the actual children they are teaching. If we believe that knowledge of children's cultures—language, norms, values, and ways of doing things—is critical for successful education, then we know we must find a way to learn more about the children we teach.

One way of bridging the gaps that often exist between the knowledge and experience of teachers and the learning strengths and needs of their students is to develop partnerships with the adults who know them best—adults who can act as cultural translators and links to cultural knowledge (Cummins, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Hulsebosch, 1996; Moll, 1992). For most children, partnerships between teachers and families serve this function. Families can act as mediators helping to interpret and, sometimes, reconcile the differences in norms, values, beliefs, and ways of doing things between homes and schools without labeling the child as unacceptable (Delgado-Gaitan & Ruiz, 1992). Parents can help their children understand just what it is the school expects from them and why. They can also help teachers understand their child's actions through the socio-cultural lens of family, thereby opening up new avenues to accomplish educational goals. Families, with their intimate knowledge of their children, can also offer funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) derived from homes and communities. These "funds" include understanding and experiences typically not included as part of school curriculum: knowledge about managing a restaurant, growing vegetables, home repair, automotive mechanics, or community history. Teachers can then incorporate this knowledge of students' cultures into the daily school curriculum and instruction.

Partnerships between home and school offer the possibility of bridging cultures. However, for some children it is not enough for only families and teachers to reach out to one another. Bridges among the adults in their immediate life must be multi-

plied if a fuller cultural understanding is to be gained. In some families, caregivers are already overwhelmed by the task of responding to daily survival needs and have little energy left to provide mediation, translation, or cultural interpretation. And in some families, the family members themselves are distanced from the cultural perspective that would enable schools to better respond to their children. Examples of this include parents who have moved up, out, and away from their communities of origin, trans-racial adoptive families, gay children in heterosexual families, and hearing parents raising deaf children. For many families an additional partner is vitally important if the child is to learn in culturally relevant environments: the community. Connections to communities can enhance the knowledge, power, and efficacy of families as well as schools. In this paper we describe a community-based project that works to establish links for cultural communication, mediation, and understanding among families of minority (deaf) children, Deaf community members, and school personnel in a deaf education program. Through this depiction and analysis we shed light on the power of community-family-school relationships for children's education.

Specifically, this paper describes the Deaf Parent- to-Parent Project (DPPP)¹, an initiative intended to bridge the cultural gaps between the Deaf² community, hearing parents, and school personnel who are nurturing and educating deaf children. Through a series of workshops intended to initiate ongoing relationships, Deaf parents become resources and mentors to hearing parents raising deaf children, as well as to their schools. The project's goals were:

- To provide a rapid immersion in a cultural perspective on deafness that contrasts with the pathological perspective often encountered in the early years by hearing parents of deaf children;
- To increase the capacity of hearing parents of deaf children to respond to the developmental and socio-linguistic needs of their children;
- To tap into natural parenting capacities, supporting parents' self-confidence and accompanying abilities to advocate for their child within the school system; and
- To enable school personnel to better understand the strengths, needs, and experiences of both deaf and hearing parents of deaf children.

This paper will first describe the framework and curriculum of the DPPP, then discuss what we have learned about bridging home, school, and community cultures.

Educating Deaf Children

Deaf children, like all minority children, face the challenge of not seeing themselves in the school environment and curricula. Much of our world, including

schooling, is based on hearing and speech, rather than on visual communication. Although virtually all certified teachers of deaf children have been prepared in Deaf Education programs, only about 15% of teachers of deaf children are deaf themselves (Corvell, 2001). There has been a great deal of documentation regarding the impact on students when they have few opportunities to see powerful images of themselves in schools: in the curriculum, in the pedagogy, and in adult role models (Hurn, 1993). As schools become increasingly aware of these negative impacts, they seek ways to create learning environments that act as both a mirror of the child's identity and experiences, as well as a window for all children into the experiences of others (McIntosh & Style, 1988).

In schools where there is an understanding of the gap between the experiences and culture of the school and those of the students, resourceful and aware teachers of "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995) turn to their students' first teachers: their families. In effective schools, teachers and families work together to develop home-school partnerships to strengthen children's education. But for teachers of deaf children, seeking cultural understanding from their students' parents is likely to be only partially successful. At least two things interfere with the development of home-school partnerships in the interest of culturally relevant curriculum for deaf children: (a) school views of minority parents, and (b) parental experiences with deafness.

School Views of Minority Parents

Educators say that parents are a child's first teacher, and that in order for education to be effective, families must be involved (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Yet, the approach to family-school relations, especially for children who are members of minority groups, is usually unidirectional rather than reciprocal, with the flow of influence from school to home, with the intent to improve families or enlist their support for school-determined goals (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

The focus on the value of schools' knowledge for families and their children is often rooted in a belief that parents, communities, and/or children are deficient in the qualities and skills needed to teach and learn (Delpit, 1995; Vazquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). Schools, then, attempt to overcome what they see as deficits by developing programs to compensate for what they believe to be lacking. These programs are often based in a skills approach that aims to break down learning, while overlooking the culture, capacities, and experiences that students and their families offer schools (see, for example, Haberman's 1991 discussion of what he terms the "pedagogy of poverty").

Deafness, which has historically been constructed as a category of disability, has also been susceptible to the deficit approach. The focus has been on what is miss-

ing (hearing), rather than on Deaf people as members of a group with a language, culture, and heritage of its own. As a result of the disability and deficit perspectives, teachers of deaf children seek smaller class sizes, skill-based approaches to education, and earlier and earlier intervention for deaf children and their families. “In interactions with families, deafness is always the central focus... and children become ‘the deafchild’ rather than a child who is deaf” (Scott & Dooley, 1985, p. 215), and the family becomes a “family with a disability” that needs help from what Lane (1997) calls the “troubled persons industries”: doctors, audiologists, speech therapists, and “educators of the deaf.”

Parental Experiences with Deafness

The definition of deafness as a category of disability is in contrast to the construction of Deaf people as members of a linguistic minority.³ In the last decade, in the wake of the civil rights movements of the 1960’s and the realization that the signed languages⁴ used by Deaf people are linguistically valid, activists in the Deaf community have begun to describe the perspectives, knowledge, and strengths of deafness as a cultural identity. “Deaf culture and current technologies make being Deaf different from having another disability, and the Deaf community has a tradition of being a social and artistic subgroup within the larger society.” (Marschark, 1997, p. 44)

Deaf parents with deaf children bring to child-rearing their own years of implicit as well as explicit experience, knowledge, and attitudes about what it means to be Deaf. If the Deaf parent was born deaf, they have grown up responding visually to the world around them. Deaf parents intuitively think in visual ways, which is the best way to convey information to young deaf children who are just forming a language base (Erting, Prezioso & Hynes, 1994; Erting, Thumann-Prezioso, & Benedict, 2000). Despite the fact that Deaf parents are raised in a society that sees them as disabled and can seldom avoid the attitudes of deficiency, they also know the capabilities of themselves and their peers, and are more attuned to the potential of deaf children. Although Deaf community members who have, themselves, raised deaf children can provide valuable insights into deaf children, they have seldom been sought out for their expertise.

Hearing Parents Experiences with Deafness

Over ninety percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Allen, 1986), the majority of whom have had no meaningful contact with Deaf people prior to the birth of their child. Hearing parents of deaf children thus spend the first few years of their child’s life—and often beyond—attempting to understand what it means

to be deaf (physically) and Deaf (culturally). They struggle with understanding what it means to be visually oriented in a world that is, itself, audiologically based. Parents' first thoughts may be about their child's inability to hear music. They may later—or never—shift to a cultural perspective that allows them to think visually about day-to-day interactions.

Parents' first experience of deafness usually comes when their child is “diagnosed” as deaf within the medical system. All of this, the focus on disability, the emphasis on the medical model of response, and the unfamiliarity with deafness, often results in parents becoming uncertain about their abilities to parent their deaf child. As Scott and Dooley report, professionals “become viewed as more expert parents than the parents themselves” (1982, p. 212). Hearing parents of deaf children may also share the dominant culture's norms and myths about deafness that influence their perceptions and expectations of their children. For hearing parents of deaf children, knowledge, processes, interactions, routines, and tasks about which parents would seldom think twice become frustrating, and their normal parental capacities become frozen or seemingly unavailable for use. As a result, deaf children may struggle for understanding and mirroring in their families, as well as at school. For deaf children, the Deaf community, especially Deaf parents who have themselves raised deaf children, can be an essential key to understanding and education in home and at school.

The Deaf Parent-to-Parent Project began from a desire to tap the resources of the local Deaf community in the interest of supporting the knowledge, skills, and networks of hearing parents raising deaf children. The goal was to provide structures within which Deaf parents who had raised Deaf children could share their indigenous knowledge about Deaf children with hearing parents through a series of workshops and subsequent mentoring relationships. Since most of the workshops took place in schools, we also began to see unexpected influences on school personnel as the project progressed. This paper reports on what we've learned from the first three years of the DPPP.

Methodology

Curriculum Development

When Project Staff set out to develop curriculum for the Deaf Parent-to-Parent Project, the goal was to join the growing body of research on indigenous knowledge in a minority community (in this case, the Deaf community) with the experiences and mother-wit, or native knowledge, of local Deaf parents. They had several specific goals in mind:

- To support Deaf parents in articulating the things that they know intuitively about how deaf children think and learn;
- To identify techniques and concepts to promote perspective taking (from auditory/Hearing to visual/Deaf) in hearing parents raising deaf children; and
- To organize and empower a core group of Deaf parent-leaders for workshops and mentoring relationships with hearing parents.

Although, on the surface, the project's focus was on knowledge and skills for parents raising deaf children, the larger, deeper agenda was a broadening of worldview on what it means to raise a deaf child. Informal interactions among Deaf and Hearing parents throughout the workshop conveyed intangibles such as a realization that Deaf can be independent and successful adults, a belief in the significance of connections between parent and child – even without a shared language, and a trust that their deaf children can continue to love them even while becoming active members of the Deaf community.

Project staff⁵ initially reviewed the literature on raising Deaf children to gain a more explicit understanding of relevant issues, particularly those related to cultural perspective. They read, for example, that when deaf babies make vigorous repetitive movements, Deaf parents interpret these as early efforts to sign, while Hearing parents tend to interpret these movements as potential hyperactivity (Koester, Papousek, & Smith-Gray, 2000). They also learned of studies reporting that hearing mothers tend to be highly directive with deaf children, seemingly because they cannot or do not understand the visual cues through which their child is communicating (Musselman & Churchill, 1993).

Next, six Deaf parents of deaf children met in focus groups to brainstorm knowledge, strategies, and skills they knew from their own parenting experiences to be important in raising deaf children. When their discussions mirrored current research on best practice for deaf children, that research was provided to them to further validate the significance of their experiential and intuitive responses. These initial Deaf participants also formed the core of the project staff for workshops.

Development sessions in preparation for the first workshops focused on indigenous strategies Deaf parents use for optimizing the visual aspects of parent-child interactions. These strategies, based in a visual perspective, included:

- Visual-gestural play
- Using highly animated facial expressions
- Following the child's eye gaze to understand interest
- Moving into the child's line of sight rather than pointing
- Using touch to regain attention
- Reinterpreting the meaning of vigorous physical activity
- Visual presentation of early literacy

The final session established the format for the series of four, two-hour parent-workshops. The goal was to achieve a balance between time for informal interactions among Deaf and hearing parents (and their children), and hands-on opportunities to engage in strategies that could help hearing parents shift to a more visually-oriented perspective. Although the planning for workshops focused on coaching, parent-to-parent education, and techniques to enhance parent-child interactions, the Deaf parents knew their open and engaging involvement with hearing parents in project activities was a critical part of the project's curriculum.

Participants

Over the course of three years, between 1998 and 2000, ten Deaf parents (one also a grandparent) participated in the development process and become parent-leaders. During workshops, five hearing parents who are raising deaf children were also recruited as role models for other hearing parents. These fifteen parents, together with three project staff, became the core group for leading workshops.

During the three years, we offered a series of twenty workshops of four sessions each. About half of these workshops took place during the school day, usually first thing in the day so as to better enable parents to attend a workshop prior to going to work. The other half of the workshops took place at night or on the weekend at sites connected with community organizations, including advocacy groups and churches for Deaf. Most recruiting of participants was done through the schools and early education programs.

The families who attended these workshops have Deaf or hard-of-hearing children from birth to age six. The families were 44% Latino, 32% African-American, 20% Caucasian, and 4% unspecified. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the parents are single mothers. Twenty-five percent (25%) have only the Deaf child in the home; 42% have two children and 33% have three or more children in the home. Families included mothers, fathers, siblings (hearing and hard-of-hearing), grandparents, foster parents, and child-care providers. The majority of the families lived in urban Chicago.

School-Home Connections

Most young deaf children in the United States enter some kind of "early intervention" school program as soon as they are identified as deaf. Research has shown that teachers believe that parent involvement is important. We therefore knew that schools were our best place to recruit hearing parents of deaf children. Prior to beginning a series of workshops in schools we spent time meeting with teachers (all of whom were hearing), individually and at faculty meetings, to enlist their support in recruiting parents for the workshops. Teachers, though supportive of

parent involvement, report feeling ill-prepared for and unsuccessful at making connections with parents (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Williams, 1992). In addition, staff in urban schools are often pessimistic about their students' families' ability to learn the skills needed to teach, or even support the development of, deaf children. Teachers in urban schools tend to attribute parental non-cooperation to lack of interest or caring rather than to a lack of knowledge and insecurity (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). In contrast, our project was based in the assumption all parents have skills and can learn to adapt them to better meet the needs of their children.

The first year project staff went to a school seeking to host the project there, saying they hoped to have mothers and fathers participate. The teacher laughed, saying, "Good luck! We never see fathers here." Three weeks later we had a full workshop with six families including two fathers and a grandmother in attendance. The next year that teacher volunteered to help make phone calls to all the families, and the school showed a greater commitment to the work by providing a constant meeting place every week. At other schools we've been surprised to find school faculty asking to attend the workshops with the parents. We have seen that teachers who previously did not trust parental interest in involvement or did not believe that it was possible to involve parents can change their beliefs when they see evidence to the contrary.

Workshops

Project workshops center around education—in the broadest sense of the word—that can occur through communication and interaction. Workshops were designed to shift the paradigm of parent-school and cross-cultural (Deaf-Hearing) interactions that are often based in unequal power relations in which schools and hearing people see homes and deaf people as deficient. These workshops put all parents and a Deaf cultural perspective (e.g., thinking visually) at the center. In doing so they model a shift in power dynamics that has the potential to also shift the assumptions of both teachers and parents.

Workshops use a curriculum generated by Deaf parents, and are lead by Deaf professionals and Deaf parent volunteers. Deaf project staff communicate in American Sign Language (ASL), while hearing staff communicate with oral English, with ASL, and often with interpreters translating into Spanish, Arabic, or Chinese. Through the Project workshops we try to create an environment where parents can reconnect with the pleasures of parenthood, while understanding the educational power of simple day-to-day interactions. Children are present and take part in all activities, working alongside of their parents. Parents see volunteers enjoying and understanding their children while witnessing/sharing their own frustrations with their children. Siblings, extended family members, and, increasingly, school staff

also attend groups. An important part of the workshops is parent-child interaction followed by discussion of that interaction.

The workshops focus on depathologizing deafness and reminding parents of (and demonstrating to teachers) their intuitive knowledge of children. Some of that occurs as Deaf adults describe home lives that, in many ways, are like those of the hearing parents. Our volunteers are often asked if they can drive, are really married, how they know their child is crying, and other basic questions about how Deaf people live.

Project leaders also try to help parents to better understand the realities that are different for their deaf child. Cultural/communication differences are shared. For example, Deaf people naturally follow the line of eye gaze when trying to understand what a young deaf child wants, while hearing people tend to rely on the gestures that children make. Thus, when a child who has not yet developed a language is crying for something to eat, he or she points to the shelf and throws a tantrum. His hand is pointing and moving around while he becomes more upset. A deaf person tends to draw an invisible line from the child's eye to where he is looking, and then asks, while pointing, "Is this what you want?" This approach works well since children tend to get fixed on what they want and their eye is likely to remain on the item even while the child's body is moving. The end result is that Deaf parents find the item sooner than hearing parents, with less frustration for both parties. Communication hints like "watch the eyes" are shared with the hearing parents to help them understand how to more easily attend to the needs of their child.

Also provided are practical activities to encourage and extend comfortable, playful, parent/child interaction that is not dependant on a shared language. In most workshops we play *The Copy Game*. This activity is like playing the drama game, *Mirror*, in which one person copies what another person does. Parents are asked to get down on the floor and copy whatever activity their child is doing. If the child is moving a car along the floor, parents are to mimic the activity, keeping their face close to their child's, mirroring whatever facial expressions their child is making.

There are many purposes for this activity. First, it is non-verbal and nonjudgmental and thus not frustrating for parent and child. Second, it helps parents learn how their child uses their eyes. There is a natural rhythm that Deaf people use to shift eye gaze sequentially from activity to communication (Harris & Mohay, 1997). Since hearing people can talk and be involved in an activity simultaneously, most hearing parents are not in tune with that kind of sequential rhythm. Deaf parents help the hearing parents expand their use of facial expression during the activity to show them how the child will be more likely to maintain eye gaze if the parent is showing them interesting expressions. That improves the length of eye gazing behavior, which improves the opportunity to give the child information via visual

communication (e.g., sign, gesture, or lipreading). Use of *The Copy Game* in the home allows the child to have control over an activity, which usually evolves into a game of *Follow the Leader*, which is very empowering for a deaf child acting as “the leader.” Over time the parents report they see a change in their child’s self esteem and in their own understanding of timing in attempts to keep their child informed.

Techniques that can be used in the home are discussed, and, after observing parental interaction, adaptations are demonstrated to help parents become more connected with and beneficial to their children. One example is how to coordinate hands and eye movement while reading a book to a deaf child. These techniques allow parents to utilize their own parenting skills as they begin to understand how to adapt to meet the conceptual and communication needs of their children.

Data Sources

Over the course of the first three years of the Deaf Parent-to-Parent Project, staff collected data to better understand the influences and interactions that occurred. Data sources include questionnaires, follow-up interviews, field notes of project staff, and videotapes of workshop sessions. In this paper we will describe some of what we’ve learned from the data.

Findings: Mentors as Cultural Mediators for Education

One of the goals of the DPPP is to enable parents to tap into their natural parenting capacities, which appear to be frozen in relation to their deaf child. In addition, we hope they will add new capacities to their repertoire that will enable them to respond to their deaf child’s socio-linguistic needs. Thus, our analysis of videotapes of the workshops focuses on interactions between parents and children during the sessions over the course of the four workshops. We also focus on interactions that take place outside of the workshops, as described by parents during the workshops. With over one hundred hours of videotapes, our analysis is still in the preliminary stages. Analysis of the videotapes shows four key ways in which parents acted as cultural mediators for education:

1. Storytelling as a cultural means to see commonalities

Although workshops were not initially planned to do so, the first sessions usually incorporated families telling their stories. It appeared that for many of the parents, especially the non-English speaking parents, this group was their first opportunity to share with others their experiences of parenting a deaf child. Many spoke of feel-

ing inadequate, embarrassed, or isolated. Deaf parents, in turn, told their stories of similar feelings the first time they gave birth to a hearing child.

Since storytelling is a cherished activity in Deaf communities, Deaf parents also often used stories to illustrate a concept or to provide information. In addition to the storytelling that occurred during more formal group time, hearing and Deaf parents (with interpreters always available) would often chat as they arrived for the workshop, during break times, and at the close of the session. Time spent in this activity was an early and strong means of connection for Deaf and hearing parents, breaking stereotypes and providing insights into what their child might be like as a Deaf adult.

2. Mutual validation of parental knowledge, skills, and perceptions that carries over into interactions with teachers

Games like *Mirror* and *Follow the Leader* were often powerful experiences for the parents and the teachers. Parents began to shift from feeling they must explicitly teach language and use good ASL skills in order to be effective parents for their deaf children, to realizing that there was tremendous benefit from natural parent interplay with communication by any means possible.

During the second workshop we shared how many hearing parents have mentioned their children are clingy or won't let them do anything alone. We related how hearing children use sound to help them find their mothers around the house. They can hear them moving about and are assured that they are still in the house. Volunteers shared how it takes a long time for them to find their children in the house, and vice versa, since they cannot hear the water running in the bathroom or the shoes on the stairs, or see behind the closet door. Hearing people *unconsciously* use auditory cues to find each other around the house. However, for deaf family members, people seem to appear and disappear without any known cause. That is why Deaf cultural norms suggest that people inform each other where they are going.

Parents tend not to want to bother their child if he is playing quietly; they use the opportunity to go off and do something. A deaf child is often unaware they have left. When the young child looks up from their activity they are startled, and if it takes a long time for them to find their parent, they often begin to panic. We encouraged parents to use very simple communication to interrupt the child and say, "I go. I come back." If they have more communications skills, they can tell the child specifically where they are going.

One mom returned to the group the week after this discussion and shared that she tried that strategy. She told her 6-year-old son she was going out to put laundry on the clothesline. She related with awe how it was the first time in years that she was able to finish putting laundry on the line without having to rush back into the house, fearing her child was deathly hurt, while he screamed hysterically.

3. Shared non-threatening discussions and modeling among parents, and between parents and teachers

Interactions between families and school regarding deaf children are usually focused on so-called intervention models for deaf children and often disenfranchise parents, rendering them powerless to make decisions. In the parent-to-parent groups the discussions are varied but aimed, at least partially, at equalizing power relationships. All group members, parents and school personnel alike, give feedback on strengths and needs of the group. Group members ask questions of one another and provide information and advice. School personnel, who are guests in the groups and fewer in number than the parents, are able to gain new insights into the out-of-school experiences of children and their families. The group context allows parents and teachers to discuss general questions about children's behavior rather than, as is often the case, receive reports of school concerns.

Parents also see modeled a variety of forms of communication: gesture, sign, sign-with-voice, sign-without-voice, interpreted. From the videos we learn that parents can shift from verbal communication to nonverbal and visual communication, and we see fathers do so more easily. Perhaps they have a less established pattern of interactions with their children and so do not have to unlearn behavior, as appears to be the case with the mothers. In any case, what fathers learn mothers will also be able to learn. The Project parents are able to make conceptual shifts and use the "thinking visually" techniques provided for them in the workshops. When they do so, it appears they become motivated to see how they can make other adaptations to benefit their child (e.g., drawing pictures of the playground before going out to play). As parents report in the workshops, some of the interventions are immediately reinforced by the positive responses from their children. Their child's behavior shifts in response to the parent's interventions, which serves to improve parental self-esteem. Finally, when school personnel attend groups, ask questions, and draw connections to work done in the schools, it reinforces for parents the significance of these seemingly mundane, everyday kinds of activities and discussions.

4. Shared information regarding use of school systems and structures

Inner city public school parents often have limited sources of information on how to obtain resources for their child. The groups developed through the Deaf Parent-to-Parent Project provide information on community contacts, Board of Education training (e.g., IEP planning), how to achieve their goals in school bureaucracies, and available services. For example, one aunt talked about concerns in raising her six year-old nephew who was a deaf kindergartener with mild cerebral palsy and had been mainstreamed into a "regular" classroom. The school had developed a plan to continue the boy's education in a mainstreamed first grade classroom,

with no language access. The school also reported that he was showing behavior problems, yet options regarding other placements, including deaf education, had never been suggested. The DPPP meetings, which took place in a classroom in one of the deaf cluster schools, were the aunt's first contact with deaf education. Group leaders connected this caregiver with school personnel who could provide her with more information about educational options. As a result, within a week, the boy had switched to a classroom in which language was accessible to him.

Discussion

Since we have begun working in the schools we have found that teachers are interested in learning more from the project team to further their own education. At one of the schools where we have been working for three years, parental involvement was identified as the deaf program's highest priority for staff development the next year. The building administrator marveled that this is the first time that particular topic has made the teachers' "top five" list.

Parents tend not to see themselves as needing support or assistance until they are overwhelmed. There is an open opportunity to offer services when parents are in crisis, a factor we have considered as we begin applying for continued funding of the project. We hope to offer our services to individual schools using a consultation model, identifying and assisting in various areas of interest (i.e. literacy, locating Deaf role models, parent involvement, or deaf child development). We can also help them identify Deaf community resources for learning and ways to allocate their in-service training to meet their learning agendas. We could offer drop-in groups or coffee and chat hours at the schools so that teachers and parents will know we are available to them on specific days. We also plan to continue to offer the workshops to families with newly identified deaf children.

Deaf parents can act as a catalyst for reawakening the intuitive knowledge of hearing parents raising deaf children. Seeing that other parents (Deaf and hearing) share common experiences and that simple parental interactions (such as playing the *Copy Game*) are an effective way to enjoy a relationship with their child helps to reaffirm what parents already know. A shared sense of social stigma also help to unite parents of deaf children, allowing them to work together to challenge societal (and sometimes school) assumptions about the possibilities available to them and to their children. Deaf parents, themselves active leaders and family members, provide a reality check for both hearing parents and teachers about what the future can hold for deaf children. Deaf parents also serve as a bridge between the cultural knowledge of the Deaf community, the knowledge of deaf educators, and parental knowledge and experiences. Thinking visually, following eye gaze, telling stories, and communicating by any means necessary are important reminders for

all members of the home-school-community partnership who care for and about deaf children.

Endnotes

¹The DPPP was funded through a grant from the United Way and offered through Jewish Family and Community Service of the Jewish Federation of Chicago and the MENDAC Program at Mt. Sinai Hospital.

² Deaf, with a capital letter, is used to denote people who have a hearing loss and who identify as a part of Deaf culture, while deaf, with a lower case letter, is used to refer to people who have an audiologically defined severe to profound hearing loss.

³ There is a growing practice of capitalizing Deaf when referring to this second construction. That practice will be followed from here on in this paper. Similarly, Hearing is used to convey culturally specific norms based on the ability to hear.

⁴ In the United States, American Sign Language (ASL) is considered to be the natural language of Deaf people. Other countries have their own unique native sign languages (e.g., French Sign Language)

⁵ Original project staff consisted of Lynda Myers, a Deaf social worker from Jewish Family and Community Services (Lynda is also a mother of a Deaf daughter), and Christine M. Mayworm, M.S., LCPC, currently Co-Director of the MENDAC Institute on early childhood. Suzanne Burley, Ph.D., a Deaf psychologist at Mount Sinai (Deaf and Hard of Hearing Mental Health Program) replaced Christine in year 2 of the project, and Kjersti Usler, L. P.C., a former teacher of deaf students who is hearing, also joined project staff.

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