Korean-American Parents’ Perspectives On Teacher-Parent Collaboration

by

Janel Song & Wendy Murawski - California State University, Northridge

Abstract

This paper examines Korean-American parents’ satisfaction with special education services in America and their experiences with teachers and other school staff. A thorough literature review analyzes the history and cultural factors that may influence the way Korean-American parents experience the current American special educational system, as well as their reactions related to teacher-parent collaboration. A sample of Korean-American parents who have children with disabilities were surveyed using questionnaires and participated in follow-up interview in order to ascertain the obstacles they identify as creating a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration, as well as to determine what recommendations they would recommend for improvement. The findings were organized into 6 themes that emerged from the qualitative data analytic: linguistic factors, cultural factors, lack of information, time factors, service provider factors and financial factors.

Korean-American Parents’ Perspectives On Teacher-Parent Collaboration

Collaboration between teachers and parents who have children with disabilities is considered a result of parents’ efforts to obtain the best education for their children. However, many parents of children with disabilities often felt alienated by their children’s schools while attending and negotiating the various programs, such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Valle & Aprent, 2002).

Since many parents from various countries immigrate to the United States, teachers have to collaborate with racially and culturally diverse families. According to the population survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, there are 28.4 million immigrants living in the United States, and they make up 10% of the U.S. residents’ population. Immigrant parents, however, report having difficulty working with professionals whose beliefs, values, practices, and language differ significantly from theirs. Indeed, the U.S. special education programs lack active involvement and participation from parents of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002).

Korean-American parents have additional factors that impact their ability to fully comprehend American schools with professional students. Traditionally in Asian culture, a disability is interpreted as a “punishment from God,” (according to Buddhism), or is due to the parents’ or child’s own genetic problems (Park & Turnbull, 2001). Children with disabilities are considered the parents’ fate. This often makes Asian parents regard their children with disabilities as a burden and an indicator of failure. Teachers and school staff are trained to look for ways to overcome obstacles and collaborate effectively. More specifically, this paper examines Korean American parents’ satisfaction with special educational services in American schools, and their identified needs. Prior to identifying the specific perceptions of interviewed parents, it is first important to recognize the historical and cultural background that may influence their responses.

Another factor, which impacts the collaboration between teachers and Korean-American parents, involves Confucianism, which was originally a Chinese religion, but has been widely practiced as a way of life throughout Asia, including Korea. In this philosophy, obedience to a superior is regarded as natural and one of the most admirable virtues in order to become a “perfect gentleman” (Chao, 1990). Thus, many Korean people show absolute respect and deference to authority and elders such as teachers, doctors, or public service personnel. In the United States, this reverence can create a barrier between parents and professionals because parents will agree to professionals’ opinions and recommendations without engaging in any discussion. This philosophy, therefore, hinders the possibility of a free and open dialogue between American parents and U.S. prepared teachers. There is hope, however. In a recent study by Park and Turnbull (2001), geared to Korean-American parents, the participating parents showed enthusiasm about their role as participants in the decision-making process to select an appropriate school for their children. In spite of the long tradition of Confucianism that still resides in traditional Korean people and the fact that they may be unfamiliar with the special education system in America, Language is the greatest barrier in cross-cultural communication. Families with limited English proficiency are severely disadvantaged because of the frustration caused by the language barrier (Park & Turnbull, 2001). Researchers found that many Korean-American parents reported frustrations in trying to communicate with teachers because teachers used a significant amount of special jargon, and do not adapt to understand parents’ needs and fears (Godak & Ericksen, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to examine Korean American parents’ satisfaction with special education services in American schools, and what factors influence parents to look for ways to overcome obstacles and collaborate effectively. More specifically, this paper examines Korean American parents’ satisfaction with special education services in American schools, and their identified needs. Prior to identifying the specific perceptions of interviewed parents, it is first important to recognize the historical and cultural background that may influence their responses.

Korean Immigrants In America

The history of Korean immigration began in 1903, when 101 Koreans arrived as immigrants for Hawaii’s sugar plantations (Choy, 1979). At that time, Koreans came to the United States for better economic opportunities and to help the Korean independence movement (Huth & Kim, 1984). The largest wave of immigration in the United States occurred in the 1900s when an area in Los Angeles, California, which developed as Koreatown. Now, Koreatown serves more than 250,000 Koreans living in Southern California (Park & Chh, 1999).

Today the majority of Korean immigrants come to the United States for better educational opportunities for their children and themselves. Korean parents consider education the most important issue for their children’s future success. Koreans who have children with disabilities often want to immigrate to the United States because America has better educational and social supports for individuals with disabilities, as well as a more positive attitude towards disabilities in general (Cho, Singer & Breiner, 2000).

Asian Representation In Special Education

Zhang and Katiyanawich (2002) surveyed the percentage of minority and White representation for the disability categories of Emotional disturbance (ED), Learning disabilities (LD), and Mental retardation (MR) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In this study, Asian representation was low compared to the other races. Teachers reported that Asian students were not registered with their disabilities at an early age. The underrepresentation may also have been due to a stereotype of Asian Americans as the “model minority” and generally good students (Sileo & Prater, 1999).

Methods

Recruitment of Participants

In order to first identify Korean American parents of children with disabilities, several schools within the Los Angeles, California area that are known to have many Korean-American students were contacted. In addition, Korean-American churches also were contacted as they often have ministries for children with disabilities. A final permission to conduct this survey was eventually obtained from three elementary schools in Koreatown, and five Korean-American churches in the Los Angeles area.

All research participants were told that the questionnaire was voluntary and would remain anonymous. On the last question of the questionnaire to participants were asked if they would be willing to provide more specific information by telephone interview. For those willing, telephone numbers and schedules were arranged, and nine of the questionnaire participants signed up for the telephone interview.

Study participants became a part of the Los Angeles area and indicated a willingness to participate in this study. Among them, 13.5% (n=7) were female. This was not surprising as, in the traditional Korean family, the wife is expected to stay at home and bears the major responsibility of performing household tasks, whereas the husband is expected to be the breadwinner (Huth & Kim, 1984). All 9 participants selected the Korean language as their primary home language of almost all families was Korean. Demographic information on parents’ age, education, as well as students’ age, grade, and disability status are provided in Table 1 (see page 34).

Instruments

The questionnaire provided to parents contained 20 questions and was presented in both English and Korean. All questions were used to determine if the questionnaire was demographic in nature and asked about the participants’ general background including gender, age, and education level. The next three questions were about the children’s age, disability and parents’ knowledge about their children’s disabilities. The rest of the questions attempted to ascertain what parents thought about the American special education system, and the decision to participate in the Korean-American parent collaboration they had or had not experienced. Some questions were open-ended questions to elicit the most natural and rich responses. For the phone interview, a telephone with a speaker-phone and a paper and pencil were used for note-taking. Interviews were conducted in Korean, as it was the parents’ preference and is the first author’s native language. (Copies of the survey and interview questions are available through contact with the first author.)

Procedures

All questionnaires were prepared for each participant. The packet included questionnaires in English and Korean, Parental Informed Consent Form, Experiment Subject’s Bill of Rights, a return envelope, and stamps. The return envelope and stamps were distributed in order to reduce the school staffs’ and parents’ efforts to get the questionnaires back.
### Table 1. Demographic Information on Questionnaire participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/Guardian</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>N=7</th>
<th>N=45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent's age</td>
<td>30-40 yrs</td>
<td>N=12 (23%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-50 yrs</td>
<td>N=27 (54%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-60 yrs</td>
<td>N=18 (35.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above 60 yrs</td>
<td>N=16 (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' highest education</td>
<td>Junior-High</td>
<td>N=5 (9.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N=9 (17.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College/ University</td>
<td>N=29 (55.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>N=4 (7.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>N=3 (5.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's school level</td>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>N=8 (14.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>N=21 (59.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior-High</td>
<td>N=5 (9.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-school</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>N=4 (7.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's disability category</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>N=19 (34.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental Retardation</td>
<td>N=14 (26.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>N=9 (17.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech Delay</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cerebral Palsy</td>
<td>N=1 (1.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Epilepsy</td>
<td>N=1 (1.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple Handicap</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacob Syndrome</td>
<td>N=1 (1.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>N=1 (1.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Knowledge about their child's disability</td>
<td>No Information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little Information</td>
<td>N=5 (9.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some Information</td>
<td>N=29 (55.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot of Information</td>
<td>N=18 (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families’ U. S. residency</td>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>N=15 (28.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>N=12 (23.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>N=11 (21.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 16 years</td>
<td>N=14 (26.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons to come to the United States</td>
<td>For Business or economic issues</td>
<td>N=16 (30.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For children's education</td>
<td>N=24 (46.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Due to political issues</td>
<td>N=2 (3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>N=5 (9.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missionary or other</td>
<td>N=5 (9.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As soon as possible, fifty-two questionnaires were collected out of 120 questionnaires distributed at a return rate of 43%. After gathering the questionnaires, the university affiliated programs and regional centers to learn about the American special education system and children’s disabilities.

### Satisfaction with the American special education system

All of the participants expressed their satisfaction with certain aspects of the American special education system and its disability-related policies. Forty-four out of 52 (85%) participants preferred the American special education system. The parents said that American educators treated their children with disabilities equally to children without disabilities. They also said that American educators had better equipment and more educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Some of the participants said that they were impressed after the first school meeting because they were surprised that so many people gathered to discuss their son or his child. Meetings of that type are not common in Korea. On the other hand, a few participants said that there were different merits to American and Korean special education systems, and could not say which one they preferred.

Responses to questions related to the relative importance of teacher-parent collaboration are portrayed in Table 2. Forty-eight out of the 52 parents (92%) surveyed indicated that collaboration between school and home was either “very important” or “important.” Only four participants (8%) said that teacher-parent collaboration was “A little important,” while no parents reported thinking that it was not important for their children’s education.

### Participation in school volunteer work

Although all of the parents stated that they wondered about their children’s daily school life, only 34.6% (n=18) of the participants had experienced any type of volunteer work at their children’s school. Most stated that they were very satisfied with their volunteer work and thought it was a helpful opportunity to their children. Parents read books related to their children’s disabilities, as well as attended University affiliated programs and regional centers to learn about the American special education system and children’s disabilities.

### Data Coding and Analysis

The multiple choice questions on the survey were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, consistent with quantitative analysis. The purpose of this analysis was to examine the overall trends of the data. Open-ended questions and the phone interview data were analyzed according to Bogdan and Biklen’s (2003) qualitative analyses. The open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the transcripts were analyzed to identify major themes and core categories. After reading through all the transcripts, the transcripts and the units of data were cut up and divided into separate folders, which were divided by core categories. When the participants answered the question about obstacles to teacher-parent collaboration, multiple responses were allowed, which resulted in a total number of 112 answers, rather than the expected 52.

### Results

Most of the participants reported clear concerns about their children’s disabilities, and wanted to give better educational opportunities to their children. Parents read books related to their children’s disabilities, as well as attended University affiliated programs and regional centers to learn about the American special education system and children’s disabilities.

### Table 2. Responses to Collaboration-related Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you think teacher-parent collaboration is for educating your child?</th>
<th>A little important</th>
<th>N=4 (7.70%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>N=16 (30.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>N=32 (61.54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were school meetings with teachers effective in increasing collaboration with you and the teacher?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=17 (32.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=31 (59.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>N=4 (7.29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you feel that teacher-parent collaboration was not effective, what were the obstacles?</td>
<td>Limited English Skills</td>
<td>N=34 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and racial differences</td>
<td>N=7 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of knowledge about the American special education system</td>
<td>N=25 (42.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time problem</td>
<td>N=15 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent teacher turn over</td>
<td>N=14 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>N=9 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
catalyst for making good relationships with teachers and other school staff. Only two participants said that their volunteer work was beneficial because their own chil-
dren were very distracting and sometimes demanded too much attention. One parent said that she had difficulties communi-
cating with other volunteer workers and school staff because of her "English problem." The remaining 65.4% (n=34) of the parents who had not participated in any kind of volunteer work reported that they were willing but could not because of their lack of English skills, their jobs, or to some ease, a health problem.

Satisfaction with school meetings

While the meetings were useful, they met with their child's teacher or other school staff members, responses ranged from one to four times a year (n=17), five to nine times a year (n=19), more than ten times a year (n=10), to daily (n=6). Table 2 indi-
cates parental opinions of the effectiveness of these meet-

Linguistic factors

Thirty-four of the 125 teachers (26%) said that their child's teacher was not fluent with the results. She felt that she could not ask her children or explain her feelings well because of her limited English ability. She also felt that the teacher underestimated her child's abil-

Lack of information

Many of the participating parents reported not having a basic understanding for the special education system. They felt that the information was not understandable.

Time factors

Sixty five point four percent (n=34) of the participants did not have time to participate in volunteer work or other school events because of their lack of English skills and their jobs. If school meetings were held during the day, many of the parents could not participate as they had work obligations like grocery stores, Korean restaurants, dry cleaners, and auto repair shops. In many cases, both parents worked together. This unavailability made the parents report feeling apologetic toward the teachers and school staff.

Parity with service providers

Successful collaboration is possible when there is an equal partnership between teachers and parents, however, most parents felt that they were not equal with school professionals. One key reason given was that many Koreans do not feel the need to be socially involved in the cultural background. Another reason given was that they reported not knowing much about the American special education system or special education jargon due to their lack of English skills. They felt that they were inferior to teachers regarding their children's education. This became a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration.

Financial factors

Unfortunately, constant conflict exists between schools and parents because of financial constraints on the school and for the better care for their children. Some parents reported that their children needed services the school was unwilling to provide on a regular basis. While a few parents hired a private tutor, they reported that it was very expensive. Although there are many financial benefits provided by various government and other agencies, most parents were unaware of the opportunities for fi-

Language factors

Linguistic factors and cultural factors are very important in the process of successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To understand the process of successful collaboration, it is essential to identify the language and cultural barriers. Table 3 summarizes the language and cultural barriers that can affect the parental involvement of Korean American parents in the American special education system. The table indicates that the extent of English proficiency is a significant determinant to successful collaboration between parents and professionals. To educate all teachers to learn Korean is certainly not realistic; however, finding ways to ensure communication with parents is not optional.

It is recommended that school personnel prepare for longer meeting times with parents who are using an inter-

Lack of information

Many of the participating parents reported not having a basic understanding for the special education system. They felt that the information was not understandable.

Time factors

Sixty five point four percent (n=34) of the participants did not have time to participate in volunteer work or other school events because of their lack of English skills and their jobs. If school meetings were held during the day, many of the parents could not participate as they had work obligations like grocery stores, Korean restaurants, dry cleaners, and auto repair shops. In many cases, both parents worked together. This unavailability made the parents report feeling apologetic toward the teachers and school staff.

Parity with service providers

Successful collaboration is possible when there is an equal partnership between teachers and parents, however, most parents felt that they were not equal with school professionals. One key reason given was that many Koreans do not feel the need to be socially involved in the cultural background. Another reason given was that they reported not knowing much about the American special education system or special education jargon due to their lack of English skills. They felt that they were inferior to teachers regarding their children's education. This became a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration.

Financial factors

Unfortunately, constant conflict exists between schools and parents because of financial constraints on the school and for the better care for their children. Some parents reported that their children needed services the school was unwilling to provide on a regular basis. While a few parents hired a private tutor, they reported that it was very expensive. Although there are many financial benefits provided by various government and other agencies, most parents were unaware of the opportunities for fi-

Language factors

Linguistic factors and cultural factors are very important in the process of successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To understand the process of successful collaboration, it is essential to identify the language and cultural barriers. Table 3 summarizes the language and cultural barriers that can affect the parental involvement of Korean American parents in the American special education system. The table indicates that the extent of English proficiency is a significant determinant to successful collaboration between parents and professionals. To educate all teachers to learn Korean is certainly not realistic; however, finding ways to ensure communication with parents is not optional.

It is recommended that school personnel prepare for longer meeting times with parents who are using an inter-

Lack of information

Many of the participating parents reported not having a basic understanding for the special education system. They felt that the information was not understandable.

Time factors

Sixty five point four percent (n=34) of the participants did not have time to participate in volunteer work or other school events because of their lack of English skills and their jobs. If school meetings were held during the day, many of the parents could not participate as they had work obligations like grocery stores, Korean restaurants, dry cleaners, and auto repair shops. In many cases, both parents worked together. This unavailability made the parents report feeling apologetic toward the teachers and school staff.

Parity with service providers

Successful collaboration is possible when there is an equal partnership between teachers and parents, however, most parents felt that they were not equal with school professionals. One key reason given was that many Koreans do not feel the need to be socially involved in the cultural background. Another reason given was that they reported not knowing much about the American special education system or special education jargon due to their lack of English skills. They felt that they were inferior to teachers regarding their children's education. This became a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration.

Financial factors

Unfortunately, constant conflict exists between schools and parents because of financial constraints on the school and for the better care for their children. Some parents reported that their children needed services the school was unwilling to provide on a regular basis. While a few parents hired a private tutor, they reported that it was very expensive. Although there are many financial benefits provided by various government and other agencies, most parents were unaware of the opportunities for fi-

Language factors

Linguistic factors and cultural factors are very important in the process of successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To understand the process of successful collaboration, it is essential to identify the language and cultural barriers. Table 3 summarizes the language and cultural barriers that can affect the parental involvement of Korean American parents in the American special education system. The table indicates that the extent of English proficiency is a significant determinant to successful collaboration between parents and professionals. To educate all teachers to learn Korean is certainly not realistic; however, finding ways to ensure communication with parents is not optional.

It is recommended that school personnel prepare for longer meeting times with parents who are using an inter-

Lack of information

Many of the participating parents reported not having a basic understanding for the special education system. They felt that the information was not understandable.

Time factors

Sixty five point four percent (n=34) of the participants did not have time to participate in volunteer work or other school events because of their lack of English skills and their jobs. If school meetings were held during the day, many of the parents could not participate as they had work obligations like grocery stores, Korean restaurants, dry cleaners, and auto repair shops. In many cases, both parents worked together. This unavailability made the parents report feeling apologetic toward the teachers and school staff.

Parity with service providers

Successful collaboration is possible when there is an equal partnership between teachers and parents, however, most parents felt that they were not equal with school professionals. One key reason given was that many Koreans do not feel the need to be socially involved in the cultural background. Another reason given was that they reported not knowing much about the American special education system or special education jargon due to their lack of English skills. They felt that they were inferior to teachers regarding their children's education. This became a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration.

Financial factors

Unfortunately, constant conflict exists between schools and parents because of financial constraints on the school and for the better care for their children. Some parents reported that their children needed services the school was unwilling to provide on a regular basis. While a few parents hired a private tutor, they reported that it was very expensive. Although there are many financial benefits provided by various government and other agencies, most parents were unaware of the opportunities for fi-

Language factors

Linguistic factors and cultural factors are very important in the process of successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To understand the process of successful collaboration, it is essential to identify the language and cultural barriers. Table 3 summarizes the language and cultural barriers that can affect the parental involvement of Korean American parents in the American special education system. The table indicates that the extent of English proficiency is a significant determinant to successful collaboration between parents and professionals. To educate all teachers to learn Korean is certainly not realistic; however, finding ways to ensure communication with parents is not optional.

It is recommended that school personnel prepare for longer meeting times with parents who are using an inter-

Lack of information

Many of the participating parents reported not having a basic understanding for the special education system. They felt that the information was not understandable.

Time factors

Sixty five point four percent (n=34) of the participants did not have time to participate in volunteer work or other school events because of their lack of English skills and their jobs. If school meetings were held during the day, many of the parents could not participate as they had work obligations like grocery stores, Korean restaurants, dry cleaners, and auto repair shops. In many cases, both parents worked together. This unavailability made the parents report feeling apologetic toward the teachers and school staff.

Parity with service providers

Successful collaboration is possible when there is an equal partnership between teachers and parents, however, most parents felt that they were not equal with school professionals. One key reason given was that many Koreans do not feel the need to be socially involved in the cultural background. Another reason given was that they reported not knowing much about the American special education system or special education jargon due to their lack of English skills. They felt that they were inferior to teachers regarding their children's education. This became a barrier to teacher-parent collaboration.

Financial factors

Unfortunately, constant conflict exists between schools and parents because of financial constraints on the school and for the better care for their children. Some parents reported that their children needed services the school was unwilling to provide on a regular basis. While a few parents hired a private tutor, they reported that it was very expensive. Although there are many financial benefits provided by various government and other agencies, most parents were unaware of the opportunities for fi-

Language factors

Linguistic factors and cultural factors are very important in the process of successful collaboration between parents and teachers. To understand the process of successful collaboration, it is essential to identify the language and cultural barriers. Table 3 summarizes the language and cultural barriers that can affect the parental involvement of Korean American parents in the American special education system. The table indicates that the extent of English proficiency is a significant determinant to successful collaboration between parents and professionals. To educate all teachers to learn Korean is certainly not realistic; however, finding ways to ensure communication with parents is not optional.

It is recommended that school personnel prepare for longer meeting times with parents who are using an inter-
teachers inform parents about important matters, teachers should use the parents' own language whenever possible (Al Hassan, 2002).

Parity with service providers

Because Korean-American parents tend to defer to educational professionals as part of their Confucianist culture, teachers need to recognize this trend as a potential barrier to true parity. Making overtures to elicit parental opinion through the use of surveys, interviews, informal discussions, and the like will help to ensure that parents have a voice in the education of their children, without putting them in a philosophically precarious position of having to question educators. Meetings, both formal and informal, should begin by the educator reinforcing the importance of having parental input and the expertise the parent brings to each meeting.

Financial factors

In order to comply with the federal mandate that all children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), a school district must provide special education and related services at no cost to the child or his/her parents (P.L. 102-119). Many Korean-American parents feel embarrassed or guilty about asking for something from their children's school or state, because in Korea they had to pay for everything related to their children's special education. Educators should work with parents to provide their children with the services they need and to mollify their concern or feelings of guilt about helping their children.

Conclusion

In the current educational climate, many parents and teachers try to collaborate in order to offer better education for students with disabilities, but sometimes they find themselves in two separate worlds. Parents of Korean descent often have a hard time collaborating with teachers whose culture, language and life style are different from their own. Successful collaboration is based on an equal partnership between teachers and parents, but in order to be an equal partnership, parents need to be empowered. By recognizing the potential barriers to parent-teacher collaboration and applying these suggestions for overcoming those obstacles, Korean-American parents can participate more effectively in their children's education and faculty can derive the benefit from working in collaboration with, rather than at odds with, parents. Teachers cannot fully achieve their teaching goals and meet students' learning needs without such parental help. Together, through more effective parent-teacher collaboration, all individuals will benefit.

References


