Creating Classroom Environments That Address the Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds of Students with Disabilities
An Asian Pacific American Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Significant changes in the public school population throughout the United States are influenced by the increasing numbers of immigrants who enter the country annually. It is estimated that in the next 50 years the U.S. population will become exceedingly more ethnically diverse than it is at present. Immigrants from Asian and Pacific Rim countries are emigrating to the United States more rapidly than any other group. We discuss the impact of increased numbers of Asian and Pacific Islander students in the context of special education. In particular, we focus on the changing demographics of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the overall U.S. population and on the importance of designing and delivering special education services that address their diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics, culturally and linguistically relevant instructional practices, and parental involvement.

The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse society, as evidenced by the large numbers of immigrants from non-English speaking countries. These changes in the U.S. population are evidenced by the different languages spoken at home, in the school, and in the community. Approximately 14% of the overall population speaks a language other than English ("Spanish surge," 1993). Collectively, Asian language speakers, such as the Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Laotians, Thais, and Vietnamese constitute about 14.1% of the population that speaks a foreign language ("Census: Languages," 1993). In 1999, approximately 2.3 million school-age children and youth spoke a language other than English at home; many spoke English with difficulty (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993). In addition to the recent immigrants who have little or no exposure to the English language, the variety of languages spoken in schools also includes native populations, such as Hawaiians, that are endemic to the United States.

The purpose of this article is to discuss Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in relationship to (a) the changing demographics within the United States, (b) the extent that their cultural diversity has on the design and delivery of special education services, (c) cultural and linguistic characteristics, (d) culturally and linguistically relevant instructional considerations, and (e) parental involvement. We recognize the heterogeneity of students in the public schools. However, we concentrate our discussion on Asian and Pacific Islander Americans because they are the fastest growing population group in the United States.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

In the 10 years between 1980 and 1990, the population in the United States has increased dramatically. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census (1991), the percentage growth of Asian Pacific Islanders (108%)
exceeded the total growth of both African Americans (13%) and Hispanics (53%). Many Southeast Asians emigrated to the United States as refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the subsequent Communist invasions that precipitated mass emigrations of boat people who escaped persecution in the “killing fields” of Cambodia. In 1982, changes in refugee policies permitted the Vietnamese to enter as immigrants for family reunification purposes—especially Amerasian youth with implied U.S. citizenship (Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993).

Immigrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands have settled in major urban areas across the country, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, New York City, Washington, DC, Portland, and Chicago (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991). The city of Honolulu and the state of Hawai‘i, however, are probably the most representative of geographic regions with increasing numbers of Asian Pacific Americans who live in the United States. Approximately 62% of Hawai‘i’s diverse population originated from East or Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds. Of this number, 85% speak a language other than English at home, including Bisayan, Chinese, Hawaiian, Ilocano, Japanese, Tagalog, Samoan, Tongan, and Vietnamese. Many people have difficulty with or do not speak any English (State of Hawai‘i, 1995). These demographics are reflected in the public school population, where students represent a composite of peoples who differ regarding their longevity in the state, their individual and ethnic identities, and their family constellations. In addition to the indigenous Hawaiians, the families of many students have lived in Hawai‘i for several generations, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans. For example, the Chinese American community in Hawai‘i recently celebrated 200 years of habitation on the island of Oahu. Japanese Americans, on the other hand, constitute a unique population comprised of five generations, including first generation immigrants from Japan (Issei), as well as locally born second (Nissei), third (Sansei), fourth (Yonsei), and fifth (Gosei) generations. Other students’ families are more recent immigrants and refugees from the Pacific Islands or Southeast Asia who may have fled economic and political tyranny. Approximately 87% of the immigrants who entered Hawai‘i in 1994 came from Asian and Pacific Islander countries (State of Hawai‘i, 1995).

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (1992) considers Asians and Pacific Islanders as a single group of minority students. We believe that the diversity among the various populations in this category is particularly great and warrants their separation into at least two groups—Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Even so, we must recognize the heterogeneity within the categories. For example, the major groups of Asian Americans are from (a) East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines; (b) Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam; and (c) South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Pacific Islanders, on the other hand, are people from the islands of Fiji, Guam, Hawai‘i, Samoa, Tahiti, and Tonga, among others (Trueba et al., 1993). We present sample linguistic and cultural practices of these various populations later in the discussion.

DIVERSITY AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Special Education Representation

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (1992) estimates that students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds constitute approximately 32% of the general school population. Unfortunately, disproportionately many students from these underrepresented populations are identified as having disabilities and participate in special education classes (Adger, Wolfram, Detwyler, & Harry, 1993; Arilles & Trent, 1994; Chin & Hughes, 1987; Fleissner & Van Acker, 1990; Grossman, 1995; Harry, 1992, Ramirez, 1990; Voltz, 1994). They are most often misrepresented in special education programs, especially where evaluation is subject to potential cultural and assessment bias.

Unlike other ethnically diverse groups, Asian American students tend to be underrepresented in the areas of learning disabilities and emotional and behavior disorders, whereas they are overrepresented in programs for students with speech disorders. Grossman (1995, 1997) cites three potential reasons for this phenomenon of underrepresentation. First, teachers mistakenly believe that all Asian Americans are good students and high achievers who adjust readily to schools and society. Second, Asian American students tend to internalize their emotional distress and are less disruptive in class. Third, teachers may fail to recognize Asian American students' unobtrusive behavior as indicative of any underlying emotional problems. Teachers, therefore, neglect to refer those students with potential learning disabilities or emotional and behavior disorders for special education services. Unfortunately, because Asian American students are often considered to be the “model minority,” many students appear to be falling through the cracks, as indicated by their underrepresentation in programs for students with learning disabilities and emotional and behavior disorders (U.S. Department of Education, 1992). We must remember that not all students from Asian American backgrounds succeed in school. Teachers, therefore, must look beyond stereotypes and design programs that address students’ individual academic and behavior needs (Trueba et al., 1993).

Federal data regarding the representation of Pacific Islander students who receive special education services are unavailable. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights’ classification of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in one federal category for reporting purposes complicates the issue. Data are available, however, for the State of Hawai‘i, which delineates reporting categories more specifically than the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 1994). These data indicate that some Pacific Islander students in public school settings (e.g., Hawaiians/part-Hawaiians, Samoans) may be
overidentified in one or more disability areas in comparison to their proportional representation in the overall school population, which consists of approximately 24% Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian and 3% Samoan students. For example, Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian students represent about 34% of all students identified with mild mental retardation, 37% of those with learning disabilities, and 31% of those with emotional and behavior disorders. Samoan students represent approximately 8% of all students with mild mental retardation (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 1994). Chinn and Hughes (1987) suggest a ± 10% rule-of-thumb estimate for disproportionate representation; the percentage of students with disabilities who fall outside this range is considered disproportionate. As Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian students represent 24% of the overall school population, we would expect that their unbiased representation in special education programs would range approximately from 22% to 26%.

Research reports also indicate that Hawaiian children and youth are at risk for negative academic outcomes. Their representation is highly disproportionate for many social and physical statistics indicative of special educational needs, including (a) retention in grade level, (b) inordinate absences in secondary school, (c) abuse of drugs and alcohol, and (d) excessive incidences of child abuse and neglect (Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate, 1993). For example, 1 in 8 Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian students is retained in grade level, and these students exhibit 20 more unexcused absences in 1 semester than other student groups. Approximately 58% of Hawaiian students choose to drop out of secondary school once they reach 18 years of age (Barringer & Liu, 1994; Takenaka, 1995). Takenaka also reports that Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian youth accounted for 46% of all drug-related juvenile arrests in 1992. Finally, about 15% of all reported cases of child abuse and neglect were among Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian children and youth from birth through age 17 (Hawai‘i Kids Count, 1996).

**Variables that Contribute to School Failure**

The disproportionate representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander students in special education is particularly apparent in states like California, Hawai‘i, and New York. We can expect an increase in the misrepresentation of Asian and Pacific Islander students in special education in other geographic regions concomitant with ongoing demographic changes. A number of school-related variables contribute to the increase in Asian and Pacific Islander students who are at risk for the identification of a disability or for educational failure. These variables are similar to those that affect students of other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, teachers’ attitudes and reactions to speakers of nonstandard English and the lack of appropriate assessment instruments are often cited as reasons for these students’ lower academic achievement and referral to special education and related services (Adger, Wolfram, & Detwyler, 1993; Grossman, 1995, 1997). Moreover, students from diverse backgrounds may not present a “goodness of fit” with the standardized delivery system and instructional practices in classrooms based on Euro-American culture (Carey, Boccardi, & Fontes, 1994; Garcia & Malkin, 1993; Grossman, 1995, 1997). Other factors include inadequate teacher skills to accommodate characteristics that can be traced to students’ cultural environments (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Burstein, Cabello, & Hamann, 1993; Welch, 1996) and a lack of proportionate ethnic representation between teachers and students (Cook & Boc, 1995).

Linguistic and cultural diversity present special challenges to professionals as they attempt to create educational environments that address the needs of students with disabilities. In the next section, we discuss how some of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of students from Asian American and Pacific Islander backgrounds affect their schooling experiences.

**Characteristics of Asian American and Pacific Islander Students**

Training special educators to teach in schools today necessitates that they develop a strong sense of the multicultural world in which they and their students reside. This involves developing (a) a sensitivity to their own personal cultures and inherent values regarding diverse populations; (b) an awareness of the linguistic, cultural, and familial backgrounds of the children and youth in their classes; (c) a responsibility to students’ needs regarding communication, curricular, and pedagogical perspectives; and (d) an understanding of family members’ socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural background as a foundation for realistic parental involvement (Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, 1994; Hurry, 1992; Pruter, Sileo, & Sileo, 1997; Sileo, Sileo, & Pruter, 1996; Trueba et al., 1993; Voltz, 1994, 1999).

Educators must increase their multicultural competencies and become culturally literate about the students in their classes. For example, while discussing teachers’ responsibility to facilitate the learning of Hawaiian children and youth, Hewett (1996) stated that teachers must learn about “the correct history of the Hawaiian people, their beginning, their philosophy, their way of thinking, their character, and their lifestyle” (p. 40). Furthermore, teachers “need to address the issues of cultural identity and sovereignty that concern the native Hawaiians today” (p. 40).

An important consideration in developing an awareness of students is teachers’ cognizance of diversity within cultural groups. Quite often, teachers assume that cultural groups are homogeneous and, therefore, they have a tendency to lump together various populations without considering the diversities within various groups. Although some commonalities exist, Asian American and Pacific Islander populations are very diverse: They speak different languages, practice different religions, and view life differently (Cheng, Ima, & Labovitz, 1994).
There are similarities and distinctions among various populations regardless of race—the populations are neither homogeneous nor heterogeneous in nature. It is important, therefore, to avoid making cultural assumptions, because differences exist in the values and beliefs of people from the same backgrounds. The cultural diversity and uniqueness of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are linked to their different origins, ecological adaptations, and histories. For example, the Chinese perspective has influenced the traditions of the Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese as well as some Southeast Asians (e.g., Chinese-Vietnamese, Hmong, and Vietnamese). Other Southeast Asians, such as the Burmese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Thais, however, are influenced primarily by Indian values and beliefs. The Philippine culture, on the other hand, is patterned after indigenous Malay groups, the Chinese, and Spanish (Trueba et al., 1993).

Pacific Islanders also represent a vast range of cultures. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest body of water; it occupies one third of the Earth's surface and contains about 25,000 islands. The islands are typically grouped into three areas: Polynesia (e.g., Hawaii, American Samoa, Western Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Easter Island), Melanesia (e.g., Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji), and Micronesia (e.g., the Carolines, Palau, the Northern Marianas). The United States is politically connected to several Pacific island nations. American Samoa and Guam are U.S. territories, the Northern Marianas are a U.S. commonwealth, and other nations have free association with the United States (i.e., Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands). The term free association means that the United States defends the islands and provides some financial support as well as diplomatic ties with other countries (Dunford & Ridgell, 1996).

The vast differences among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders necessitate that teachers know about the diversity in students' cultural backgrounds, language and nonverbal communication skills, cognitive and behavioral styles, and socioeconomic levels (Garcia & Malkin, 1993; Grossman, 1995). This knowledge facilitates their understanding of students' inherent lifestyles and school performance. It is also the foundation for appropriate teacher-student interactions and instructional strategies that are congruent with students' learning patterns. An understanding of cultural and linguistic values helps teachers to "communicate more effectively with Asian and Pacific Island students, to recognize many of their difficulties, to avoid potential conflicts, and to establish an atmosphere that will facilitate learning" (Trueba et al., 1993, p. 144).

Language Characteristics

Language is the basis for identifying and understanding cultural nuances. Students' language characteristics affect their communications and interactions with teachers and other students; they are the foundation for students' academic success, self-worth, and adjustment to new sociocultural environments.

Teachers, therefore, must develop sensitivity to and positive regard for the dynamics of linguistic diversity, including differences in standard and nonstandard language dialects (e.g., Ebonics, Hawai'i Creole English) as well as the pragmatics of language (e.g., when to speak, what to discuss, who speaks first, how to initiate and terminate a conversation). They need knowledge about the diverse language systems that operate in their classrooms, including the students' native languages as well as the students' literacy and basic skill levels in their native language, and potential problems with second-language acquisition. In essence, teachers must be concerned with whether the language difficulties evidenced by students are English language-based or whether they are pervasive language disorders that intersect students' native and second languages. Speech pathologists are professionals prepared to identify such language differences. Language characteristics of Asian and Pacific Americans that contribute to their overidentification for special education services include (a) phonological difficulties, (b) traditional reliance on oral communication, and (c) use of dialects.

Phonological Difficulties. The English language of many Asian American youngsters is influenced by languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Chamorro, and Hmong. In many instances, some of their English utterances are unintelligible and cause teachers to believe that the children cannot communicate (Trueba et al., 1993). For example, students from Asian or Pacific Islander backgrounds often incur phonological difficulties and say street, tree, and day when they mean street, tree, and they, respectively.

Reliance on Oral Communication. Several cultures in the various Asian and Pacific Islander populations rely traditionally on oral rather than written communication. In fact, in Hawai'i all communication was oral prior to the arrival of the Protestant missionaries in 1820 and the concomitant development of an alphabet system that allowed the Hawaiian language to be written. At one time, Hawaiians recited their history in oli, a poetic chant which represented all phases of their lives, including praise, satire, resentment, love, and genealogy.

Children from the Pacific Islands, Laotian rural groups, and Montagnards from Vietnam . . . come from countries with oral traditions and little or no exposure to written materials in their own language. Therefore, these children have problems differentiating the appropriate use of written language forms used in the classroom from the oral forms used in the playground. (Trueba et al., 1993, p. 63)

Use of Dialects. Limited English proficiency and minimal experience with the dominant educational system may complicate students' interactions with their teachers (Sileo et al., 1996). Quite often, the students' first language may be
viewed as subordinate to English, or they may speak a non-
standard form of English that may be undervalued by their
teachers. Teachers, however, must be very careful to avoid
denigrating students' language, because such deprecation
devalues their culture and fosters feelings of inadequacy
(Grossman, 1995, 1997). "There is no linguistic reason to
discard or devalue vernacular dialects, which are natural human
systems" (Adger, Wolfram, & Derwyler, 1993, p. 44).

A current nationwide debate concerns the use of Ebonics
in inner city public school classrooms. In Hawai'i, a similar
issue exists concerning the use of Hawai'i Creole English or
pidgin in the public schools (see Note). Many linguists clas-
Cify both Ebonics and Hawai'i Creole English as distinct
dialects or languages, each with its own syntax and grammar.
Pidgin English was developed by the speakers of various
ethnic groups—such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Portugu-
ese who emigrated to Hawai'i to work on sugar planta-
tions—as a means of communicating with others who spoke
different languages. Thus, there are many variations of pidgin
depending on the native language of the speakers (Bickerton,
1983; Sato, 1985). In Hawai'i, most children and their parents
speak a form of Hawai'i Creole English in which they may
mix vocabulary and grammatical structures from various
languages, depending on with whom they are speaking and the
topic of the conversation. Children enter school knowing and
speaking pidgin English. Although it is heard commonly in
homes and other social settings throughout Hawai'i, pidgin
may not be valued in classroom settings. A standard English
language system has been encouraged and required in Hawai'i's
public schools since the early 20th century. The use of Hawai'i
Creole English in the schools and community is the focus of
intense continued debate regarding its effect on students'
online academic performance.

If a student is referred for special education services or is
undergoing a reevaluation, the Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act (IDEA) requires that tests be administered
in the child's native language. Testing a limited—English-
speaking student in English is clearly unfair. However, it
might be less obvious that standard English testing is equally
unfair to speakers of various dialects such as Hawai'i Creole
English. Sociolinguists have observed that "dialect speakers
may appear linguistically retarded simply on the basis of
dialect differences" (Harry, 1992, p. 72).

Nonverbal Communication Styles

Teachers' knowledge of students' nonverbal communication
styles that are rooted in their cultural heritage is vital to the
instructional interactions that occur between teachers and stu-
dents and among the students themselves. For example, the
shaka or hang loose hand signal is a prominent form of
nonverbal communication among Hawai'i's local popula-
tions that may be used either as a greeting or as an indication
that things are okay. Pacific Islanders rely on uplifted nod of
their heads or raised eyebrows to acknowledge someone's
presence or to agree with a comment or an observation. These
nonverbal movements often replace any verbal statements.
Asian and Pacific American students, out of respect for and
deferece to adults, members of the opposite sex, or those
who are senior in status—including teachers—may lower
their eyes when interacting with them. Teachers must under-
stand that this lack of eye contact does not indicate students'
dishonisseur or mischievous or guilty behaviors.

A smile is a common form of nonverbal communication
in Southeast Asia. People smile when they are happy or sad,
when they are being reprimanded, and when they may not
understand a lesson or cannot answer a question. According
to Trueba et al. (1993),

American teachers are often shocked by the smile
of Southeast Asian students when the latter are
scolded. The smile... does not mean a challenge
or disrespectful behavior, but conveys the message
that they recognize their fault and... do not bear
any grudge against the teacher who has scolded
them. (p. 147)

Professionals should also consider cultural beliefs con-
cerning touching others. For example, in some Southeast
Asian and Pacific Islander cultures—such as Cambodian,
Laotian, and Hawaiian—touching a child's head may be con-
sidered threatening or offensive, because of spiritual beliefs
that the head is a sacred part of the body. Students' reactions
may range from vague discomfort to resentment, anger, and
feelings of physical violation. Other touching, however, is a
sign of friendship or affection among Pacific Islanders and
occurs with immediate and extended family members as well
as friends. It is incumbent on teachers, therefore, to become
knowledgeable about such nonverbal cultural behaviors and
to act accordingly.

Cognitive Styles

Teachers need to be aware of the differences in students'
cognitive styles and their impact on problem-solving skills.
Some Asian American students, such as those of Japanese
and Korean descent, are more concerned with task orienta-
tion, personal achievement, and independence from external
judgment. They may prefer formal relationships with teach-
ers, who are viewed as a source of knowledge, and work
autonomously for individual recognition. Pacific Islander stu-
dents, on the other hand, maintain a group focus that reflects
their cultural values and lifestyles in which education, histori-
cally, was conducted through an oral tradition where groups
of young people acquired survival skills and cultural history
from their elders.

Many groups in the Pacific Islands develop coop-
erative working strategies and depend on each
other for subsistence and emotional support... The Tongans, for example, have a tradition of
working in groups as they make a fabric of mul-

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Hawaiian students, among other Pacific Islander populations, are often concerned with the social environment, sharing personal information, and establishing and maintaining interpersonal harmony and relationships with others (naʻau), working together (kualima), listening (hoʻoloha), looking (ikepuna), and observing and mimicking (hoʻopili) their peers as a source of information. These cultural values are meshed with concerns related to being just and hopeful (pono), giving back to the community (hoʻihoʻi), and recognizing ancestral contributions (hoʻo omana‘o). Hewett (1996) stated that Hawaiians “are accustomed to doing tasks in a system that provides work as a shared function. They work to meet group needs, and value task performance as a contribution to the well-being of the group” (p. 39). These students may incur difficulty with the traditional American educational system, which often relies on lectures and individualized work assignments, and fosters competition among students. It may be appropriate, therefore, for teachers to use more cooperative learning experiences to ensure students' sense of well-being and self-confidence in educational settings.

**Behavioral Styles**

Professionals’ knowledge of students’ behavioral styles, such as reactions to personal praise and respect for nature, enables them to separate behaviors based on levels of acculturation from those manifested by emotional overlays. For example, students’ self-beating remarks, refusal to attempt new tasks, and giving up easily on assignments may reflect their cultural identity and upbringing.

Many Asian and Southeast Asian children and youth are modest and humble about their achievements and, therefore, may incur difficulty accepting praise, stating that they do not deserve the recognition. They often indicate that they actually know and may volunteer or demonstrate knowledge only upon request. They dismiss compliments by discussing their faults and do not anticipate acknowledgement for behaviors that are within a normal range of expectations. Hawaiian students are also often embarrassed by excessive public praise, which is thought of as a negative form of individual attention and may create problems among other students (Hewett, 1996).

Differences in cultural interaction styles can create misperceptions. Southeast Asians, for example, consider American straightforwardness to be impolite and rude.

Falsehood carries no moral structure for a Cambodian, Laotian, or Vietnamese. The essential question is not whether a statement is true or false, but what the intention of the statement is. Does it facilitate interpersonal harmony? Does it indicate a wish to change the subject? Hence, one must learn the “heart” of the speaker through his or her words. In Indochina, one thinks very carefully before speaking. The American style of “speaking one’s mind” is thus misunderstood. (Nguyen, as cited in Grossman, 1995, p. 360)

Other important considerations regarding diverse students that teachers should be knowledgeable about include the length of time the family has lived in the United States, the primary language spoken at home, parents' educational expectations and future goals for their children, the impact of low socioeconomic level on students' cognitive styles, previous learning or traumatizing experiences prior to emigration to the United States, and overall physical and mental health status. These variables are particularly critical when we consider the recent waves of immigrants entering the country—especially those from Southeast Asia who were victims of war crimes, and who may have experienced refugee camps and the disintegration of and separation from their families.

Language barriers can greatly affect students' behavior. A small misunderstanding between a student and a teacher can develop into a large behavioral or discipline problem. Moreover, language barriers can limit the student's social contacts with peers, thereby creating additional problems. Wei (cited in Grossman, 1995) describes an example:

A high school teacher was concerned when a Vietnamese boy changed from being friendly and cooperative to being antisocial. A talk with the boy revealed that he did not know enough English to communicate with his peers, and as a result, he was slowly withdrawing from them... His abrupt responses seemed rude to his classmates, further frustrating him, and in effect, discouraging other social interaction. (p. 145)

Educators must consider the role of culturally based behavioral styles when working with students with disabilities from Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds, especially while interpreting behavior and designing appropriate behavior management systems that are intended to foster achievement and behavioral change. Answering questions such as those included in Table 1 will guide teachers as they design and implement culturally sensitive behavior management programs.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

A discussion of culturally and linguistically relevant instructional practices would not be complete without considering the need for multicultural education in classroom settings. We discuss the purpose and content of multicultural education in the context of Asian and Pacific American cultures.
TABLE 1. Questions to Identify Cultural Practices that Influence Students’ Behaviors

**Family Dynamics**
1. What are the important family rules?
2. What are the primary disciplinary methods used at home and the students’ reactions to these methods?
3. Is the student praised, corrected, or criticized? How often and by whom?
4. What are the behavioral expectations for children toward elders and teachers?
5. What emotions are expressed openly? What emotions are never expressed?
6. What messages are communicated to children nonverbally?
7. Are shame and guilt used as disciplinary techniques?

**Misperceptions About Student Behavior**
8. What roles do silence, questions, and responses play in the student’s culture?
9. How do students’ quiet and obedient behaviors (e.g., lack of overt responding and calling attention to oneself) affect the teachers’ perceptions?
10. Do students’ inappropriate behaviors result from a lack of language proficiency and/or misunderstanding?
11. Does the teaching style (e.g., teacher-directed instruction) differ from the student’s accustomed learning style (e.g., peer-mediated instruction)?

**Student Characteristics**
12. Do students question or obey authority figures?
13. Do students assume a competitive or a cooperative posture in their learning and interactions with other students?
14. Do students put their needs and desires before those of the group or vice versa?
15. What are the students’ beliefs regarding sharing belongings with others? How do these beliefs affect rules, classroom organization, and expectations?
16. Do boys and girls demonstrate differential behavioral expectations in their interactions with each other or with adults? Do students’ perceptions about gender influence grouping patterns in the classroom or their interactions with and respect for authority figures?
17. Do students maintain personal space or distance differentially in their interactions with other students of the same gender, opposite gender, or with adults?

**Disciplinary Style**
18. What are acceptable and unacceptable ways to motivate or change students’ behaviors based on their perceptions of positive and negative consequences?
19. What are acceptable ways to provide feedback to students about their academic and social behaviors?
20. How do students’ perceptions about group rights influence their willingness to change behaviors to benefit their peers?

*Note. Sources: Alper et al. (1994); Grosman (1995); Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm (1977).*

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**Multicultural Education**

The overall purpose of multicultural education concerns promoting the value and strength of diversity, nurturing people’s pride in their cultural heritage, fostering human rights and alternative life choices, and developing positive understandings of and attitudes toward diverse cultures. Banks (1994, 1996) presents 5 practices that characterize effective multicultural education. These practices are:

1. Integrating examples and content from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to illustrate curricular concepts, principles, and theories;
2. Helping students to construct knowledge and understanding of the interactions and contributions of diverse populations to U.S. culture and civilization;
3. Reducing racism, sexism, and poverty and promoting positive regard toward diverse populations;
4. Assuring equity in pedagogy by using instructional strategies that are congruent with students’ cultures, behaviors, and cognitive styles; and
5. Empowering school cultures and social structures to ensure educational equity and advance social justice and equality.

Inasmuch as Asian and Pacific Islander Americans are the fastest growing populations in the United States, special educators—in fact, all teachers—need a clear understanding, not only about these cultures, but how to celebrate and share these cultures with their students. First, however, teachers must gain a clearer understanding of their own cultures.

**Self-Awareness.** The aims of multicultural education cannot be attained unless teachers acquire an understanding and appreciation of their own worldviews, cultures, values, and belief systems that contribute to their behaviors, as well as an awareness and acceptance of cultures that differ from their own. Teachers’ self-awareness may be accomplished by answering questions similar to the following:

1. How do I describe myself racially, ethnically, and culturally? Who in my family influenced my sense of ethnic identity? How did they teach me these values?
2. What characteristics of my ethnic group do I like the most? Least?
3. What ethnic groups other than my own do I understand the best? Least?
4. How do I describe myself socioeconomically? Is my current socioeconomic position similar to that of my parents and grandparents? What would change if my socioeconomic condition decreased drastically during the next year? (Lambie & Daniels-Mohring, 1993).

A multicultural pie graph is a tool that facilitates teachers' personal awareness of their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritages and how they perceive things differently from others, including the students in their classes (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990). In making a pie graph, teachers ask themselves questions regarding the variables that contribute to their individual identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, educational opportunities, religion, disability). They then complete a graph in which the variables are weighted to determine their significant contribution to their own make-up and the construction of their worlds. Figure 1 presents an example of a multicultural pie graph completed by a middle class female teacher of Korean American descent. Teachers can also use this tool with the children and youth with disabilities in their classes to aid them in framing an awareness of their identities and interactions with others.

The focus of self-awareness concerns how teachers perceive themselves in relationship to students in their classes. Teachers must recognize that all students have the potential to succeed, and that cultural diversity and learning differences should be celebrated in classrooms (Hewett, 1996). In essence, teachers should acknowledge and eliminate potentially prejudicial attitudes that influence their expectations of students' academic learning and social behavior.

**Multicultural Curricular Content.** Multicultural education, when presented within the context of overall curricular revision, helps to ensure that students examine and explore content, concepts, themes, issues, problems, and concerns from a variety of cultural perspectives. It facilitates their knowledge of the historical, social, and political realities associated with society. The following suggestions regarding multicultural curricular content complement systemic curriculum changes and help to ensure equity and excellence in education for Asian American and Pacific Islander students. They extend beyond surface cultural experiences, explore diversity on the principle that everyone has a culture, connect activities to students' lives, and reflect contemporary cultural values.

Students can learn about diverse cultures through cultural capsules and cultural clusters, which may serve as instructional aids and help to diminish cultural gaps for children and youth who are recent immigrants from Asian and Pacific Island countries (Trueba et al., 1993). Cultural capsules were developed initially to help Americans learn about and adjust to other cultures; they can be used to describe small differences between various cultures. For example, a "traditionally American" cultural capsule might include eating cereal and toast for breakfast, in contrast to rice, fish, or miso soup that may be eaten in a traditional Japanese family. Cultural capsules are a good way to teach children about various cultures. They can be prepared by teachers or by students and may be accompanied by pictures, songs, and audiovisual aids (Singh, Ellis, Oswald, Wechsler, & Curtis, 1997).

One example of a cultural capsule concerns Asian Americans' and Pacific Islanders' respect for and attempt to maintain a balance with their environment. This concept may be illustrated by Japanese Americans' respect for beauty and nature as evidenced by formal gardens, floral arrangements on low tables, and scroll paintings (kakemono) that are displayed in special places of beauty in the home (tokonoma), and the artistic arrangement of food on dishes of various colors.

Another example of a cultural capsule considers Japanese Americans' celebration of the New Year with certain required foods—soba (noodles), ozoni (rice dumpling soup), kuro mame (black beans), and kazunoko (fish eggs)—each of which carries a specific meaning: long life, good luck and wealth, health, and fertility, respectively.

Cultural clusters combine a number of cultural capsules about a specific topic. Teachers can use them as a dramatization in which students portray the information contained in the capsules. This is often done as a comparison across various cultures on the same topic (e.g., diverse methods of greeting). The teacher or students may provide the background information and content regarding the cultural cluster. This approach allows active student participation, as well as being a positive and enjoyable way for students to learn about their own and other cultures (Singh et al., 1997).

Traditional practices of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans should be taught and celebrated along with the traditions...
from other diverse populations. Two examples—a traditional wedding in Hawai‘i and a customary Chinese New Year celebration—follow.

A traditional wedding in Hawai‘i includes many traditions that evolved from historical practices. Quite often the actual wedding ceremony begins with an oli, a spiritual blessing or chant, which is followed by a hoʻokupu, an offering by the bride and groom to the Hawaiian deities as a token of their gratitude. Weddings in Hawai‘i often take place outdoors, to illustrate a sense of harmony and balance with the natural environment. The wedding ceremony is performed in the Hawaiian language by a Kahau, a reverend of Hawaiian ancestry, and followed by a iliau with traditional Hawaiian food such as kalua (pig), ʻopili (shellfish), and haupia (coconut pudding). Spontaneous Hawaiian love songs and dances are performed throughout the iliau celebration, with the bride and groom dancing either hula kahiko (traditional) or hula `auana (modern) for each other; the wedding guests join the dancing. At the end of the celebration, the newly married couple, their families, and guests join hands to sing an anthem, Hawai‘i Aloha, which closes the event (Melvin E. Spencer, III, personal communication, May 23, 1997).

In Hawai‘i, Chinese martial arts clubs perform lion dances as part of a customary Chinese New Year celebration. Two individuals, under a decorated lion’s head, perform established movements to the rhythmic beats of a drum, cymbals, and a gong. Individuals offer money (li ʻei) to the lions for good luck and prosperity and burn firecrackers to chase away the evil spirits. People eat jul, which consists of various ingredients, including mushrooms, dried oysters, lotus root, long rice, hairy seaweed, black fungus, and other Chinese vegetables, as well as gau, a sweet dessert that consists of brown sugar and mochi flour (Russell H. Chun, personal communication, May 27, 1997).

Teachers also afford students opportunities to learn about people from diverse cultures by facilitating linkages to all aspects of the curriculum. For example, an art appreciation class may include examples of Asian and Pacific Islander artwork as well as art from other cultures. A music lesson may consider the contributions of Asian and Pacific Americans to composition and performance. Finally, the writings of Asian American and Pacific Islander authors may be the literary bridges that link the language arts with students’ lives. A sample list of Asian and Pacific American individuals who have made contributions to the arts and sciences as well as other areas is provided in Table 2.

Learning about different cultures should include developmentally appropriate concepts and activities that present multiple opportunities for students to address diversity from a worldwide perspective. In the United States, this is often accomplished by discussing the contributions of diverse populations to the evolution of American society. For example, in social studies classes, all students, including those with disabilities, should learn about historical events that occurred in Asia and the Pacific Rim—such as the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and the subsequent annexation of Hawai‘i as a United States territory, the focus of the Spanish-American war in the Philippines, and the impact of the Vietnam War on refugees emigrating to the United States. Teachers should present historical concepts such as the settling of the West from varying perspectives, demonstrating, for example, that the concept of “the West” was a Eurocentric idea. “To the various immigrants from Asia, such as those from Japan and China, the land to which they immigrated was not the West but the East, or the land of the ‘Golden Mountain’” (Barks, 1997, p. 72).

We have developed a learning activity similar to the popular board game Trivial Pursuit as an attempt to expand students’ general knowledge about diversity and their spe-

### Table 2. Sample of Noted Asian and Pacific Islander Americans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Area</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art and</td>
<td>Jose Aruego</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Maya Lin</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Tina Carrere</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Margaret Cho</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jason Scott Lee</td>
<td>Chinese/Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Haing Ngor</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keana Reeves</td>
<td>Chinese/Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Deni Akaka</td>
<td>Chinese/Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benjamin Ceyatano</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel Inouye</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dalip Singh Saund</td>
<td>Indian Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Waihee</td>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Connie Chung</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ken Kasihinahara</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>LeLy Hayslip</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bharati Mulckjee</td>
<td>Indian Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Ondarje</td>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amy Tan</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yoshiko Uchida</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Queen Lili ‘ulukalani</td>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yo-Yo Ma</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zabin Mehta</td>
<td>Indian Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Ellison Onizuka</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samuel C. C. Ting</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eugene Hau-Chau Trinh</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Sammy Lee</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Greg Louangis</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jose Sapola</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tlania “Junior” Sua</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>“Tiger” Woods</td>
<td>Thai/African/Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Skating</td>
<td>Michelle Kwan</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Michael Chang</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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specific understandings regarding culturally diverse groups, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The game, which includes content related to historical events, the contributions of various populations, and specific role models, facilitates students' positive identification with their racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds.

To facilitate students' identification with positive role models in Hawai'i, we also developed a learning activity similar to Who Am I? that includes a series of biographical vignettes of well-known Asian and Pacific Americans (see Table 2). In addition to identifying the person, students discuss the person's potential for success based on the number of environmental variables that may have placed them at risk of educational failure (e.g., poverty, speaker of English as a second language). We have found two excellent sources to facilitate the creation of these biographical sketches: (a) local print media, such as newspapers and magazines, where individuals are interviewed about their lives and their professions; and (b) reference books and biographies written for children (e.g., Chiv, 1996; Gan, 1995; Marvis, 1994; Morey & Dunn, 1992).

As another activity, we often ask students to draw a picture of something that from their perspective represents their cultural heritage. We then ask them to draw a second picture based on their perceptions of how others view their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Concomitant discussions clarify their understandings of personal cultural values and identities and their perceptions of others' stereotypic attitudes.

An additional activity that we have used involves the identification of all cultural groups to which an individual belongs. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways. The multicultural pie graph was described earlier. Students may also draw a pie chart, identifying the cultural groups of which they are members and indicating the proportional importance or influence that each group bears on their lives. This activity enables students with an opportunity to reflect not only on the different populations to which they belong, but also on the influence that each population has in determining who they are as individuals (see Figure 1).

A different approach allows for various cultural groups to be identified within a classroom. Students are asked to write on index cards the cultural groups of which they are members, including their ethnic make-up, religion, disabilities, and languages spoken at home. Each student must use different colored cards and pens, so that each student may be identified individually later. The first student posts his or her cards horizontally across the classroom wall. The next student places her or his cards under the first student's cards if they represent the same categorical group. If not, she or he places her or his cards along the same horizontal line as the first student. Eventually, a matrix is created that represents each cultural group identified by the class members as important in their lives. This activity is followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences between the various cultures represented by the students in the class.

Systemic curricular change is necessary to attain the goals of multicultural education. These instructional ideas provide a starting point to develop awareness and understanding of diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander cultures. Banks, a respected leader in multicultural education, stated in an interview that many teachers begin discussions of multicultural education with "Contributions—you know, Black Day, Indian Morning, Jewish Afternoon. I used to be critical of that, but I've come to see that you've got to start somewhere." (Brandt, 1994, p. 28).

Curricular Materials

The use of instructional materials with positive images of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural populations helps to develop students' awareness of diversity and to reduce prejudice (Banks, 1994). Teachers, therefore, must ensure that textbooks and other curricular materials are free of biases for or against specific populations and that they represent a wide range of diversity, particularly of the students in their classes. Books may include (a) invisibility, whereby specific racial, ethnic, and cultural populations as well as women, individuals with disabilities, or aged people are either neglected or underrepresented; (b) stereotyping, in which traditional and rigid roles are ascribed to certain populations; (c) selectivity and lack of balance, where authors fail to discuss the roles of various groups; and (d) linguistic bias, where authors rely solely on masculine pronouns or Anglo names (Hunt & Marshall, 1994). Textbooks, for example, may show Pacific Islanders engaged in skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled labor activities such as bus drivers, entertainers, and gardeners as long as they are also represented in professional roles such as physicians, teachers, and lawyers. Representation in curricular materials involves both textual and pictorial examples.

Instructional Approaches

Culturally relevant instructional strategies are sensitive to students' cultural identity and include real world tasks and contextualized learning experiences from students' environments outside of school to ensure continuity among home, school, and community. These strategies should be consistent with and complement curricular content and materials that provide students with opportunities to examine their cultural heritages, values, and expectations. Strategies appropriate to Asian American and Pacific Islander students consider the perspectives of time, cooperation and group processes, and teacher-directed instruction.

Time. The focus on time in classroom settings may be very different for students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. For example, many European cultures place a great deal of emphasis on using time wisely; their perspective is that "time is money." Pacific Islanders, on the other hand, may be less time-conscious and focus on orientation to task.
Teachers who lack sensitivity to this cultural value may perceive these students as using their time inefficiently. Therefore, it is important for educators to think about cultural perceptions of time and to modify time considerations as they interact with students.

Teachers who work with Hawaiian students should recognize that time is flexible. They should acknowledge that Hawaiian children and youth learn best in an environment that invites them to *kaua kaua*—that is, to "talk story" or engage in conversation. "Culturally, 'talk story' is a means of getting to know others and working together. For Hawaiians, learning is social and talking story is an essential part of learning." (Hewett, 1996, p. 39). Teachers should allocate time to talk story and not hurry through something for the sake of time. Talking story helps students to frame their learning within the context of family and life experiences. It also acknowledges Hawaiian students’ preference for collective participation in social and academic endeavors.

Finally, teachers should not assume that students who hesitate before answering a question in class do not have the correct answer or are unsure of the answer. Some students may need think time prior to responding to each question that is raised. Some cultures are more present-then future-oriented. This notion, which is particularly true for many Pacific Island cultures, promotes the attitude of seizing the day with less concern about tomorrow. Students, therefore, may need daily rather than long-term assignments. They may require direction and assistance in organizing and planning their time to complete long-term projects.

Silote et al. (1995) provide a sample worksheet on which they suggest that teachers write their personal cultural values, the comparative cultural values of the students with whom they are working, and strategies for developing sensitivity to any differences. For example, if the teacher’s style is fast-paced and the student’s style, on the other hand, is more slowly paced, with think time needed when questions are raised, the teacher’s strategy may be to allow the student the necessary time to think before offering a response to an inquiry.

**Cooperation and Group Processes.** Cultures differ in the degree to which they value individualization, competition, and cooperation. Teachers must recognize and consider the importance of these values to the students in their classes as a basis for organizing classroom activities. Historically, most schools in the United States have been structured to emphasize individualization and competitiveness. However, social relationships are more important to some students; they prefer social interactions and group affiliations in classroom settings. Research has indicated that changes in school processes to complement students’ cultures result in improved student performance (Tharp, 1989). We also know that students achieve more when provided with opportunities to learn and express themselves in culturally familiar ways (Harry, 1992). Traditionally, individuals from certain Asian countries, such as China and Japan, are raised in individualistic or competitive environments. Students from other cultures, such as Filipino Americans and Pacific Islanders, however, are raised to be cooperative and group-oriented.

Students from cultures that promote cooperation respond more favorably to group participation. Teachers, therefore, should reinforce students for their cooperative behaviors as much as they reinforce them for individual achievements. Peer tutoring and cooperative learning are often identified as effective and appropriate instructional strategies for students from these cultures (e.g., Harry, 1992; Hudson, 1989). In the Hawaiian culture, for example, cooperation and assisted performance are commonplace; siblings are routinely responsible for the care of younger children in the family.

Cooperative learning and peer tutoring have been advocated as effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities (e.g., Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 1994). In the movement toward full inclusion, educators have suggested that cooperative learning can provide a means for educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms. However, relatively few studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative learning for students with disabilities. Some studies indicate that students with disabilities may be more socially accepted in heterogeneous cooperative learning structures, but academic gains have not been demonstrated (Cosden & Haring, 1992). In contrast, peer tutoring has accumulated a greater amount of empirical support as an instructional strategy for students with disabilities (e.g., Ogusathore & Scruggs, 1986).

There are additional benefits of using student-mediated strategies for students whose primary language is not English. Students’ language development can be enhanced dramatically by the opportunities for individualized and personal interaction in pairs and small groups. Social interactions are also the basis for challenging students’ current knowledge structures and affording them opportunities to expand and refine their knowledge bases.

Students who have been raised in cultures that foster cooperative behaviors may need direction regarding the appropriateness of cooperation in school. They may be quick to share their belongings with peers, which could potentially extend to allowing others to copy their schoolwork or answers on examinations. These students may view themselves as helpful or generous and, therefore, not interpret their behavior as inappropriate or problematic within the school’s culture.

**Teacher-Directed Instruction.** Many cultures reinforce the principles that underlie teacher-directed instruction, an instructional approach well documented as an effective model of instruction, particularly for students with disabilities (White, 1988). Asian American and Pacific Islander students may prefer to participate in an activity only after observing others demonstrate the skill and only after the ability is mastered. They learn by observation and memorization and prefer patterned practice and rote learning over discovery learning (Truha et al., 1993). In the Hawaiian culture, children are expected to watch and to memorize in order to learn how to
do something. One novice teacher who was learning to adapt her teaching style to the learning style of students of Pacific Islander descent stated: "I began to think that anything I could model had a better chance of being learned. So I looked for ways to model more complex and abstract processes... I would think aloud, write aloud, and work aloud." (Tepper, 1992, p. 5). In addition, this teacher also learned the importance of repetition and practice for the learner. “Rehearsal became an understood and comfortable mode for all sorts of learning work” (p. 6).

As a result of interacting with the students in their classes, teachers should acknowledge, accept, and capitalize on their students’ diversity, rather than labeling departures from the norm as indicative of learning and behavior difficulties. They should create a wide range of instructional approaches that complement students’ educational needs.

**Parent and Family Involvement**

The education of students from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds necessitates a shared responsibility and commitment from parents, other family members, and professionals to address the students’ unique academic and social learning needs. A great deal has been written regarding multicultural considerations and parent-professional partnerships in both general and special education (e.g., Alper et al., 1994; Harry, 1992; Lambie & Daniels-Mohring, 1993; Sileo et al., 1996; Voltz, 1994, 1995). Therefore, a full discussion of practices that foster effective interactions among parents and professionals will not be addressed in the context of this article. Instead, we provide a brief discussion of the issues that specifically affect Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

General approaches to facilitate the involvement of family members from diverse cultural backgrounds may include (a) employment opportunities as paraprofessionals, where parents learn instructional strategies that may benefit their own children; (b) parent education programs that improve parents’ formal education (e.g., English as a second language, basic reading, mathematics) or increase their opportunities to participate in and influence their children’s education; and (c) awareness programs that extend parents’ confidence levels in and interactions with their children’s education (Sileo et al., 1996). Parents of children with disabilities who are also members of diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural populations may benefit from participation in programs designed to increase their knowledge and understanding of the components of individualized education programs and family service plans, as well as parental rights and responsibilities outlined in due process requirements. Participation in these programs may be particularly important for parents from Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds, who often defer to the authority of teachers and schools regarding the design and implementation of educational programs that address their children’s learning and behavioral needs.

In addition to these general ways of enhancing parents’ access to and understanding of schools and the educational system, teachers need to personalize their interactions with parents and other family members. Teachers may accomplish this by examining the personal cultures and values that influence their parent–professional exchanges, clarifying family needs and priorities, and developing a deeper realization of the challenges that confront families (Sileo et al., 1996). Teachers also need to be knowledgeable of various family structures (e.g., nuclear, single parent, extended families, matriarchal or patriarchal family systems), parents’ perspectives on child rearing practices and disciplinary styles, behavioral and developmental expectations for their children, as well as parents’ perceptions and acceptance of disabilities and special learning needs, if applicable. Considering familial structures and lines of authority, for example, it is important for teachers to know that the Vietnamese family is patterned after the Chinese extended family system, which is vertically organized, hierarchical, and patriarchal in nature. The Vietnamese family is a well-defined hierarchy that includes immediate, extended, and clar-type family members, who have specific roles and responsibilities and provide moral, material, and financial assistance to other members. The Lao and Khmer family systems, on the other hand, are influenced by Indian civilization and tend to be more nuclear, neolocal, and matriarchal in nature (Trueba et al., 1993).

Differences in sociocultural, religious, and moral values also result in different approaches to child rearing and discipline. Quite often, educators may view the child rearing practices of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse families as inferior to their personal practices. The caretaking and disciplinary practices among some Asian and Pacific Islander Americans may sometimes be considered wrong or abusive and prove problematic for teachers who may judge others, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of their personal cultural values and Eurocentric backgrounds. Many Asian American families (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) consider pain and hard work as conditions for developing strong moral values in their children. Severe physical punishments for behavioral transgressions are considered expressions of parental love and responsibility. For example, Vietnamese parents who are recent immigrants to the United States may pierce a child’s ear and tie it to a doorknob; other Southeast Asians may lock their children out of the house because they have not met traditional familial expectations and obligations (McIntyre & Silva, 1992). Morrow (as cited in Grossman, 1995) stated that such forms of punishment are “locking the child outside the house, isolating the child from the family social life, shaming the child, scolding or guilt induction that results in a ‘loss of face’ are commonplace in Southeast Asia” (p.145).

Folk medicine treatments practiced among various Asian populations may also compromise special educators’ personal and professional responsibility to the students in their classes. For example, the healing practices of “cupping” (i.e., lowering a heated ceramic cup on an infected area of the
skin), pinching, scraping, and “coinning” (i.e., rubbing a coin on an infected area of the skin) often leave marks and abrasions that may be mistaken as evidence of child abuse. It is critically important for educators to become conversant with the child rearing, disciplinary, and medicinal practices of the diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural populations with whom they interact to fulfill their professional responsibilities in a culturally sensitive manner (McIntyre & Silva, 1992).

Many Asian American families maintain high expectations of their children’s behavior. They value harmony, filial piety and respect for elders, social order, and the family. Korean children, for example, are expected to be reserved, to exhibit external calmness, and to control undesirable emotions such as anger, jealousy, hostility, and self-pity. They defer to their parents’ wishes, avoid questioning authority figures, and are embarrassed when showered with attention; they try to excel in school in order to earn their parents’ approval (Cheng, 1991).

Silico et al. (1996) have provided specific considerations related to verbal and nonverbal communication styles as a basis for improving parent–professional interactions. Teachers must acknowledge that many Asian American and Pacific Islander parents may prefer one-way communication, rely heavily on nonverbal communication cues, and seldom express their feelings even if they are opposed to teachers’ suggestions and recommendations. Traditional Samoan parents, for example, offer very few suggestions to teachers regarding their children’s education. They defer to the teachers’ knowledge and do not wish to reveal their lack of understanding regarding educational programming. In addition, Samoan parents consider the status of teachers as similar to that of the matai or village chief, who is thought of as a superior being; therefore, they listen to and acquiesce to the matai’s wishes (Finauga Finauga, personal communication, June 18, 1997). It is important to remember that Asian American and Pacific Islander parents, like parents from other diverse backgrounds, care about and will do everything to ensure their child’s success in school. Filipinos, for example, place great value on education and will sacrifice personal property and other financial resources to ensure that their children attend school.

Teachers must also accept that some Asian American and Pacific Islander families may consider a child with a disability as their fate, attributing the disability to a previous behavioral transgression. In traditional Samoan families, for example, the birth of a child with a disability is considered to be a curse for a parent’s earlier aberrant behaviors. The parents’ reaction to a child with a disability initially may be one of nonacceptance. Very often, a child is hidden from the public because the disability is an embarrassment and symbolizes the parents’ supposedly inappropriate behavior. In essence, if the parents have engaged in wrongful behavior, the behavior cannot be hidden and will be evidenced in the child. For example, if a rebellious Samoan teenager steals a neighbor’s pigs, the teenager’s future child may be born with a dark and hairy birthmark as a retribution for the behavior (Finauga Finauga, personal communication, June 18, 1997). Asian American and Pacific Islander families may also rely on more traditional religious beliefs and medical practices, including herbal medicine and acupuncture in the treatment of disabilities (Cheng, 1991). Further discussion regarding the perceptions of Asian and Pacific Islander parents related to the presence of children with disabilities in the family may be found in Cheng (1991), Silico et al. (1996), and Trueba et al. (1993). Professionals’ knowledge of and ability to reflect on these variables enables them to respond to parents from diverse backgrounds in a manner that conveys positive regard for the dynamics of diversity, establishes trust, and ensures optimal parent and family involvement.

**Conclusion**

Changing demographics have an overall impact on the manner in which we conduct public education in the United States, and teachers must accommodate these differences to ensure progress in American education. According to Sarason (1995), “the initial object of change is not students, the classroom, or the system; it is the attitudes and conceptions of educators themselves” (p. 84). Teachers have a moral obligation to ensure that all students experience a safe and welcoming school environment that affords equitable access to education. Inclusion and fair access are especially important for those students who are members of traditionally underrepresented populations, such as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, that have a history of exclusion.

The overall purpose of this article was to highlight some of the demographic changes in the United States, especially as they concern the increasing numbers of Asian American and Pacific Islander populations and the necessity to afford educational opportunities that address their needs.

The information presented in this article serves as a starting point for future sharing and discussion aimed at addressing the educational needs of students from Asian American and Pacific Islander backgrounds. We hope that teachers will take the time to reflect on and exchange successful, innovative strategies and ideas that enhance the education of the diverse students in their classes.

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NOTE
The terms Hawaiian English and pidgin are used interchangeably in this article.

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