PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ISRAELI STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to achieve an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Israeli parents of students with severe disabilities about their involvement in the Individual Education Program (IEP) process. Data collection in this study involved interviewing 20 parents whose children study in special education schools in the Tel Aviv area in Israel. Through analysis of parents' responses, two main themes related to the involvement of parents in the IEP process become apparent: A child-centered focus and parents' self-efficacy. Positive parent-teacher collaboration enhanced the sense of parents' efficacy with respect to the IEP process and resulted in plans that were individualized to students' needs. The main conclusion of the research is parental involvement and the collaboration of parents with teachers is a process that teachers and parents must nourish daily. Parental involvement and effective parent-teacher collaboration in the IEPs of students with severe disabilities is founded on relationships of trust and positive communication between families and schools.

The Individual Educational Program (IEP) is a blueprint for special education and related special education services in both the United States and Israel (Martin et al., 2006; Tal, 2009; Yell, Katsiyannis, Ennis & Losinki, 2013). International research about the education of students with disabilities has emphasized the importance of involving parents in planning and implementing an IEP tailored to students' strengths and needs (Angel, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009; Hobbs & Silla, 2008; Hui-Chen & Mason, 2008). Previous research findings have confirmed that the academic results and the social well-being of students with disabilities improved when parents were involved in the IEP process (Englund, 2009; Thompson, Meadan, Fansler, Alber, & Balogh, 2007; Whitbread, Bruder, Fleming, & Park, 2007).

However, the participation and involvement of parents in the IEP process continues to challenge schools. The problem is that insufficient involvement of parents may result in programs being less responsive to the unique needs of students with disabilities (Feldman, 2009; Kroth & Edge, 2007; Landmark Zhang, & Montoya, 2007; McMillan, 2008; Omoteso, 2010; Ray, Pewitt-Kinder, & George, 2009). The specific problem in Israel is that poor involvement of parents in the IEP process (Dorner's Committee, 2009; Tal, 2007) may inhibit the development of effective IEPs for students with severe disabilities and the inclusion of these students in the community.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to achieve an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Israeli parents of students with severe disabilities about their involvement in IEPs. This study may add to the body of knowledge about parental involvement and parent-teacher collaboration in the IEP process. Additionally, the themes revealed in parents' interviews may suggest recommendations on how to enhance involvement and participation of parents in the IEPs of students with severe disabilities.

Background: Demographics and Special Education Policy

Israel is a small country with an area of 20,770 square kilometers. In 2012 approximately eight million permanent residents lived in Israel; these residents comprised two ethnic groups: Jews (76%) and non-Jews (24%) (Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012). Although about 1.8 million people are defined as non-Jews, referred to collectively as Arab citizens of Israel, Arab citizens include a number of different, primarily Arabic-speaking groups, each with distinct characteristics. The Israeli formal education system

includes both Hebrew-language and Arabic-language educational institutions. The structure and curricula of Arab-language institutions parallel those of the Hebrew-language sector, with appropriate adjustments to fit the different languages, cultures, and religions. The state education system for the Hebrew-speaking sector consists of two educational streams: State education and state-religious. By law, education is compulsory for all children and youth who reside in Israel, from pre-primary school age until the 10th grade (Israel Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Special Education Law (SEL) in Israel was passed in 1988 and emphasized the state's responsibility for providing special education, free tuition to children with special needs from all groups. According to the Israeli Ministry of Education, the number of students in special education has grown faster than the total number of students. The percentage of students in special education out of the total number of students rose from 2.2% in the 1999/2000 to 3.3% in the 2009/2010 academic year. In 2009, of 60,558 students between the ages of 3 and 21 years with special needs in Israel, 32,407 were diagnosed as students with severe disabilities that seriously restricted more than one functional capacity in daily life (Israeli Special Education Department, 2010, para. 3). The students studied in special classes in regular schools or in special education schools and were eligible for an IEP as part of their placement in a special educational setting.

In 1988, the SEL marked a conceptual and instrumental change in the provision of special education services to children and adolescents with special needs. Consisting of five subsections, namely, Definitions of Terms, Free Special Education, Diagnosis and Placement, Education in a Special Education Institution, and Miscellaneous, the SEL was an attempt to create procedural certainty and codify guidelines for placement. The vagueness of the SEL, however, had not created formal guidelines about how to develop and implement IEPs.

In 1998, the Israeli Special Education Department (ISED) launched formal guidelines for development and implementation of IEPs. These guidelines describe a process in which teachers were encouraged to involve parents and specifically ask for parents' signatures on the IEP form before implementation of the program (ISED, 2007). Although the guidelines of the ISED aim to support parents' participation, the IEP process was not integrated under the SEL (ISED, 1998). Parents' participation in the process cannot be enforced and parents' involvement varies in different school settings (Tal, 2009).

Parental Involvement in the IEP Process

Parental involvement and the collaboration of parents and teachers in IEPs present barriers to creating a common perspective for a child's educational goals (Kroth & Edge, 2007; Landmark et al., 2007; Rudiger, 2007). Barriers include minimal communication of parents with school staff, insufficient knowledge of parents about special education practices, and passive participation of parents in IEP meetings (Fish, 2008; Gershwin- Meuller et al., 2008; Sanders, 2008; Whitby, Marx, McIntire & Wienke, 2013). The obstacles affect the ability of parents to influence decisions regarding the IEP process and collaborate with staff in implementation of programs in class.

Parental involvement is even more important in the case of students with severe disabilities. The severity of the child's disability may affect the child's capacity to communicate and require parents to become more involved in the educational program of their child (Bachner, Carmel, Lubetzky, Heiman, & Galil, 2006). Because students with severe disabilities often fail to express themselves verbally, it is critical that primary caregivers and teachers keep an open channel of communication to promote students' best interests at home and in school. Involved parents who collaborate with teachers may achieve sound educational programs to support the unique needs of their children (Blackstone, Williams, & Wilkins, 2007). Several factors, such as a family's cultural background, the child's age, the amount of parental knowledge about special education laws and procedures, and the type and level of disability have been shown to affect parents' perceptions (Coots, 2007; Reinschmiedt, Sprong, Dallas, Buono & Upton, 2013; Simon, 2006).

Cultural Background and Parents' Perceptions

Cultural differences may impose communication barriers and impede the positive involvement of parents collaborating with professionals in IEPs (Barrera & Liu, 2006; Beth, 2008; Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007). Studies have revealed that parents who are familiar with special education procedures and who understand the formal requirements of parental involvement in IEPs experience less frustration and become more involved in the process (Hobbs & Silla, 2008; Kent, 2013; Lo, 2008; Prezant & Marshak, 2006; Trussell, Hammond, & Inglass, 2008). Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) found Hispanic

parents in the United States did not participate in school activities and did not attend IEP meetings because of their cultural backgrounds and poor English language skills. Landmark et al. (2007) revealed lack of knowledge, unstable employment, and emotional difficulties hindered the ability of parents of students with disabilities from different cultural background to take an active role in the IEP process.

Child's Age and Parents' Perceptions

Parents of students with disabilities face different challenges through the lifespan of their children, and this may influence participation in schools (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Research revealed that parents of young students were less experienced but showed higher levels of motivation to participate in the educational process (Simon, 2006). Parents of older students who faced different challenges in the transition from the primary to the secondary level and from high school into the community were more critical (Antle, Montgomery & Stapleford, 2009). Sparks (2007) explored the extent to which parents of high school students with disabilities believed IEPs were meeting the needs of their children. Parents who expressed clear dissatisfaction were those who explored alternatives in other schools.

Parents' Knowledge and Perceptions of Special Education

In several studies, parents shared the relationship between feelings of empowerment and knowledge about procedures and special education practices (Beth, 2008; Ingber & Dromi, 2010; Jivanjee, Kruzich, Friesen, & Robinson, 2007). For example, parents who gave themselves high rates of participation in the IEP process also rated themselves as more empowered in the areas of family, the child services system, and special education laws (Jivanjee et al., 2007). Rouleau (2007) revealed that participating in workshops increased parents' knowledge of their legal rights and knowledge of the six main areas of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Rouleau suggested parents of students with disabilities participate in training sessions to increase their understanding and self-confidence about participating in the IEP process.

Type and Level of Child's Disability and Parents' Perceptions

A child's disability may influence parents' participation in IEPs. Research demonstrated the need for a family centered-approach in setting educational goals for students with severe disabilities. Parents living in Western Canada shared that discussing family values, individual circumstances, and the desire of parents for the child's participation openly with the staff supported an effective goal setting process and their personal involvement in IEPs (Wiart, Ray, Darrah, and Magill-Evans, 2010). Bassin, Schatz, Posey, and Topor (2010) concluded that whereas parents of students with severe disabilities needed extensive support from staff, they might also become resourceful partners. Moreover, Calculator and Black (2010) revealed that parents of students who could not speak or communicate without an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system believed it was their role to advocate for AAC practices at school. Parents of students who are mentally challenged or with motor disabilities believed IEPs should also include daily activities and particularly self-care goals. The parents wanted to share valuable information about children's performance at home and help teachers develop self-care goals in the IEP (Chiarello et al., 2010).

The present study is the first one in Israel to explore parental involvement in the IEP process and may be significant to students, parents, and teachers of students with disabilities. First, exploring parental involvement in the IEP process may support educational practices for enhancing the academic and social performance of students with disabilities in schools. Second, discovering the perceptions and beliefs of parents associated with different cultural groups, such as Arabs or Jews and orthodox or secular Jewish parents (Gumpel & Sharoni, 2007), may provide improved practices for students with disabilities in Israeli special education schools. Last, identification of parents' central concerns may assist teachers with implementing educational programs aligned with the goals and cultural background of the family (Santamaria, 2009).

Method

This article is part of a larger qualitative phenomenological research based on answering three research questions:

RQ1: What are the factors influencing parents of students with severe disabilities (defined as students with a disability that seriously restricts more than one functional daily life capacity) to become involved in IEPs at special education schools in Israel?

RQ2: What are the factors affecting parent-teacher collaboration in IEPs?

RQ3: How can the collaboration between parents and teachers improve in the IEP process?

The phenomenological design is the best choice to provide a comprehensive description of phenomena shared by a group (Moustakas, 1994), the phenomenon in this case being parental involvement in the IEP process for Israeli students with disabilities.

Participants

The sample consisted of 20 parents, 19 mothers and one father, whose children aged 3 to 21 years were diagnosed with severe disabilities and eligible to register for an IEP in the 2010-2011 academic year. Two parents were Arabs, three were orthodox Jews and 15 were secular Jewish parents. The parents were members of three different nonprofit organizations for families of children with severe disabilities in Israel. Representation of diverse perspectives was gained by including parents whose children attended various special education settings. Eight students attended schools for mentally challenged students and received vocational rehabilitation services such as occupational therapy and speech therapy. Twelve students attended special education schools for children with motor disabilities and were eligible for additional services such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, and AAC services. Of the 20 parents, six were teachers or professionals who worked with special needs children and their families. Table 1 is a summary of parents and children's characteristics.

Table1. Summary of Parents and Children's Characteristics

	Parent	Age of child	Type of child's disability
P1	Mother	10	Severe communication disorders
P2	Mother	14	Rett syndrome
P3	Mother	20	Mental retardation
P4	Mother	6	Severe language and learning disability
P5	Mother	5	Severe developmental disabilities
P6	Mother	6	Language and emotional disorders
P7	Mother	20	Severe language disabilities
P8	Mother	15	Cerebral palsy
P9	Mother	15	Cerebral palsy
P10	Mother	11	Motor disabilities
P11	Mother	12	Motor and cognitive disabilities
P12	Mother	20	Motor disabilities and ADHD
P13	Mother	12	Cerebral palsy, blindness, and deafness
P14	Mother	6	Severe language disabilities
P15	Mother	5(twins)	Cerebral palsy and developmental delay
P16	Mother	4	Cerebral palsy
P17	Mother	12	Motor and communication disabilities
P18	Mother	14	Cognitive and language disorders
P19	Father	15	Cerebral palsy
P20	Mother	10	Cerebral palsy

Instrument and Data Collection

Personal, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with parents were the primary instrument because interviews *allow us to enter into the other person's perspective* (Patton, 2002, p. 341) and gain explicit and valuable information. An informed consent document guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality (Patton, 2002) and encouraged parents to respond with openness in this study. Interviews took place in parents' homes or a private location chosen by the parent to facilitate the collection of data about practical issues related to parents' participation in the study and to enhance parents' comfort while sharing their personal experiences of involvement in the IEP process. The interview included descriptive questions that explored personal dimensions, incidents, and people related to the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Orr, 2008).

The first interview question aimed at identifying the factors perceived by parents as barriers to their involvement in the IEP, for example, *Describe what parental involvement in the IEP process means to you or describe why you become involved in the IEP process*. The aim of the second question was to identify factors affecting collaboration between parents and teachers in the IEP process, for example, *Describe what parent-teacher collaboration means to you or what supports or inhibits your*

collaboration with teachers in the IEP process. The aim of the third question was to understand how to improve parent-teacher collaboration in the IEP process, for example, *What would support or inhibit productive parent-teacher collaboration in IEPs?* or *Please share a personal experience when you tried to improve collaboration with teacher*s.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started with a transcription of each taped interview that was then translated into English. The phenomenological analysis of the interview transcripts followed the Moustakas-modified Van Kaam technique (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002) that in the final stage concludes with *a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience* (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181). Analysis of data started with a phenomenological theoretical perspective called *epoch*, which involves re-framing from common understanding, judging, and suspending previous knowing so that the phenomena is revisited with an open mind (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). In this study, suspension of judgment and subjectivity to construct the *epoch* was gained by engaging in a consecutive reflexive process.

Journal notes included entries of phone conversations when scheduling the interviews and narrative descriptions of personal expectations and beliefs before meeting with each parent. The physical setting, parents' body language, and parents' motivations to expand beyond the interview questions were documented to allow for future reflection. Labeling prejudgments and writing them down helped to develop an *internal readiness to enter freshly, encounter the situation, issue, or person directly, and receive whatever is offered* (Moustakas, 1994, p.89).

The following stage was a phenomenological reduction in which two questions guided the bracketing and elimination of data. First, do the phrases contain a clear understanding of the experience? Second, is it possible to abstract and designate the description (Moustakas, 1994)? Treating the statements equally and grouping the data into meaning units called themes contained the essence of the experience for every participant in the study (Patton, 2002). The next stage was to interpret the data and develop a textual description of the essence of the experience for each parent. The final themes described the essence of the phenomena for parents participating in this study.

Findings

Analysis of parents' interview data revealed five major themes: child-centered focus, parent self-efficacy, parent-teacher communication, parent-teacher collaboration, and trust. In this article, only the two themes, which relate to parental involvement, namely, child-centered focus and parent self-efficacy, are discussed. The other themes, which relate specifically to parent-teacher communication, collaboration and trust are beyond the scope of this paper and will be presented in a separate article.

Child-Centered Focus

The concept of a child-centered focus refers to parents' perceptions of what they believe is the best IEP process to meet their children's needs. Of the 20 parents, 19 referred to the IEP as a child-centered focus process. Examination of the child-centered focus theme led to identification of three sub-themes. The sub-themes were parent advocacy, implementing families' perspectives in the IEP process, and understanding the child's abilities.

The 19 parents who spoke of child-centered matters contended parent advocacy influenced the program to be more personalized. Parents' emphasis was on teachers' needs to understand the family's wishes before developing a child-centered program. For example, Participant (P) 13 stated the following:

It is discouraging to come to a meeting and find that the staff concluded what is best for my child without discussing it with us. We received a form that did not represent in any way our desire for implementation of assistive technology. More than half of the parents stated the foundation for a child-centered program is that teachers and parents have a shared understanding of the child abilities. P3 shared the family's involvement in defining the child's activity of how daily living objectives led to better understanding of the child's abilities and helped with designing a program of self-care at home and in school.

Advocacy included parents pleading on behalf of their children for personalized instruction and development of responsive IEPs. The second sub-theme, family perspectives, revealed that parents desired their thoughts and wishes be taken into account while planning and implementing the IEP. The third sub-theme, understanding the child's abilities, revealed that parents wanted to share with teachers the child's abilities at home and learn from teachers about the children's abilities at school.

Advocacy

All the 19 parents believed they were the best advocates to represent their children's interests. Parents were concerned that the children's point of view would not be heard if the parents were not involved in the IEP process. Eighteen parents wanted to advocate a child-centered vision and desired to share information with teachers. Fifteen parents advocated for additional meetings with teachers, and 14 parents wanted the IEP to include age-appropriate instruction. Thirteen parents of students with severe disabilities requested the implementation of accommodations and innovative practices in the IEP. Parents believed, as the primary caregivers, that they were entitled to advocate for their children's needs in school. For example, P12 said that parenting a child with disabilities was a life project and shared the belief that parental involvement gave children a chance to grow and progress.

Parents were engaged emotionally and most of them believed the purpose of parental participation in IEP meetings was to tell their children's stories. P1 shared, *I want teachers to see my child as a whole person and not as the fill-ins on the IEP form* P17 said, *We tell teachers in the IEP meeting everything. We must be there to share the child's dreams. Those dreams won't exist without us saying it out loud*.

Parents believed they were the best representatives of their children during transitions. The majority of parents advocated for additional meetings with teachers and believed discussing students' progress on a regular basis facilitated coordination between school programs and other programs the children attended. Parents emphasized the importance of sharing child-development information and wanted IEPs to include age-appropriate instruction and implementation of specific accommodations

Family Perspectives

Of 19 parents, 14 indicated a need to embrace a family-centered perspective in the IEP. Aligning the IEP to families' beliefs and preferences and to families' wishes for students' autonomy was a major concern of the parents interviewed. P15 had 5 year old twins with severe disabilities who had been placed in a special education preschool program; she expected the IEPs to emphasize the development of free play and wanted teachers to include a goal that addressed the children's play skills. The parent stated that teaching free play strategies was as important as teaching literacy skills. Other parents stated that the priorities of each family for their children's IEPs should be recognized. P12 summarized, *I do not want teachers to patronize and advise me as though they know what is better for us*.

Understanding the Child's Abilities

Understanding the child's abilities refers to parents' belief that teachers and parents should have a shared understanding of the student's strengths and positive attributes. Ten out of 19 parents said that teachers who understood their children's abilities and identify what motivates their children to learn could create a successful child-centered program. P14 elaborated, *Only the continuous discussions about my child's performance helped teachers understand the communicative needs of my child and resulted in an effective language intervention.*

P4 shared that observing the children in various school activities and understanding their language deficiencies helped to reinforce new concepts the children had learned in various home settings. P7 expressed enthusiasm about teachers' guidance on how to teach an adult student to perform appropriate grooming and hygiene at home. The parent explained that observing the interaction of the student with the homeroom teacher in class helped the family to be less protective and do the same at home. Rather than matching students' disabilities to services that already exist, parents wanted services to be developed based on the students' priorities and strengths. P15 stated as follows: Professionals need to focus on the student's agenda and competence. A comprehensive vision about what is best for the child is not what he can or cannot do, but rather identifying the child's strengths. The key for success is acknowledging that the child's development does not have to go by the book.

Parent Self-Efficacy

The concept of parent self-efficacy refers to parents' beliefs about their ability and capacity to influence the IEP process for their child's benefit. Of the 20 parents, 18 discussed their sense of efficacy in the IEP process. Parents' self-efficacy included two specific sub-themes: capacity to influence and involvement. A connection between the sub-themes was evident; most parents who believed they could effectively influence the outcomes of the IEP also reported high levels of involvement.

Capacity to Influence

Parents said teachers' approval in the IEP process augmented the sense of parent self-efficacy and the level of parental participation. P12 reported that she had shared strategies that the family used at home to cope with the maladaptive behaviors of the child with the staff while writing the IEP. The parent believed that when teachers implemented the same strategies in class successfully, it reinforced a strong sense of parental efficacy in the following IEP meetings. P12 said, *I remember the moment I felt that teachers appreciated our effort to help…This was so rewarding! That's the moment I knew that the goals prescribed in the IEP would be implemented in class.*

The ability to decide on their children's best interests increased as parents obtained relevant information. Of the 18 parents, 17 said that parents who had knowledge about other schooling opportunities and interventions had a stronger sense of efficacy in the meetings. P4 shared that knowing about different educational choices the child could attend in the future enabled parents to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Familiarity with the characteristics of their children's diagnoses helped parents discuss opportunities for better practices in school.

Of the 18 parents, nine reported that the Internet provided information about innovative practices that expanded their knowledge and enabled them to strive for a better IEP. P1 stated that attending a forum of parents whose children used talking computers encouraged the family to aspire to higher communicative goals in the child's IEP. P2 claimed that reading about the IEP in other countries provided useful information about the ability of parents to influence the process.

Of 18 parents, nine disclosed that successful collaboration experiences with teachers in the past influenced their present belief that parents' ideas would be considered in the IEP meetings. P13 shared that in the previous school, the principal referred to parents' suggestions with genuine interest. The parent said, *It [the positive experience] was an empowering moment that filled parents with a strong sense of efficacy. I can still remember those experiences when I get discouraged…I know we can do better*.

In summary, the issues parents discussed as affecting their sense of efficacy positively were receiving approval from teachers, possessing knowledge and relevant information, and having had past positive experiences. Parents reported that a stronger sense of self-efficacy allowed them to contribute effectively to the outcomes of the IEPs. Parents with a weaker sense of self-efficacy admitted they asked few questions in the meetings and did not believe that they could influence the program.

Involvement

Of the 18 parents, 17 discussed involvement in schools. Proactive parents with a strong sense of efficacy believed their involvement affected the individual educational goals and resources their children received in class. Parents with a weaker sense of efficacy said that they were passive in the IEP meetings and did not believe in parents' ability to create change. P11 shared: Teachers have low aspirations for my child, and the IEP was the same as the program of last year. I just attended the formal meetings. I don't believe that I can affect my child's program at all…I participated in the meeting, but I am not sure it changes anything. Many parents stated they felt they had to be involved to assist in their children's progress. Of the 17 parents, 10 said that they were involved because they believed only parental involvement encouraged teachers to implement accommodations and effective instruction in class. Of the 17 parents, nine said that they were involved because they wanted their children to reach the academic and social standards of their age groups. Students with promising academic abilities inspired parents to become involved and strive for higher academic goals through the IEP. P14 shared, *The child is the apple of my eye* and wanted teachers to aspire to higher standards for the child.

The level of nature of parental involvement differed according to the type of disability and specific needs of children. Parents of students with motor disabilities who required intensive rehabilitation in daily life activities aimed to be involved in every detail of the program. Parents of students who cannot talk were involved because they believed only intensive involvement and collaboration with teachers could guarantee that their children would use a talking computer or an AAC system in class. P1 wanted to meet every month with teachers and therapists and discuss new symbols to implement in the child's talking-computer. In summary, the sub-theme of parental involvement reflected parents' desires for their children to realize their potential in school and for teachers to initiate responsive IEPs in terms of their potential.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce previous research that embracing a family-centered vision in special education programs supports the involvement of parents (Fish, 2008; Ingber & Dromi, 2010). There were not marked differences in the perceptions and beliefs of parents associated with different cultural groups. Exploration of the data revealed that a child-centered focus within the IEP process and strong parental sense of self-efficacy were essential components of parental involvement in the IEP process. Two key motives for parental involvement in IEPs were evident. First, parents wanted children to realize their potentials in school and believed parental involvement in IEPs would help the children's education. Second, parents observed that teachers do not always consider their children's potentials and do not initiate responsive IEPs. The findings of the present study are similar to those of Prezant and Marshak (2006), Rouleau (2007), and Gershwin-Meuller et al. (2008).

The findings also provided support for Rouleau (2007) and Gershwin-Meuller et al.'s (2008) studies that proactive parents with a strong sense of efficacy were familiar with the laws and the services available in special education schools. Knowledgeable parents in this study valued the power of parents' awareness and commonly requested the advice of external specialists or searched for information on the Web. Another issue related to the theme of parents' sense of self-efficacy was the use of the Internet.

Recommendations

Four recommendations may be made based on the analysis of data. The first recommendation is for the school system to provide families with training programs to improve parents' understanding of special education issues and encourage parental involvement in IEPs. The second recommendation is for the school system to construct a section with information for the families on the school website. A section with credible and valid special education links could give the parents a sense of support from the school and enable them to become knowledgeable participants in the IEP process. The third recommendation is that school leaders develop additional modes of communication to increase the opportunities for parents and teachers to share knowledge about students. Alternative modes might include individual forums, online student records, and monthly records of students' extracurricular activities. The fourth recommendation for special education schools is to adapt teachers' schedules to encourage a family-centered vision within the IEP process. Allowing teachers more time in their weekly schedules to meet with parents and observe students in various contexts might increase the responsiveness of IEPs to students' needs.

The study's limitations are that the sample may not necessarily represent the diverse attributes associated with parental involvement for Israeli students in special education schools. Parents whose children attend special education schools in the central area may not reflect the multitude of cultural and social identity structures of students with severe disabilities in Israel.

Conclusion

The main conclusion of the research is parental involvement in the IEP and collaboration of parents with teachers is a process that teachers and parents must nourish daily. Relationships of trust and positive communication between families and schools support parental involvement and development of child-centered programs. Teachers need to be aware of family-centered perspectives and have a shared understanding with parents about the student's needs and strengths. Positive parent-teacher collaboration enhances a sense of efficacy among parents with respect to the IEP process and results in a plan that is individualized to student needs. Supporting teachers' abilities to develop responsive programs requires parents to provide relevant information about their children and school leaders to promote more opportunities in teachers' schedules to discuss children's needs with parents.

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