An Exploration of the Role of the Diversity Advisor within Educational Teams that Support Students with Visual Impairments who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

by

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Abstract

The use of language interpreters is one method for providing information to parents who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) during meetings in schools. However, straight translation is often not enough. Diversity advisors are unique positions created to take on the role of becoming cultural brokers between the school and family as well as providing interpreting services. The purpose of this research was to explore the role of the diversity advisor within the context of an educational team that supports a student with a visual impairment who is also CLD. A focus group method was used to gather data from three groups on the learning team who had experience working with students with a visual impairment who are CLD: diversity advisors, classroom teachers and teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs). Similar questions were asked of each group around perceptions of their role, interactions with other learning team members, and interactions with CLD families who have a child with a visual impairment. The transcribed data was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach to discover emerging themes, as well as areas for growth. Among the findings, common themes between the groups included a need for better role clarification, a desire for cultural understanding around visual impairment, continued communication and relationship building among team members, and the need to address concepts and terms that lose their original meaning when translated from one language to another. Potential solutions to improve interactions with other learning team members and professional development opportunities for diversity advisors in their work with families who are CLD with a child who has a visual impairment are discussed.
Preface

This graduate-level research thesis is an original study in the field of education for students who are blind or visually impaired. I designed the study and conducted the study procedures and data analysis under the guidance and supervision of my research committee, in particular Dr. Kim Zebehazy, in the Faculty of Education, department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. Additional supervision was provided by Dr. Cay Holbrook and Dr. Owen Lo in the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. The UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) approved the study proposal on December 8, 2014 as a minimal-risk study. The BREB research approval number is H14-02675.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Multicultural Society

The classroom that is present today is an ever-changing canvas of cultural diversity. People are constantly moving around the world for various reasons, which is reflected in the growing number of people who are entering Canada and living in Canadian communities. Between 2006 and 2011, around 1,162,900 foreign-born people immigrated to Canada. These recent immigrants make up 17.2% of the foreign-born population and 3.5% of the total population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The nation is becoming more and more a multilingual society with the growing number of immigrants with over 200 different languages spoken within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The diversity that is seen in today's Canadian population is mirrored in classrooms across the country. These residents are either preparing to or have already entered into school systems across Canada, whether it is to enter as adults in English as another language classes or as school aged children and youth.

Classroom Teachers and Diversity

Within the school context, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLD) are not only learning language and curriculum but also involved in learning how to meld together cultures that will eventually become the students’ self-identity. (Timmons, 2009; Berg, 2013). The student who is CLD will have a self identity developed from the belief system that they have acquired from their cultural background, which influences how a student interprets, interacts and acquires the information (Guinan, 1997; Bau, 1999; Fan & Chen, 1999; Timmons,
These students will have to balance this cultural identity with the culture that they will acquire from school.

Classroom teachers are challenged to provide culturally relevant instruction to this diverse group of students (Tucker, Porter, Reinke, Herman, Ivery, Mack & Jackson, 2005). Cultural competence is defined as the “ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served” (Moyer & Clymer, 2009; Hanley, 1999; Chu, 2011; p. 1, NEA, 2008; Milian, 2006). Effective teachers build upon their cultural competence in order to devise new strategies and approaches within their own pedagogy to build inclusive classrooms in the changing face of a diverse landscape. However, teachers commonly feel that they are not equipped to come up with these strategies (Tucker et al., 2005; Chu, 2011; Hamm, 2014).

One part that is key to cultural competence and relationship building lies in understanding differences and similarities that exist between the school and home cultures (Moyer & Clymer, 2009; Harry, 2002). In order to truly understand similarities and differences, it is important to move beyond the surface culture, or that which can easily be seen (e.g., language, food, art), and towards a deeper more meaningful understanding of culture (e.g., the definition of sin, concept of justice, work ethic, eye behavior, approaches to problem-solving, fiscal expression and approach to interpersonal relationships) (Weaver, 1986). It is moving towards this willingness to understand the deeper culture that builds relationships (Weaver, 1986; Tucker et al., 2005; Moyer & Clymer, 2008; Bau, 1999).
**School Support for Diversity**

School districts across Canada have different resources and different methods to provide assistance to classroom teachers, administration, parents and students who are CLD to understand each other at a deeper level. These resources are used in accordance with each family's need to create a relationship among them and the school. One common practice is the use of language interpreters to bridge the communication gap between a student and his or her family’s native language with the English language. The role of the interpreter is different depending on the situation and educational context. Often, straight translation is not the only support needed.

The Calgary Board of Education uses both language interpreters and Diversity and Learning Support Advisors (DSLAs). The DLSA team has been part of the school board as a service for over 15 years. Unlike language interpreters, DSLAs assist in language and cultural brokering between families and schools. Cultural brokering moves beyond just translation and interprets cultural variables to accurately convey content (Wright, 2014). Within their cultural brokering roles, DSLAs are unique to this school board as they hold responsibilities to connect parents with the school team and community resources (CBE, 2013). The DSLAs have a wealth of knowledge in regards to how to approach different families in a manner that is respectful. These advisors have relationships with families that are above and beyond services, and students become familiar with them as well as the school team.
Students with Visual Impairments from CLD Backgrounds

Special education is one context in which DSLAs may provide support for CLD families who have a child with a disability. DSLAs encounter specialized terminology and resources that they must interpret within the family’s cultural perspective. In particular, DSLAs may have less experience with low-incidence disabilities including students with visual impairments. There is a deficit of resources and information that is available around students who have a visual impairment (VI) with different cultural backgrounds (Topor & Rosenblum, 2013; Conroy P, 2006, 2012; Milian, 1999; Correa-Torres & Durando, 2011; Gallimore, 2005) for professionals to access.

When working with students with a visual impairment, DSLAs will encounter an expanded school team and disability-specific content to interpret. For instance, students with visual impairments are provided with instruction from a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVIs) to learn and master nine different areas of what is referred to as the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) in order to become a successful independent adult (TSBVI 2015, para. 6). The Expanded Core Curriculum is defined as “concepts and skills that often require specialized instruction with students who are blind or visually impaired in order to compensate for decreased opportunities to learn incidentally by observing others.” (TSBVI, 2015, para. 1).

These areas include assistive technology, social skills, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility among others. Like all students from CLD backgrounds, CLD students with visual impairments are also learning English as another language.
and learning to develop their own identity among their native culture and Canadian culture, making support from individuals such as DSLAs just as important.

In order to facilitate the relationship between the school, student, and family, it is important to gather information on how DSLAs build cultural competency for the classroom teacher and TVI in the context of working with a child who is CLD and have a visual impairment. Equally important, is the need to better understand the capacity of the DSLA in providing relevant, current information for families within this context since they are relied upon to fill the cultural gap. Information pertinent to student progress must be relayed with accuracy for this student group. There are multiple sources that are used to assist with relaying information such as language translators, school staff that are fluent in their native language, family members, and translated written reports or memos.

The complexity of the cultural perspective on the work of the TVI with students with a visual impairment who are also CLD has presented areas of need for research since there is currently limited research and limited professional development to access. This research topic has also been a personal area of interest. I have observed, as a TVI who is CLD herself, that the lens or perspective of each member who is involved in the educational team of a student with a visual impairment changes when different cultural backgrounds interact.

This study explores how the role of the DLSA changes within learning teams who are working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with visual impairments and their families. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:
1. How are the perspectives of the stakeholders (DLSAs, TVIs, and classroom teachers) the same or different when reflecting on the collaborative nature of the learning team?

2. In what ways can teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and school learning teams assist the Diversity and Learning support advisor to provide accurate information and build a reciprocating relationship with students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse?

3. How does the work of a Diversity and Learning Support Advisor (DLSA) change when interacting with a family with a child with a visual impairment?

**Definition of Terms:**

**Diversity and Learning Support Advisors (DLSAs).** DLSAs are individuals who provide culturally and linguistically appropriate professional services and supports to the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) staff, students and families as well as providing interpretive language services as needed. DLSAs work with schools to build an understanding of students’ strengths and abilities and acknowledge students’ learning experiences and differences which contribute to CBE becoming a culturally competent and inclusive learning organization (CBE, 2013).

**Language Interpreter.** Language interpreters are individuals who interpret verbal conversation from the target language to English and English to the target language, as required (CBE, 2010).
Chapter 2- Literature Review

General Overview of Students with Visual Impairment

A student with a visual impairment (VI) is considered part of a “low incidence disability group” (Holbrook, 2006). This student group shares a commonality of having a visual impairment; however, among these students there are many different factors that differentiate each student with a visual impairment from one another. These factors include the nature of their visual impairment, ability to use their remaining vision, and the extent of their visual capability (Holbrook, 2006; Huebner, 2007). Students with a visual impairment sometimes have additional disabilities other than their visual impairment. These additional disabilities can include learning disabilities, neurological disabilities, health and orthopedic impairments, or both visual and auditory impairment, which is defined as deaf-blindness (Huebner, 2007). In addition, each student has life experiences with family and social peer relationships that also affect functioning within a school environment.

In terms of the range of visual abilities in this population of students, there are different ways to describe the degree of vision loss and how it affects the student’s access to visual information. Different terms will be encountered, some synonymous with each other, within the field of working with a student with a visual impairment. It is important to define visual impairment in the context of this paper as “any condition in which eyesight cannot be corrected to what is considered “normal” (Holbrook, 2006). Low vision is a term often used interchangeably with visual impairment and refers to a loss of vision that may be severe enough to hinder
an individual's ability to complete daily activities such as reading, cooking, or walking outside safely, while still retaining some degree of useable vision (Holbrook, 2006). Blindness may be used as a term instead of visual impairment when an individual predominantly uses other senses in place of vision to interact with the environment. In comparison, the term *legal blindness* is more specific, defining a level of acuity or field loss that qualifies a person for government services (Huebner, 2007).

Along with the general terms for vision loss, two terms are generally used to describe the onset of when a person loses their vision. *Adventitious* means that the impairment or condition was acquired after birth, generally as a result of an accident or disease and there is still some visual memory established (Huebner, 2007). *Congenital* means visual impairment occurred before birth or soon enough after birth that visual memories were not created (Huebner, 2007). It is very important for professionals working with a student with a visual impairment to know this information, as well as more specific terms, as it assists with school programming and understanding the amount of exposure to visual information that the child has access to. For example, a student who is adventitiously blind who brings some visual experiences to lessons may need help to acquire new concepts to integrate with the preexisting visual memory; whereas, as student who is congenitally blind may require additional lessons and direct experiences in concept development in order to acquire the same information that a peer who is sighted would access through incidental learning (i.e., visual observations of activities or concepts) The curriculum needs of these students would not be met without
planned instruction from a TVI who knows what students with a visual impairment need for their learning styles.

Students can also be classified as being a print reader, or braille reader. Print readers are individuals who usually read large print or regular print with visual aids (e.g., magnifiers, video magnifiers, screen enlargement software); braille readers use braille as their main source of reading and writing (Huebner, 2007). Some individuals who are legally blind or have low vision use a combination of braille, large print and low vision devices and are considered to be dual media users.

Given the range of visual abilities, possibility of additional disabilities, and onset of vision loss, it is important to understand that no two individuals, even with the same eye condition, will function visually in exactly the same way (Holbrook, 2006). The majority of individuals with low vision will have fluctuations in visual functioning from day to day and situation to situation. Physical and mental health factors such as medications, seizure activity, fatigue, and environmental factors such as lighting, seating, contrast, will affect an individual’s visual functioning (Corn, 1983). The educational team needs to be aware of the interaction of these factors to best support the learning of students with a visual impairment.

**Visual Impairment and Learning**

Vision loss has an impact on learning and development. For most children, visual images are seen as a whole picture and then slowly broken up into smaller pieces for further understanding. Students with a visual impairment, particularly tactile/braille users or students with restricted fields, are learning and seeing things from part of a picture and having to put pieces together to understand the whole
Children with a visual impairment often experience delays in their fine motor skills that hinder their ability to develop language and concept development (Erickson et al., 2007). This delay is due to the lack of opportunity to explore their environment and reduction of incidental learning opportunities from pictures, television, and visual cues from events that are occurring around them (Erickson et al., 2007). Students who are blind or visual impairment may need different strategies and skills to access and understand information and concepts.

Given these unique learning considerations, it is important to note that individuals with visual impairments may experience challenges or have unique learning needs in more than one educational and/or functional area. To address this, students with visual impairment receive specialized instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) in addition to the general (core) curriculum in school. The ECC is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs. The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals and providing instruction (TSBVI, 2015, para.1). The nine areas of the ECC is as follows: compensatory and functional academic skills, assistive technology, social interaction skills, independent living skills, visual efficiency skills, orientation and mobility (O&M) skills, recreation and leisure, career education, and self determination (TSBVI, 2015, para. 6).
Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments

Children who have a visual impairment and meet certain criteria to be deemed qualified to receive services should have a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) as part of their educational team. The role of a TVI is very content specific yet fluid in the description of how school districts would like to have their services provided and what certification may look like (Holbrook & Koenig, 2007). TVIs provide direct instruction in the ECC, provide information to other members of the student with a visual impairment’s education team, consult, and adapt core curriculum to make it accessible to the students (Holbrook & Koenig, 2007). TVIs are also responsible for part of the educational programming in the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that is specific for students with visual impairments. The content of the IEP is specific to the assessed learning needs of the student with a visual impairment. IEP goals can range from learning to use assistive technology, to improving literacy skills, to building social interaction skills.

Service delivery models. Most TVIs work in an itinerant setting. This allows students who attend their neighbourhood or other public school to be provided specialized services from a TVI who travels from school to school. In many cases, the student will be the only student who is visually impaired in the school. The TVI comes to the school, provides instruction and consultation, and then travels to another school where he or she provides support to another student (Lewis & Allman, 2007).

Some schools set up a resource room for students with a visual impairment in a single school building. In this resource room model, the TVI stays at the school
all day and provides both intense instruction and on-the-spot support for students with visual impairment enrolled in classes at that school (Lewis & Allman, 2007). Students with a visual impairment may also have the option to attend a residential school. This is an on-campus residential environment that offers various programs with a focus on both the ECC and core curriculum (Lewis & Allman, 2007).

**Make-up of the educational team.** In addition to the TVI, there are other professionals that work with students with a visual impairment and will make up part of the educational team. These professionals include an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist who specifically focuses on the area of O&M in the ECC to help students with a visual impairment learn to maneuver safely, efficiently, and gracefully around their environment; this includes instruction in using the long cane (Holbrook & Koenig, 2007). In addition, some students with a visual impairment may have a paraprofessional (also called educational assistant, special education assistant) assigned to work with them. The paraprofessional helps student with a visual impairment by producing adapted material, assisting in the classroom environment, as well as assisting in reinforcing skills taught by the TVI.

The O&M specialist, TVI, classroom teacher, and paraprofessional, make up the bulk of the team that provides vision support. There are other professionals that make up the IEP team to provide specific services and build capacity of other team members. For example, students with visual impairments may also work with occupational and physiotherapists or speech and language therapists, especially if they have additional disabilities. Equally important to a collaborative team is the classroom teacher and the student’s family members.
TVIs within the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) work within the itinerant service model for students with a visual impairment. They are expected to provide direct service under the Alberta education program of studies and the Expanded core curriculum. TVIs see a combination of students with and without additional disabilities who are braille users, dual media users and have low vision. TVIs in the CBE also run short-term programs that bring students with visual impairment together to develop specific ECC areas for a day or multiple days.

**Teachers and Cultural Competency**

Along with the special education considerations that accompany the diverse range of visual conditions and learning needs seen amongst students with visual impairments, the cultural diversity of students also needs to be considered. As mentioned, classroom teachers are an integral part of a student with visual impairment’s educational team. These teachers are in charge of the core curriculum and have daily exposure to students. The make-up of today’s classrooms is highly diverse and includes students with disabilities as well as students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. It is important for all teachers to become more culturally competent in order to provide curriculum instruction that is relevant and meaningful to students (Milian, 2006; NEA, 2008). Teachers must also reflect on their own views and beliefs and expectations about the student’s ability (Milian, 2006; Zebehazy & Correa-Torres, 2013).

Diversity is the wide range of uniqueness in humanity (Milian, 2006). Cultural competence is defined as the “ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being
served” (Hanley, 1999; NEA, 2008, p.1). Cultural competence is a critical set of skills and knowledge educators must acquire to better serve English Language Learners (ELLs) (CBE, 2013). Some of these skills include developing personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivity, and having cultural knowledge (NEA, 2008; CBE, 2013). It is important provide a cross-cultural framework in a variety of environments that enables effective interactions among professionals or within a school (Berg, 2013). An example of this could be schools providing space to ethnic communities to teach their native language.

According to NEA (2008), there are four main areas that teachers need to develop in order to become culturally competent. The areas are to value diversity, be culturally self-aware, understand the dynamics of cultural interactions, and incorporate cultural knowledge within the institution and adapt to diversity (NEA, 2008, p. 2). Teachers show that they value diversity when they accept and respect cultural backgrounds and traditions, customs and beliefs, and different ways of communication (NEA, 2008). Cultural self-awareness is accomplished by teachers knowing and being familiar with their own culture. This includes an ability to self-evaluate how their own experiences, skills, and beliefs shape who they are within their community, and how that affects how they interact with students (NEA, 2008).

It is important to know that there are many different cultural experiences and relationships that happen in a local community. Knowing this information, it is recommended that educational services be designed to help implement this knowledge to better serve diverse populations (NEA, 2008, p.3) For example, educational services can implement cultural activities such as multicultural fairs for
staff and community involvement as well as incorporate staff professional
development to build techniques to create a learning environment for students who
are CLD (Moyer & Clymer, 2009).

Becoming competent in these areas can be a struggle for teachers (Harry,
2002). Research has found that teachers who worked with students who are CLD
have some knowledge of how to incorporate culturally sensitive activities (Batt,
2008; Harry, 2002). However, there is a concern about limited financial resources
for additional specialized staff to assist students and provide professional
development to ensure that staff members feel confident in their skills. (Batt, 2008;
Hamm, 2014)

Teachers also report that they wrestle to find a balance in trying to honor
cultural norms while maintaining and teaching within the school culture (Chu,
2008). Students who are CLD may find that school is different from their own
personal learning experiences. In school, there may be an emphasis on direct
instruction (one-on-one approach), but some students may come from homes and
communities that emphasize collectivist-learning approaches such as
interdependence, sharing, and collaboration (Chu, 2011; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014).

Schools have been traditionally built to cater to the pre-dominantly English
speaking main population (Chu, 2011; Utley, Obiakor & Bakken, 2011), and most
teachers who enter the field are not ethnically diverse (Chu, 2011; Utley et al.,
2011). Given this lack of diversity within the education field, research has
recommended that teacher education courses are viewed as significant arenas for
developing requisite knowledge of and expertise in teaching students who are
ethnically, economically, and linguistically different from the dominant cultural group (Allard & Santori, 2008, Batt, 2008; Chu, 2011; Gallimore, 2005).

Another strategy for teachers to look at is using the Universal design for learning (UDL) framework to address the needs of students with different cultures. It can be used to create a curriculum that is responsive and increases learning opportunities for all learners (CAST, 2011). However, it is important to not only use one approach in connecting with students who are CLD. It is the building of relationships through family involvement in education that would increase both achievement and cultural competency (Timmons, 2009; Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008; Tucker et al., 2005). Families bring a wealth of knowledge, support, and capacity which schools can draw from to support their child’s learning. Schools need to honor, respect, and encourage the development of unique and flexible approaches to meet the needs of diverse cultures and backgrounds (Timmons, 2009; Ladky & Stagg Peterson, 2008).

**TVIs and Students with Visual Impairments who are CLD**

In addition to the general considerations around cultural competency, TVIs may need to consider additional aspects of culture when working with students with visual impairment who are CLD. It is important for TVIs to gain an understanding of how cultural values and beliefs influence how students and their families perceive visual impairment and the educational experiences they had in their native country with a low incidence disability (Milian, 2006).

There are several areas that are noted to be important by TVIs when working with students with a visual impairment and CLD and their families. Milian (1997)
conducted a survey that brought up concerns around cultural and language differences affecting families who have children who have a visual impairment and are CLD. Major themes that came out of the study were the communication between parents and the TVIs, the families’ ability to navigate a “new school system”, and the use and availability of language translators (Milian, 1997). These concerns are still relevant to the field today as there is still a considerable lack of research that is available for TVIs to be culturally competent with students with a visual impairment who are CLD.

Building a relationship with families with children who are visual impairment and CLD is a vital component of the work that TVIs do. TVIs must be able to communicate progress and skills that need to be practiced and carried forward in the student’s everyday lives. TVIs need to find ways to do this within the context of the family and the barriers they face. As noted, language is an enormous barrier for parents who are CLD to overcome in trying to communicate concern and information about their child (Guo, 2006; Gallimore, 2005).

There is also the added complexity of having a visual impairment and the cultural beliefs associated with it that influences families. Failing to consider families’ cultural values and to respect a diversity of values may affect building collaborative relationships between professionals and families (Wu & Chu, 2012). The personal, cultural and academic gaps between teachers and students could alter the relationship of learning for the student. This relationship of learning is important because it builds the core of trust and success that the student could achieve (Utley et al., 2011).
One way of providing support for students with a visual impairment who are CLD is to incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies (Conroy, 2006; Wu & Chu, 2012). Culturally responsive teaching principles look to use “students’ cultural beliefs, language and prior learning experiences to build bridges” to the new skills and knowledge in their current school environment (Utley et al., 2011 p. 9; Conroy, 2006). In addition to incorporating such strategies it is important to involve an understanding of how visual impairments are viewed in the student’s native culture and how this may affect their learning and/or approach to learning. (Milian, 2006; Bau, 1999).

Given the importance of communication with families and students with visual impairments who are CLD, the TVIs’ role as a team member extends to collaborate not only with the classroom teacher and family, but also with the interpreter (Topor & Rosenblum, 2013). There needs to be increased and better communication with the language interpreter in order for TVIs to be effective in their role. (Correa-Torres & Durando, 2011; Milian 1997; Gallimore, 2005; Topor & Rosenblum, 2013).

**Interpreters and Cultural Brokers**

Research has shown that parents want be involved but are not able to communicate or are not provided with the right channels to communicate, making them feel that their concerns were not met. (Conroy, 2012; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Correa-Torres & Zebehazy, 2014). The richness of information being conveyed from families and students who are CLD can be lost when professionals involved do not speak the family’s native language (Kosny, MacEachen, Lifshen, & Smith, 2014).
Without adequate supports, families who are CLD have been found to demonstrate a passive participation in the IEP process and appear to not want to be a part of the process (Conroy, 2012; Jung, 2011).

The incorporation of specific strategies can help promote the involvement of families who are CLD (Conroy, 2012; Utley et al., 2011). Some of these strategies include informal home or offsite visits from school, cultural days that would allow students and families to share traditions, and the use of language interpreters and cultural liaisons (Conroy, 2012; Batt, 2008). Language translation is a vital strategy that allows families who are CLD the platform to understand their children’s learning in school during parent meetings.

The terms interpretation and translation often are used and seen as the same. There is, however, a distinction between these two terms. While translation and interpretation share the common goal of converting information from one language to another, they are actually two separate processes (Celletti, 2010). Translation is the ability to convert information, primarily written, into a target language. Interpretation, which is usually oral, refers to listening to something spoken and stating the content in the target language; only interpretation communicates clearly (Celletti, 2010).

It is also important to note that not all terms can be directly translated from English to a native tongue and it is just not enough to directly translate a language in order to understand the intricacies of technical terms that are involved in the school experience (More, Hart, & Cheatham, 2013). Language differences are seen right away but cultural differences are far less obvious. Therefore it is important that the
The role of the cultural liaison is not only to be fluent in the language but also be fluent in the culture of the family, thus providing opportunities for teachers to ask questions and understand how some cultural behaviors differ from expected school behaviors (Conroy, 2012). The role of a cultural liaison is to interpret in a way that reduces any chance of cultural misunderstandings (Conroy, 2012). The role of a cultural liaison has also been called “cultural brokering” which refers to “bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons from different cultures” (Lindsay, Tetault, King, Pieart, & Desmaris, 2014, p. 11; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996).

Cultural brokers are people who are acculturated in one or more minority cultures and the mainstream culture (Singh, McKay & Singh, 1999). They are able to straddle multiple cultures, and function as language and cultural bridges among cultures. Thus, cultural brokers are in the unique position of being able to communicate values of a minority culture to the mainstream culture, and vice versa.

Research has shown that parents and families have expressed that they feel more comfortable when interacting with a language interpreter who shares the same culture (Lopez 2000; Cho & Gannotti, 2005). Parents are more willing to contact the interpreter to set up meetings, ask questions and become more involved with the school process (Conroy, 2012; More, Hart, Cheatham, 2013)

The general uses of language interpreters within a school setting are either in a direct service model (student instruction within the context of a classroom) or an indirect service model (language interpretation is provided to teachers, and through
There is currently little research that is available that discusses guidelines of how language interpreters are used within a consultation model (Lopez, 2000). However, it is highly recommended that siblings and/or other children should not be used as language interpreters (Conroy, 2012). Research has indicated that the use of children as language interpreters have brought on elevated stress and embarrassment of having to interpret (Borrero, 2011).

Although the need and the use of language interpreters are vital in exchanging important information, there have been issues that are present when including a new vital member into the IEP discussion process. Lopez (2000) noted that there were no means by which to validate the accuracy of translation. Parents and the language interpreter would be having lengthy conversations and a brief translation into English occurred for the other members that were part of the meeting. The balance and criteria that the language interpreter works within during the interpreting process needs to be broken clarified for all members of the team to feel that they have achieved some form of communication.

Many regional school districts have regulations in place that guide the role of interpreters and/or cultural brokers. These activities include translation and helping parents learn how to advocate for their children within the special education and public school system, as well as supporting parents during parent conferences (CBE, 2014).
Diversity and Learning Support Advisors

In the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), there are several venues to which families who are CLD can access assistance in navigating the school system. Parents have access to in-school settlement workers, interpretive services, and Diversity and Learning Support Advisors (DLSAs)(CBE, 2009). The services of this team can be requested through a School Learning Team meeting in which a referral form is completed to identify where the needs of the student lies and which group would best assist.

Interpretive services include language translators who are "strictly required to provide direct or as close to direct renderings of all messages in their entirety accurately, as faithfully as possible, and to the best of one's ability without addition, distortion, omission or embellishment of the meaning" (CBE, 2010). CBE’s criteria for language translators require high school to be completed and proficiency in English demonstrated via a written exam that is recognized by industry standards. Language translators must also complete the CBE language interpreter training and having experience in working as a language interpreter is seen as an asset (CBE, 2010).

In comparison, the Diversity and Learning Support Advisors (DLSA) have many more responsibilities compared to language translators. DLSAs take on the role of the "cultural broker" between CBE, school, and the family. They communicate directly with families that they work with. They also work with school staff and develop cross cultural understanding and partnerships and can participate in providing input during School Learning teams as well as ask questions during the
IEP meetings. The relationship that a DLSA has with a family can span for months to several years as the family and schools see the need to continue the relationship. This unique position beyond a language interpreter allows the school board to maintain a consistent relationship with families who are CLD as their child moves through the school system. The relationship that DLSAs build with families enriches discussions around the development of a student’s learning and encourages parents to become more involved as their understanding of the system grows.

The criteria that DLSAs are required to hold by the CBE include a “Bachelor’s Degree in a discipline related to the position (e.g., social sciences, social work, education) or equivalent in addition to having three to five years’ experience working with CLD students, families, and/or communities. An equivalent combination of directly related experience and directly related education may be considered (CBE, 2014).

TVIs work with both language translators and DLSAs. However, TVIs rely on the expertise of the DLSAs and their cross-cultural understanding to build capacity when working with the families who are CLD with children who have a visual impairment. As noted previously, no current research is available that specifically considers the dynamics of cultural brokers, like the DLSA, when interacting with teams that support students with visual impairment who are CLD.
Summary

As noted by research findings, families who are CLD can struggle to feel a part of the school community and teachers can struggle to effectively incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies into the classroom environment (Harry, 2002; More et al., 2013; Bruns, 2001). For students with visual impairment who are CLD, TVIs and the classroom teachers must communicate effectively with students and their families to maximize student outcomes. The DLSA in the Calgary Board of Education becomes an important member of the team to help facilitate communication and collaboration. However, little is known about the needs of the DLSA when working with CLD families who have a child with visual impairment or the needs of the TVI and classroom teacher when interacting with the DLSA. In order to ensure that services are as effective and useful to families as possible, it is important to investigate the learning support teams’ needs more closely. The more effective the collaboration is among team members, the more likely the team can support the needs of students and their families.
Chapter 3- Methodology

Purpose of the Study

Learning teams that support students with visual impairments (VI) and their families consist of classroom teachers, teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs), interpreters and/or cultural brokers (known as Diversity and Learning Support Advisors (DLSA) in the Calgary Board of Education (CBE)), and additional professionals who work with the child. While research has been conducted on how TVIs can become more culturally competent in working on relationships with diverse families (Conroy, 2006; Milian & Erin, 2001; Milian, 1997; Correa-Torres & Durando, 2011; Gallimore, 2005; Topor & Rosenblum, 2013), there is a lack of research and discussion about how the DLSA can become more accountable and interactive in their role of supporting and relaying important information to families with students with visual impairments. The purpose of this study is to add to the research by exploring how the DLSA works within learning teams who are working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with visual impairment and their families. In particular, the study explored the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How are the perspectives of the stakeholders (DLSAs, TVIs, and classroom teachers) the same or different when reflecting on the collaborative nature of the learning team?
2. What can TVIs and school learning teams do to assist the DLSA to provide accurate information and build a reciprocating relationship with students with visual impairment and their families who are CLD?

3. How does the work of the DLSA change from one situation to another when interacting with a family with a child with a visual impairment and the learning team?

**Research Design**

In order to gather information to answer the research questions, this study used a focus group research methodology. The use of focus groups is an appropriate method to collect data around groups of individuals in a certain population (Kreuger & Casey, 2014; Hennink, 2013) with the stipulation that the group must share similar knowledge within the specific topic of research (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). Face-to-face discussions provide opportunities to create interactions among different individuals within the same group and their responses will bring emerging themes or differences to the research questions.

The focus group method allows for self-disclosure by participants in order to create qualitative data for analysis (Wilson, 1997). This self-disclosure comes in the form of an exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and ideas among the group interactions (Wilson, 1997). An advantage to using focus groups is that it allows the ability to provide a voice to different groups, which includes those who are underserved and underrepresented (Wilson, 1997; Morgan, 1996; Kreuger & Casey, 2014). Focus groups allow each participant to become "consultants to each
"other" through listening, mirroring back what is said and facilitating each other’s opinions and responses to issues (Wilson, 1997, p.211).

This study included three focus groups in order to gain insight about the commonalities and differences in perceptions, feelings, and opinions of different members of the learning team who work with students with visual impairment and their families: DLSAs, TVIs, and the classroom teacher. The use of focus groups for this study is appropriate because it will allow for a more in-depth exploration of how DLSAs work within the parameters of a specific context (i.e., the educational context of a large school board in Canada) than the use of a survey or individual interviews would yield.

The composition of the focus groups were not varied but left homogenous to their professional roles. The objective is to maintain and create a high quality discussion around the topic among focus group members (Greenbaum, 1998). Parallel questions were asked of each of the focus groups to compare and contrast where the strengths and needs are for DLSAs when working with families who are CLD with a child who has a visual impairment. The use of parallel questions among the three focus groups also created triangulation of data. It is important to have triangulation of data, as it is a means to promote validity in the research findings (Wilson, 1997). Data from the focus groups may come from narratives that the group members provide and create a collective identity in how they view themselves in their professional role.
Participants

As mentioned, three focus groups were conducted to gather data. These groups were chosen based on their interactions and work with families and students with visual impairment who are CLD. The participants provided insights into their work as well as stimulated others to reveal information that may not be accessed using other methods. Participants for each of the following groups were recruited from the Calgary Board of Education (CBE):

1) DLSAs who have worked with families who have a child/children with a VI
2) Classroom teachers who have taught students with a VI who are CLD
3) TVIs who have taught students with a visual impairment who are CLD

These three groups were selected due to the interdependent relationship they have in order to support students. The interdependence, in part, relies on the DLSA’s ability to communicate the needs (e.g., for curriculum and IEP meetings) of students with a VI who are CLD back to their families on behalf of classroom teachers and TVIs. And, equally important, the DLSA facilitates communication in the opposite direction, from families to classroom teachers and TVIs.

Recruitment of Participants

In order to ensure informed choice and to guard against any feelings of coercion, a school board secretary who did not have any supervisory role over any of the potential participants distributed an email invitation for recruitment. Focus group sizes are generally between six to eight participants, (Wilson, 1997; Morgan 1996; Hennink, 2013) to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share their opinions and still maintain enough diversity to facilitate discussions (Hennink,
2013). However, due to a limited number of qualified members that would fit the criteria of working with students with a visual impairment who are CLD within the DLSA population, the mini focus group approach was selected as appropriate for this study (Greenbaum, 1998). A mini group is run identical to focus groups except participant size is smaller (Greenbaum, 1998; Kreuger & Casey, 2014). Three to four participants were recruited for each focus group.

**Procedure**

Participants who responded to the recruitment email and were confirmed to meet the criteria were requested via email to complete a consent form to participate in the study. The researchers also completed a demographics form to provide more information about their background and experience working with either families or students who are CLD, and students with visual impairments (see Appendix A for the demographics forms).

The researcher emailed the date, time and location to each focus mini group separately. Groups met in a school meeting room with place and time arranged according to the groups’ schedules. Each focus group session ran between 60 to 75 minutes in length in order for participants to have sufficient time to discuss the different questions and provide opinions (Greenbaum, 1998).

The procedure for the focus mini group followed the same procedure as larger focus groups (Greenbaum, 1998; Krueger & Casey, 2014).

1. Introductions were made to other members within the focus group to help create a safe climate for participants to express their thoughts. Light refreshments were served.
2. Participants were reminded of informed consent and confidentiality by the researcher. The researcher provided a brief description of how the focus group would run, as well as the role of the researcher as a moderator (i.e., the researcher proposes a question and allows participants time to gather thoughts and volunteer ideas).

3. Participants answered a series of questions in an audio-recorded group setting and were asked to provide their thoughts and opinions. They were encouraged to add to other participants’ comments and asked follow up questions to try to gather more data.

4. The researcher redirected the group as necessary to stay within the 60-75 minute timeframe. During the discussion period the researcher took notes and was an active listener to the group.

5. Once the focus group discussion has ended, an informal debriefing period took place during which the researcher recorded notes.

6. The researcher drew one name in each focus group to receive a $75.00 gift card incentive.

   Table 1 lists the questions that were asked to the groups to facilitate discussion related to the research questions of interest. The sets of parallel questions are organized according to their contribution to the main research questions. It is recommended to have between 4-5 questions planned for focus group discussions, with a series of follow up questions for clarification (Krueger & Casey 2014; Hennink, 2013).
Table 1

*Focus Group Questions and Corresponding Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 1</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Advisor</td>
<td>Describe your role as a diversity advisor. How does this role differ when working with students with a visual impairment and their families. (RQ #3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Describe how a diversity advisor helps in the classroom. How does this role differ when the diversity advisor is working with students with a visual impairment and their families? Follow up question: Is there something else that the diversity advisor could do to help your interactions with a student with visual impairment and his/her family? (RQ #3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVI</td>
<td>Describe how a diversity advisor helps you work with your students with a visual impairment who are CLD and their family. Follow up question: Is there something that the diversity advisor could additionally do to help your interactions with your students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse? (RQ #3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 2</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Advisor</td>
<td>Think about the students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse with whom you have worked with before. How did you prepare yourself to interact with them? (RQ #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Question 2</td>
<td>Related Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Teacher</strong></td>
<td>Think about the students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse with whom you have worked with before. How did you prepare yourself to interact with them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **TVI** | Think about the students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse with whom you have worked with before. How did you prepare yourself to interact with them? | (RQ #2) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 3</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diversity Advisor</strong></td>
<td>In general terms, what are some success stories that you have had when working with families who are CLD with a child with visual impairments?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Follow up questions:**
- What do you think contributed to the success?
- What strategies did you use?

| **Classroom Teacher** | In general terms, what are some success stories that you have had when working with families who are CLD with a child with a visual impairment? | (RQ #1) |

**Follow up questions:**
- What do you think contributed to the success?
- What strategies did you use?
- How did the diversity advisor specifically contribute to this success?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 3</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TVI</strong></td>
<td>In general terms, what are some success stories that you have had when working with families who are CLD with a child with a visual impairment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(RQ #1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up questions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you think contributed to the success?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What strategies did you use?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How did the diversity advisor specifically contribute to this success?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 4</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diversity Advisor</strong></td>
<td>Think of a situation where you have felt that there has been a conflict of interest or a miscommunication in your work when you are translating for school teams or assisting families who are culturally and linguistically diverse with their child who has a visual impairment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(RQ #2,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up Question:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How could it have been a better experience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Classroom Teacher</strong> | Translated conversations and meetings, such as the IEP meeting, can sometimes be challenging to include everyone. Can you describe a time when you might have struggled with feeling included during discussions with families of students with visual impairment and diversity advisors? |
| | (RQ #2,3) |
| Follow up Question: | |
| - What would have better supported your inclusion in the discussion? | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 4</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TVI</td>
<td>Translated conversations and meetings, such as the IEP meeting, can sometimes be challenging to include everyone. Can you describe a time when you might have struggled with feeling included during discussions with families of students with visual impairment and diversity advisors?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow up Question:
- What would have better supported your inclusion in the discussion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question 5</th>
<th>Related Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Advisor</td>
<td>What would be helpful for you to optimally support a future student with a visual impairment who is culturally and linguistically diverse and their family?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow up question:
- How can the TVI help you?
- How can the classroom teacher help you?
Are there other CBE team members that could be of assistance?

| Classroom Teacher      | What would be helpful for you to optimally support a future student with a visual impairment who is culturally and linguistically diverse and their family? | (RQ #1,2,3) |

Follow up question:
- How can the diversity advisor help?
- What can the TIV do?
- Are there other CBE team members that could be of assistance?
Data Analysis

Once the focus group discussions were complete, the responses of the participants were transcribed from the audio recordings by a third party transcriptionist in order for the researcher to cross reference notes taken during the focus group. Data from each focus group were first categorized using the thematic analysis approach (Hennink, 2013 p 91; Braun & Clark, 2006). The thematic approach allows for the possibility to highlight differences and similarities in a data set (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 97), allowing the data to inform about the work the DLSA conducts with families of students with visual impairments and the needs of the team from three different perspectives.

The thematic approach provided the opportunity for the researcher to find reoccurring themes and patterns from the data that was collected across a data set, in this case the focus group discussions. The data was collected and coded by identifying key words found within the transcripts related to each of the focus group questions. These key words/phrases were highlighted and checked with the notes
taken by the researcher during the focus group sessions. Then, a theme was identified for each of the patterns that emerged among the keywords. The patterns were an indication that responses were prevalent and important aspects of discussion among members in the focus group discussions.

Once themes were identified, the researcher analyzed the data again, focusing on the content that clustered around each theme (Hennink, 2013, p 91) for representative vocabulary and key quotes or phrases that were commonly used by the three groups. This was conducted as a way to understand how each group talked about the themes and to further define the complexities and context within each general theme.

The frequency of an occurring theme common throughout the three groups provides validity (Hennink 2013, p 178) and rigor to the study. It is also important to highlight differences of opinions and themes that were unique to each focus group as they represent areas of growth that DLSAs and the learning team may capitalize on when working with families with students with visual impairment who are CLD.

As a check for reliability, it was important to ensure that each focus group’s thematic analysis was correct from the perspective of the participants. Each group was emailed the themes to verify accuracy. Participants were encouraged to elaborate and/or correct any of the themes. Once feedback was received from the groups, any additional comments were added as notes to the existing data and used as a part of the results.
**Reflexivity**

Important to qualitative research is the acknowledgement of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the lens the researcher brings to the analysis and interpretation of data based on his or her own experiences and acknowledges that the researcher becomes part of the production of knowledge (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006 as cited in Ahmed, Hunt, & Blackburn, 2011). As part of the results and discussion, the researcher added her a perspective as a TVI to the interpretation of the data collected to provide insight in working with all three focus groups as well as with DLSAs and students with visual impairment and CLD herself. In addition, the researcher approached the data with the cultural lens of her own experiences as a first generation Chinese-Canadian.
Chapter 4 – Results

Data Analysis

As described in Chapter 3, data was collected through the use of a demographics form and three focus group sessions, one with TVIs, one with classroom teachers, and one with DLSAs. The demographics form collected from all three groups provided information around previous experiences with students with visual impairments and their families, who are CLD. The participants were assigned an anonymous number that was used to identify them during the audio recording process.

The focus group participants in each group (DLSAs, TVIs and classroom teachers) felt at ease with each other as colleagues in the profession and as colleagues within the same service unit. A couple of sources of data were collected that lead to the analysis of themes. Focus group sessions were audio recorded. All data that was gathered in the focus group discussions were professionally transcribed from the audio recordings by a third party transcriber who had no context or knowledge of the study. The transcripts were verbatim and included any errors in sentences and wording and were therefore presented in a non-biased way. In addition, after the completion of the focus group discussions, time at the end of the session was provided where participants took time to self-reflect on the process and talked amongst themselves. All participants noted that the focus group discussion was a good experience. After analysis of the data was complete, an email was sent to participants with the themes that came from their discussions as means
of reliability check. Participants were invited to contact the researcher if they felt any of the themes did not represent the focus group discussion.

**TVI Group Themes**

**Demographics.** Four TVIs participated in the focus group discussion. The focus group met for 75 minutes. The group of TVIs that participated had a wealth of experience in working with students with visual impairment. The average years of teaching experience among them was 18.5 years (range 15-25 years). At the beginning of the focus group and during email exchanges, The TVIs expressed interest in the topic and had worked with students with a visual impairment who are CLD at different times in their career. All the TVIs had participated in a Professional Learning Community that ran through a school year to pursue knowledge around different cultural viewpoints of visual impairments as a disability. The different ethnicities that the group worked with are highlighted in Table 2. Some of these students had siblings with the same eye condition and TVIs often worked with these families over multiple years. TVIs have noticed an increase of students with visual impairment from CLD families, however this increase is seen mainly in the urban areas versus rural communities among the outskirts of Calgary. Table 2 summarizes the demographic data of the TVI focus group.
Table 2

Demographic Information of TVI Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>TVI Experience</th>
<th>Ethnic background of Students with Visual Impairment</th>
<th>DLSA Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1                | 23 Yrs.        | Vietnam, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran, Jamaica, Korea, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Germany, etc. | - Used DLSA as interpreter  
- Helped with explaining visual impairment impact on culture to TVIs  
- Used to communicate with family around school related situations |
| 2                | 31 Yrs.        | Chinese, Egypt, Lebanon, Nigeria, Vietnam, India | - Used DLSA as interpreter  
- Helped with explaining visual impairment impact on culture to TVIs  
- Collaborated on professional development |
| 3                | 14 Yrs.        | Korea, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan | - Helped with explaining visual impairment impact on culture to TVIs  
- Used to communicate with family around school related situations |
| 4                | 5 yrs. as TVI  | Chinese, Egypt, Lebanon, Vietnam, India | - Helped with explaining visual impairment impact on culture to TVIs  
- Used to communicate with family around school related situations |
|                  | 4 yrs. as Paraprofessional | | |

Main themes. Based on the thematic analysis process used, five main themes emerged from the TVI focus group discussion transcripts. These themes were:

- Relationship building and communication with the DLSA and classroom teacher,
- Explanation of the role of the DLSA, understanding cultural differences of visual impairments, inclusion of more cultural aspects in working with students with
visual impairment and their families who are CLD, and struggle of understanding context of language in conversation and related outcomes.

Within each main theme, several sub-themes also emerged based on analysis of key words and vocabulary. These sub-themes are discussed in the following sections. Table 3 summarizes the TVI focus group themes that are described in the next sections.

Table 3

**TVI Focus Group Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Relationship Building & Communication with DLSAs & Classroom teachers | - “I’m sad we don’t have more discussion with classroom teachers, that’s always a piece I struggle with”  
- “Need to be better at setting up meetings, shouldn’t have blinkers on our area of expertise”  
- “Makes me realize that we should be trying to connect with the diversity workers on different levels”  
- “Struggle to deal with classroom teachers, we are in such a different point of view”  
- I don’t know where to start with diversity worker, if they have any idea with a blind child.” |
| Explanation of Role of the DLSA                                         | - “There needs to be clarity on what their roles are”  
- “I’m not really sure – It was never really clearly stated what the difference is”  
- “DLSAs don’t want to be called “an interpreter”  
- They didn’t want to be called in when only interpretation is required”  
- “Working with different people interpreting all the time” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Understanding Cultural Differences of Visual Impairments | - “Diversity person can help talk about vision and about their culture and how they perceive things.”  
- “Diversity worker was able to tell the student was that he shouldn’t marry first cousins, it was an aha moment.”  
- “Even if they are in a certain culture doesn’t mean they react the same way.”  
- “We cannot paint everybody with the same brush just because they have that (culture) commonality.” |
| Struggle of Understanding Context of Language in Conversations and Outcome | - “We have to be more proactive, with meetings to let people know what we need said.”  
- “Need frequent conversations to understand terms”  
- “Some of our terminology is complex and we should say it in very plain English.”  
- “I wasn’t sure exactly how things were being communicated and translated or if was getting lost in translation.” |

**Relationship building and communication with DLSA and the classroom**

*teacher.* The TVIs discussed the theme of relationship building and communication in a couple of different ways. First, there was a general consensus between all TVI participants regarding a need for greater communication and relationship building among the IEP team, especially with classroom teachers, parents and the DLSA.

The communication and relationship building will be different depending on which member of the IEP group that the TVI will be working with. For example, TVI participants felt that they needed to build more communication and presence with the classroom teacher around IEP meetings. TVIs wanted more involvement in being notified of IEP meetings in general and specifically with families who are CLD.
One TVI stated that, “It would help if they (classroom teachers) invite you to the IPP meeting.” The TVI group agreed that teachers have a different perspective on the student as they see the student on a daily basis and their goals and outcomes are different from the TVI. TVIs mentioned that it is difficult to balance academic requirements with time to work with the student with a visual impairment on the expanded core curriculum.

The communication process between TVIs and DLSAs fluctuated between formal and informal requests based on the information and urgency of the situation with the student with a visual impairment who is CLD. For example, the TVIs stated that once a need for DLSA help was identified, they would just email a DLSA and be directed to the appropriate one. On the other hand, TVIs also participated in requesting DLSA support through a school team referral.

The TVI participants felt that DLSAs play an important role and appreciated how they were able to communicate with families and IEP team members. The DLSAs provided a cultural understanding via suggestions and information that TVIs felt that they were lacking in. One example of this was a suggestion to a TVI where “the DLSA stated that meetings with the family should happen in a neutral location, and not at school.” All TVIs in the focus group were able to relate with several examples showing the importance of involving DLSAs in the communication process with families.

**Explanation of the role of the DLSA.** TVIs repeatedly stressed the fact that there needed to be a better explanation of the role of a language interpreter versus the DLSA and when each would be deployed for meetings. As one TVI stated, “It
would be helpful to have some clarification around what’s expected between a interpreter and a DLSA.” This was evident in the focus group where TVIs questioned the need to have both an interpreter and a DLSA involved in IEP meetings. For example, there were instances at IEP meetings where there was “a different interpreter every time for a student with a visual impairment until a DLSA [was] assigned to them to work through.

TVIs stated that DLSAs have tried to explain their role by initiating contact and explanation of when they would be needed. In past discussions with DLSAs, they want to “come to meetings” but do not want to just be called in for interpreter services. They wish to be “more involved in a school-based team and discuss what their culture is and that kind of thing, not just language.” Another example that DLSAs are differentiating themselves from language interpreters was that DLSAs are able to and have helped the TVI team create professional opportunities to learn about some cultural differences of the families that they work with.

Understanding cultural differences of visual impairments. TVIs felt that they need more information and time to discuss cultural differences of visual impairments, and “they could help explain to us how the family views a visual impairment, so we know where they are coming from.” One TVI felt that the cultural lens “has a huge bearing on everything.” There were several items that TVIs felt could help with their understanding of cultural implications of visual impairments.

TVIs want to find out the cultural and personal experiences of the families when building relationships with them. TVIs have found that “some families already
view vision loss as a negative and automatically their child is going through a very negative life.” They viewed the DLSA as being a position to help with this perception. “The diversity advisor could come in and help with that and talk with them.” The building of a relationship relies on how much the family is willing to disclose on what their beliefs of visual impairments are and any negative or positive events that have happened to shape that.

TVIs would like some assistance in understanding how concept development is viewed in the student with a visual impairment’s native culture. The focus group felt that if they were able to know the context of how things are taught in their native country/culture then they would be able to incorporate these strategies into teaching concept development and the ECC. For example, “when you get a totally blind child from another culture, but we don’t have a clue to provide connections for DLSAs to help the family look at concept development their way.”

TVIs also wanted to find out differences about what families from different cultures believed about the concepts of time and community. TVIs commented that with their past experiences, the concept of time was different and timelines that TVIs had were very different to ones that the family wanted. For example, conflict existed around the length of time given for the completion of IEP goals. This difference of opinions also was felt with the concept of community. The group stated that community had a different meaning compared to what community meant to the TVI. One TVI stated that “we want the students to be independent and push independence but [some families] believed that the cultural community often will help the child.” These concepts and topic ideas brought up by the TVIs were
discussed as important to have professional development created to deepen the understanding of how a visual impairment is viewed in a cultural context.

*Struggle of understanding context of language in conversation and outcome.* TVIs were very positive about their interactions with DLSAs and found that their roles are imperative in working with families who are CLD with children who have a VI. There were also some areas that TVIs have found to be barriers to their work in the IEP process with families who are CLD.

TVIs established that although interpreters and DLSAs are very knowledgeable with their language skills, there is a gap in how much information is relayed back to the TVI in meetings. TVIs found that there would be large time delays with language translation to which they felt one-sided communication was occurring. The participants all acknowledged that there are many terms that are specifically related to the field of working with a student who has a VI, that are being relayed by someone who is not in the field. For example, TVIs mentioned it was difficult conveying information on “degenerative eye conditions and instruction of braille being the next step.”

TVIs are relying on the professionalism that the language interpreters and DLSAs understand them in the correct context within the IEP document. TVIs felt confused when parents would shake hands and appear very happy with the results; however, TVIs were unsure whether or not parents actually understood what was going on.

The participants also discussed the fact that although DLSAs are very professional, they could not determine how much of their own thoughts and
personal opinions were passed to the families without prejudice. TVIs wondered “how they (DLSAs) view the blind and visually impaired community, which then reflects back to how they are going to explain things to the families.” TVIs also felt that there was an additional expectation of needing to provide background information and context about how the visual impairment relates to the student’s learning needs with different language interpreters within the short period of time that is allotted for the IEP meeting. Participants felt that they still had much groundwork and education to provide to DLSAs to encourage what people who are visually impaired are capable of.

TVIs also came up with some solutions that could help alleviate a better understanding of interpreting and conveying technical terminology for DLSAs and language interpreters. One of these strategies was the use of language that would be easier to understand by everyone on the team. Another strategy was to explain and show the DLSAs the actual equipment so that the DLSA could “explain the reasoning and why it was used in a really, really clear way.”

**Classroom Teacher Group Themes**

**Demographics.** The classroom teachers who participated in the focus group came from an elementary school setting. There were 3 classroom teacher participants and their combined average years of teaching experience was 12.6 years (range 10-15 years). They all had at least one or two students with visual impairment in their classes within the last 5 school years. The focus group met for 75 minutes. The classroom teachers also had some experience working with DLSAs in different settings. These included students with a visual impairment and other
students who are CLD. The teachers were interested in participating in the focus group discussion, as they felt that there was not much discussion about this topic on a school wide level as most students with a visual impairment make up a small portion of the school population. Their interactions with TVIs and DLSAs were limited to school based meetings around the IEP involving other team members and have not worked with DLSAs independently. Table 4 summarizes the demographics of the classroom teacher participants.

Table 4

*Classroom Teacher Focus Group Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Ethnic Background of Students with Visual Impairments</th>
<th>DLSA Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 Yrs.</td>
<td>Philippines, Indian</td>
<td>- Used as translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 Yrs.</td>
<td>Korea, Russia, Canada</td>
<td>- Used as translator - Took time to explain some information to families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 Yrs.</td>
<td>Korea, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan</td>
<td>- Used as translator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main themes.** Four main themes surfaced from the classroom teacher group: need to differentiate the role of a DLSA vs. language interpreter, teachers wanting to be culturally competent in working with students who have a visual impairment and their families who are CLD, improved communication with TVIs, and terms that are ‘lost in translation’, or lose their original meaning when translated from one language to another. Table 5 summarizes classroom teacher focus group themes that are discussed in the next sections.
### Table 5

**Classroom Teacher Focus Group Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers wish to be culturally competent working with students with visual impairments who are CLD | - “Cultural piece that is personal with family and help us understand things happening at home”  
- “Understand in the context of classroom”  
- “Build stronger connection with parent involvement and teacher in school and other specialist”  
- “Give broader picture of who the student”  
- “Diversity advisor can help you understand a culture views somebody with visual impairments differently” |
| Clear need for explanation of role of DLSA vs. Language interpreter    | - “Didn’t know they existed”  
- “I didn’t know there was someone who could support me”  
- “if they are new in Canada and new to the system, it would be nice we had someone else to speak to like a diversity worker”  
- “She just translated, that was it”  
- “I had no idea there was a difference” |
| Terms are lost in Translation                                          | Terms: Disconnected, translating  
- “Things get lost in translation by the time you are trying to explain something and you get cut off”  
- “Its very removed and static and it just take such a long time to say what they need to say”  
- “Just have to them focus on translating”  
- “Briefing translator before they pick up job”  
- “Realize the complexities of the meeting” |
Improve communication with TVIs

**Terms: Communication**

- "Need to know the curriculum that classroom teacher has to deal with or else there’s a huge disconnect between two teachers”
- "vision teacher might not be fully briefed of what that child’s expectations in inclusive environment"
- "work as a team, because the student will be spending most of their time in classroom”
- "need to figure out as a team what’s really important for this child”
- "vision teacher needs to really connect pieces and be willing to branch out"

---

**Clear need for explanation of role of DLSA vs. language interpreter.** The classroom teachers were unable to see the difference in the role of the DLSA and the language interpreters that attended IEP meetings. They felt that there needs to be a clear explanation between the two roles, as there would be different professionals that showed up to IEP meetings for this student population. The classroom teachers who participated had assumed that language interpreters were DLSAs. Therefore found it very surprising that there was a DLSA role available. A couple the participants were able to describe some responsibilities that the DLSA such as providing cultural information about parent reactions to IEP meetings. However they were not aware of the role.

Furthermore, classroom teachers saw the need of DLSAs and how their role could be used more effectively to connect with parents and that they could to bring parents in to “build a stronger connections with their involvement, with the teacher in school and other specialists.” The participants felt that despite the support of
other service units from TVIs and other specialists that “the cultural piece that is personal with the family helps us understand things that were happening at home.”

Teachers want to be culturally competent when interacting with families and students with visual impairment who are CLD. Classroom teachers felt that they need to have information of how education is viewed through the family’s eyes and what type of education experiences the student with a visual impairment went through. Teachers empathized with families who are CLD as “everything is new, and how different school looks, how they participate.” Teachers felt that with this background information they are equipped to program for that student.

The participants recognized that the DLSAs play an important role because they can help “you understand how a culture views somebody with visual impairments differently.” Teachers also mentioned that it was important for DLSAs to be consistent in working with families because more information tends to be revealed about the family’s life outside of school and its effects on the child the longer that DLSAs work with them. The more the relationship grows between the DLSA and the family, the more they are willing to trust the school. This is especially true with families who are “new to Canada and currently at home and have no one to turn to.”

Teachers commented that a balance between cultural understanding and timeliness of information is important. Teachers have had experiences with students who are CLD and/or students who have a visual impairment arriving at anytime during the school year and being registered in their classrooms without any notice. This leaves very little time to prepare and they have noted that teachers have
relied on their own experiences and have “preparedness on the fly.” This balance is also extended to the need for a classroom teacher understanding the student as a learner with their personality and ability to integrate into the learning community.

**Communication with the TVI.** The participants involved in the focus group discussion found that they struggled with communicating with TVIs. The classroom teachers felt that communication was lacking in how services were provided and its role in the education of the student with a visual impairment. They felt that there is a huge gap in understanding each other’s roles, and that classroom teachers have a “lot of curriculum to deal with” that TVIs might not understand. The teachers felt that there needs to be a team approach in communicating with them (classroom teachers) because “that’s where most of [the student’s] time is spent.” One classroom teacher felt the TVI needs to spend more time in the classroom and appreciate the diversity found in different classrooms. For example, participants felt that they are not “able to program for one student most of the time out of 25-27 kids.”

A focus group participant was frank in disclosing that “it’s a relief not to have to teach a student with a visual impairment,” due to the fact that there are many adults and supports that come in to provide strategies and the student is not provided with skills that they require to become more independent. The group felt that a more concentrated effort is needed to realize that adult support for students with visual impairments is not always productive for the student to become independent. The participants felt that there needs to be more opportunities for the student with a visual impairment to be celebrated as individual learners.
Frustrations around communication were generalized by the classroom teachers, related to students with visual impairment and CLD but also more generally to any student with visual impairment.

*Terms are lost in translation.* Classroom teachers commented that translated conversations during IEP meetings were removed and static, as “things got lost in translation and by the time you are trying to explain something they are cutting you off to translate. It creates a sense of disconnect in the conversation.” However, classroom teachers also responded that it improves when terms that are frequently used in IEP meetings such as headings and acronyms are brought up again and again and so a language interpreters and DLSAs were able to more quickly adapt to those terms.

Since the classroom teachers worked with both interpreters and DLSAs they discussed several solutions that would help to alleviate the sense of disconnect in IEP meetings. One solution was to be sure to brief the interpreter and DLSA to understand the complexities of the family and student. For example, there may be important terms or situations that need to be clarified before families arrive. Another solution was to have the same interpreter and DLSA work with the family (as much as possible) for consistency and to build a relationship that “feels good at the beginning.” The classroom teachers also suggested that it was a good idea to divide IEP topics across several meetings with the relevant individual team members so that a clear, concise picture is painted for the family. For example, having small meetings with IEP members involved with the goal versus all members gathered for one meeting.
DLSA Group Themes

Demographics. Three DLSAs participated in the focus group. The DLSAs all had limited experience in working with students with visual impairment who are CLD and their families before coming to the present school board. The participants came from various countries in Asia including India, China and South Korea. They held positions in their native countries as teachers (pre-school, elementary) and as a social worker. The average years of experience as DLSAs was 9.33 years (range 7-15 years). The DLSA role is unique to this school board as the roles and responsibilities of the DLSA go beyond interpreting and include cultural brokering along with their understanding of school policies and programs impact a student. The DLSAs have ties to their own cultural communities and have an understanding of how school systems function in their native countries compared to the school system in Canada. Table 6 summarizes the demographics of the DLSA focus group participants.
Table 6

*Demographics of DLSA Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Previous Work Experience</th>
<th>DLSA Experience</th>
<th>Ethnic Group (Languages Spoken)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>East Indian (Punjabi and Urdu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pre-School Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Korean (Korean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chinese (Mandarin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main themes.** The focus group met for 75 minutes. Five main themes emerged for this focus group. These were: DSLAs being different from interpreters (role clarification), acceptance of visual impairment being different in different countries, communication with IEP members being crucial in relaying information and understanding visual impairment implications for families, relationship building with families, and some terms are lost in translation with DLSAs having to be creative to provide information. Perspectives within the themes were more varied and at times loosely connected since each DLSA’s native culture views and treats visual impairments in a different way. Table 7 summarizes DLSA focus group themes, and related evidence discussed in the next sections.
### Table 7

**DLSA Focus Group Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| DLSAs are Different from Interpreters | - “Work with the school parents to view issues from a cultural perspective”  
- “We can ask questions, we also work on individual plan for students and families.”  
- WE can make suggestions whereas the role of the interpreters is just semantics.”  
- “Work closely with our cultural communities ad we see support from elders or church leaders.”  
- “We work with different agencies such as immigrant service etc.” |
| Acceptance of Visual Impairments differ within Different Cultures | - “Sex of the child changes approach with parents, sensitive especially for female children if there is visual impairment”  
- “Things are changing, braille is more commonly used, slowly as education spreads.”  
- “In China there is support for people with visual impairment with facilities and tools”  
- “Culturally it does not fit our norms when a child has multiple disabilities” |
| Communication with IEP Members is crucial in relaying Information and Understanding Visual Impairment Implication for Family | - “Sometimes I don’t agree with some goals in IPP”  
- “It has been difficult working with complex students, I’ve asked a few kids (especially the visually impaired ones) who have been through psychology assessment and they don’t understand what they were being asked, we need to work with them (psychologists)”  
- “I consult with other professionals, I refer more.” |
| Relationship Building with Families | - “Our relationship is a long term one, not for just one single meeting and can also last from K to 12”  
- “Help with parenting issues, such as help parent control habits in the evening”  
- “Parents don’t understand and need some clarification.” |
Some terms are lost in translation; have to be creative to provide information in a meaningful way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Some terms are lost in translation; have to be creative to provide information in a meaningful way | - “In a psych assessment there is wording that is different and there words that don’t exist in the first language”  
- “Sometimes things translated in Korean can have 2 different terms and it can translate into different meanings”  
- “Use examples such as faith to get parents on board” |

* IPP is the equivalent of IEP (Individualized Education Plan) in Alberta

**DLSAs are different from interpreters.** The participants in this group were very passionate in defining the difference between themselves and interpreters.

DLSAs are able to seek clarification and ask questions to all different service units and can work with them to assist families who are CLD. The DLSAs’ role is to “work with the school, parents, teachers and other experts such as the psychologist, to view issues from a cultural perspective and to ask for parental consent and cooperation for services.”

DLSAs also noted that they are able to ask questions on behalf of the parents and make suggestions to them. They stated that they work on individual plans for students and families on their caseload. They give advice to schools so that they are “more culturally sensitive to the issues and advocate for families.” It is important to note that DLSAs “may disagree with school decisions, they are also strategic and skillful in working with the school to understand the family’s needs.”

The role of the DLSA is not limited to working with service units within the school board but with outside agencies as well. DLSAs mentioned also working with “health professionals like doctors, CDC (Child Developmental Clinic) to understand that medical reasons may affect student achievement in school” as well as “navigate
the family through the Canadian health care system.” DLSA also stressed that the community ties they have provide meaningful connections for families who are CLD. DLSAs see supports from community groups such as elders, church leaders and different agencies such as immigrant service agencies as being helpful for families.

The DLSAs’ emphasize that the interpreter’s role is “purely semantics, and is just translating from language to language.” They must first take a language test and then interpreters have to undergo a training program. One participant works as an interpreter and as a DLSA. The difference between the two roles is that the interpreter works to “provide direct interpretation of what the teachers say and what, you know, the communication between the two parties.”

Acceptance of visual impairments differ within different cultures. The DLSAs spoke about the viewpoints of having a visual impairment in the context of their own culture. The three different cultures all stem from Asia, and have contrasts in the different approaches that each culture takes.

South Korea. The DLSA from South Korea stated that in Korea there is no acceptance of disabilities. A lot of disabilities are hidden, and those persons are ostracized. There are very little opportunities for a student with a visual impairment to obtain their high school diploma and are not considered for many things. There are gradual changes to this line of thinking, however, with opportunities being reserved for those in higher socio-economic rank, but still being very limited.

China. The DLSA from China stated that the Chinese culture is very accepting of visual impairments and have centres and facilities built to help families. However,
families have hesitations in seeking help as disabilities may be considered a shame to some families.

India. The DLSA from India stated that the gender of the child who has the visual impairment changes the approach that the DLSA takes towards the parents. If the child is a female, they are considered unmarriageable. This is not acceptable in the East Indian culture where marriage is a “big thing” in the community. For the male child it is more accepted because there is opportunity to acquire a profession and find a partner. Religion/faith based language needs to be used in order to bring parents on board.

*Communication with IEP members is crucial in relaying information and understanding visual impairment implications for family.* The DLSA’s role is part of an intervention process and they are brought in to provide support or resolve an issue. The DLSAs remarked when they find out that they have been asked to support a student with a visual impairment who is CLD and their family they do several things to gain more understanding of the visual impairment. Participants were proactive in finding “community resources that would benefit the students and their families.”

The DLSA mentioned gathering as much information as possible before talking to parents including doctor reports, information about supports that are in place and the goals for the DLSA involvement. They would even meet with the TVI beforehand to understand the implications of the “sight issue” because every child is different.
**Relationship building with families.** DLSAs spent time building their relationship with the family through “empathy, providing emotional support, and help[ing] parents identify the strengths of the child.” They also help parents build their relationships with the school and use different community resources. DLSA’s stressed the need to build rapport and trust, which occurs over a period of time. Some of the relationships that are built with families vary in length of time but can start from kindergarten up to grade 12 and beyond. DLSAs provided several examples of how they have build relationships with families. For example, DLSAs have even helped families with parenting issues around schedules; the parent would not know how much sleep their child should receive and provided information that was helpful to set up a routine.

One strategy that worked with the East Indian parent group that the DLSA participant used was to “initially accept the parents’ point of view and then start using the cultural piece.” The DLSA would draw connections to similar tasks that children would perform if they were in their native country. The DLSA would persuade the parents to allow the child to complete an activity under supervision and then reassure them. The DLSA participant provided an example of bus travel where parents were “Let her take the bus, follow her behind with the car see if she gets off at the right stop and if she did, she will be safe.”

There are several strategies that the DLSAs mentioned providing to the TVI and classroom teacher to build a relationship with the family. One example was to use multiple opportunities to build reassurance for families that their child with a
visual impairment can be successful in life as well as take the opportunity to learn more of the culture.

_Some terms are lost in translation; DLSAs have to be creative to provide information in a meaningful way._ DLSAs found themselves in difficult situations in their roles. During language interpretation portions of their work, they found that there are words that do not exist in the first language that may appear in special reports. The participants stated that they used examples from their own experiences to translate and provide a parallel example for parents to have a common ground to connect to. The translation process was also sensitive to the many different terms that may have synonyms and require the DLSA to be deliberate in the choice of term so as to not alter the meaning and also be mindful of how a parent may react as it could have a negative connotation. For example, the DLSA from a Korean background stated that, “a term that is often used is disability, when translated in Korean, there are two different terms, where one has more negative meaning and the other one doesn't.”

**Common Themes**

The data gathered during the three focus group discussions revealed some commonalities within the themes shared by all three groups. The following four areas represent these commonalities and are an indication of starting places for improving the collaborative relationship of DLSAs, TVIs, and classroom teachers in improving supports to students with visual impairment and their families. There were also differences in themes amount of focus on different themes related to the learning team relationship. These contrasts will be discussed further in Chapter 5 as
they specifically relate to the research questions of the study. Table 8 provides examples from all three focus group discussions that support the common themes.

Table 8

Common Themes Among Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Themes</th>
<th>TVI</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>DLSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Need to have Clarification of Roles between DLSA and Translators</td>
<td>- “DLSAs don’t want to be called “an interpreter”</td>
<td>- “Didn’t know they existed”</td>
<td>- “I also moonlight as an interpreter for the CBE and our role is to do direct interpretation of what the teachers say and what”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “They didn’t want to be called in when only interpretation is required”</td>
<td>- “I didn’t know there was someone who could support me”</td>
<td>- “Very restrictive when translating”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Working with different people interpreting all the time”</td>
<td>- “if they are new in Canada and new to the system, it would be nice we had someone else to speak to like a diversity worker”</td>
<td>- “DLSAs can ask for clarification”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Inclusion of Cultural Understanding around Visual Impairments and the Students with a Visual Impairment’s Education Experiences</td>
<td>“Diversity worker was able to tell the student was that he shouldn’t marry first cousins, it was an aha moment.”</td>
<td>- “Understand in the context of classroom”</td>
<td>- “Faith has to be taken into account and make them understand that its ok for a child to be visually impaired”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Even if they are in a certain culture doesn’t mean they react the same way.”</td>
<td>- “Build stronger connection with parent involvement and teacher in school and other specialist”</td>
<td>- “Use what they are to teach/talk to them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We cannot paint everybody with the same brush just because they have that (culture) commonality.”</td>
<td>- “Give broader picture of who the student”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Themes</td>
<td>TVI</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>DLSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms are often Lost in Translation which has produced some Feelings of Disconnect in the IEP Discussions</td>
<td>“Some of our terminology is complex and we should say it in very plain English.” “I wasn’t sure exactly how things were being communicated and translated or if was getting lost in translation.”</td>
<td>- “Things get lost in translation by the time you are trying to explain something and you get cut off” - “It’s very removed and static and it just take such a long time to say what they need to say”</td>
<td>- “Sometimes things translated in Korean can have 2 different terms and it can translate into different meanings”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Relationship building among IEP Team Members (Classroom Teachers and TVIs) and Families who are CLD with Students with a Visual Impairment</td>
<td>- “Struggle to deal with classroom teachers, we are in such a different point of view” - I don’t know where to start with diversity worker, if they have any idea with a blind child.”</td>
<td>“Vision teacher might not be fully briefed of what that child’s expectations in inclusive environment “Work as a team, because the student will be spending most of their time in classroom”</td>
<td>- “Vision strategist and teacher try to gain more knowledge of culture to help student with reassurance for family” - “Talk to the vision strategist, and teacher, and other agencies.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A need to have clarification of roles between DLSA and interpreters.** The need to have clarification over language interpreters and DLSAs were mentioned frequently in all three groups. Although the CBE has documentation available to school teams, even the DLSAs found it difficult to have to explain their own roles and responsibilities over and over again to different service units.
Communication and relationship building among IEP team members.

Communication and relationship building were key components throughout the three groups as it was important to be able to convey each group’s thoughts and opinions about their own roles in the IEP for the student with visual impairment who is CLD. TVIs, classroom teachers, and DLSAs were able to pinpoint and provide examples of how each group was important but found communication to break down in some instances or be difficult to facilitate. While each group tended to focus on different learning team members in terms of communication needs, the commonality of the general theme highlights a need to find ways to strengthen communication.

Communication and inclusion of cultural understanding around visual impairments and the students with visual impairment’s education experiences. The focus group participants found it crucial for DLSAs to inquire and probe families who are CLD around their point of view about having a child with a VI. The groups felt that it was important for DLSAs to broker information between their native culture and mainstream cultural belief systems in understanding education experiences of students with visual impairments who are CLD. This is further supported with TVIs and classroom teachers sharing similar responses in supporting the need to have to DLSAs be able to share information in a cultural context.

Terms are often lost in translation which has produced some feelings of disconnect in the IEP discussions. Responses from TVIs and classroom teachers were very similar in having feelings of disconnect in the translation process during
IEP meetings. This was further supported by DLSAs who stated that certain terms were not able to be translated because they do not exist in their native language. They often would use examples to provide a context for families who are CLD to understand. The process of trying to convey pertinent information about the student with a visual impairment to the family is important information for TVIs, classroom teachers and other IEP members to understand. It may be one of the reasons that interpretation appears to be longer than the original content relayed in English.
Chapter 5 – Discussion

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Helen Keller

This study explored how the role of the DLSA changed within learning teams who are working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with visual impairments and their families. Discussions in the focus groups were directly related to the role of the DLSA, with several commonalities as well as differences evolving. The focus group discussions were platforms for each group to share successes in the educational stories of students with a visual impairment who are CLD and their families. The discussions uncovered areas of growth and achievement that indicate these three groups need to plan and continue to work towards an intentional and meaningful collaborative relationship. Each group has an impact on the support of students with a visual impairment who are CLD and their families; however, together the impact is felt on a deeper level that brings cultural understanding and the melding of mainstream culture’s “new” ideas of education to existing culture’s “old” to create a unique experience.

The research questions provided a basis for the guiding questions used in the focus group discussions. The data that was generated from the discussions formed themes that were seen throughout all the groups and can be related back to the main questions posed as the premise of the study.

Research Question One

Several questions posed during the focus group discussions targeted the research question: How are the perspectives of the stakeholders (DLSAs, TVIs, and classroom teachers) the same or different when reflecting on the collaborative nature
of the learning team? Each of the focus groups were very clear in their role and had similar reflections on when they are trying to build a relationship with the family who is CLD and have a child with a visual impairment. The focus groups felt that there was a need to share information and involve parents in the IEP process along with an understanding of what their child is learning.

Specific roles on the learning team were important and there was a mutual respect held for all different members of the learning team. The classroom teachers’ role was to convey the curriculum to any student in their classroom, the TVIs were mandated to teach the ECC to students with a VI, and the DLSAs were available upon a referral process to intervene on situations that involved a cultural perspective.

There was a consensus among the three groups that the integration of cultural understanding and personal experiences of the family are important to maintain a working relationship around the learning needs of the student with a visual impairment who is CLD. The classroom teachers and TVIs both felt that initial success in building a relationship with parents was achieved through some type of language intervention from a language translator or a DLSA. This was important because it allowed parents to understand what the school experiences and expectations are for the student and in turn share some school experiences that student with a visual impairment had. It also allowed them to know what information parents knew or understood of their child’s visual impairment and, for teachers, what learning experiences the child had before entering school.

The difference of perspectives between the groups stemmed from the various levels of involvement in direct interaction with the family and student with
a visual impairment. Classroom teachers and TVIs worked directly with students and families, and wanted to find ways to enhance student learning and the school experience. Whereas, the DLSAs stated that they work with families in order to secure supports and to “understand the Canadian school system.”

TVIs and DLSAs were often in contact to discuss cultural differences around a student with a visual impairment who was CLD to provide information for each other as needed. However, the classroom teacher focus group did not draw any connections nor did they have many experiences involving the DLSA. The classroom teachers were willing to use the DLSAs as a resource more often if they were more aware of their services.

**Research Question Two**

Another aspect of the focus group discussion revolved around the research question: *In what ways can teachers of students with visual impairments and school learning teams assist the Diversity and Learning support advisor to provide accurate information and build a reciprocating relationship with students with visual impairments and their families who are culturally and linguistically diverse?* Themes related to this question emerged in two different ways: what TVIs might do to support DLSA understanding of disability specific information and what the DLSA viewed as important for classroom teachers and TVIs to do to create a reciprocating relationship culturally.

Since there was a significant amount of ambiguity around the role definition of a DLSA and a language interpreter, few suggestions were put forth by TVIs and classroom teachers in building an open relationship to share information. Once TVIs
and classroom teachers are made aware of how DLSAs could build their cultural competency, there would be the potential of discussions and a reciprocating relationship among all three groups. TVIs felt that they had a lot of technical information to share with DLSAs around visual impairments in order to provide an accurate picture for parents around their child's learning needs. However, the TVI group stated that it was important for them to create a relationship first, then have DLSAs culturally liaise opportunities for the TVI to introduce skills that would help their child succeed.

DLSAs explained that it was crucial for TVIs and classroom teachers to continue to build the “self-confidence and assurance to parents that the student with a visual impairment could achieve success in life and beyond.” Research (Berg, 2013) has shown that a cross-cultural framework would help provide effective interactions among professionals. Some examples of incorporating a cross-cultural framework includes use of dual language story books, projects and opportunities that allow students to share their cultural heritage (Moyer & Clymer, 2009). The themes that were developed from the focus group discussion have indicated that classroom teachers and TVIs are willing to become more culturally competent and require the correct guidance to do so.

**Research Question Three**

The final research question that guided the types of questions posed during the focus groups asked: *How does the work of a Diversity and Learning Support Advisor (DLSA) change when interacting with a family with a child with a visual impairment?* DLSAs initially did not find or view that their work changed. However,
as discussion progressed, focus group questions one and three (see Table 1) drew out examples of situations where DLSAs had to change their approach to work with families who are CLD with a child with a visual impairment. DLSAs disclosed that in all three cultures (East Indian, Korean and Chinese) parents did not generally accept help in the form of “counseling or additional parenting courses” for themselves as it is seen as failure to be able to parent. To combat this frame of mind from parents, the DLSAs have used analogies and positive language to frame the visual impairment in a different light for the family. For example, “god has given you the gift of this child, and entrusted you to nurture him/her.”

The DLSAs also noted that their role has differed from an intervention process to a referral process. They have provided advice and individual action plans for families; however, since they are not knowledgeable to services around the visual impairment community, there is a lot of conversation and teamwork with the TVIs to understand the needs of the student and family and then seek out specific community supports.

**Implications of the Commonality Across Themes**

As described in Chapter 4, the data analysis process of the three discussions helped to uncover four common themes, which reoccurred throughout the transcription data. These themes have an impact on the work that the groups do within the school board with each other and with families who are CLD with a child who has a visual impairment. The themes provide some direction into considerations to make during future partnerships to create clarity on how each
group provides support in the educational growth of the student with visual impairment who is CLD and their families.

**A need to have clarification of roles between DLSA and translators.**

All three focus groups found that a there was a need to clarify the differences in roles and responsibilities of the DLSA and translators. Classroom teachers found it difficult to differentiate between the two roles and often pieced together their understanding of their roles through different experiences that they had with students who were CLD and their families through translation services or students with visual impairments who were CLD. TVIs had a slightly more in-depth understanding of the DLSA role, through various professional development opportunities and direct discussions around students with visual impairment on their caseloads; however, they were concerned with different translators coming to support the team during the IEP process rather then having DLSA support.

The confusion or roles could lead to a mismanagement of how DLSAs are being utilized and deployed to IEP teams compared to when translation services would be sufficient, which could potentially stall the processing time to have appropriate strategies in place for students. It is interesting to note that DLSAs found it difficult to keep explaining their role as being different from translators. The DLSA’s work stems from an intervention process or procedure; they are requested when there is problem where cultural brokering is required on behalf of the school perspective to the family perspective or vice versa. This dilemma presents the need to have specific clarification for DLSAs to present themselves and their services to the school board, and an ability of the team to be able to identify a
need for cultural brokering. The DLSA team members bring many previous experiences from their former careers working with families and could draw connections to when their services are required when schools complete a referral form to request services of a DLSA.

If TVIs and classroom teachers are not able to differentiate between the two roles, it is possible that other service units would also be confused. To supplement the school board documents that already exist, it may be useful to create explanatory or decision-making documents in the format of a flow chart or a presentation that would outline specific examples of how each role is to be used.

A subtheme that surfaced from this role specification was the need to have more DLSAs available to provide cultural brokering opportunities that are reflective of discussions around IEPs with families who are CLD that would be in the “moment” as it happens during IEP meetings. The investment into having more DLSAs available for schools provide IEP team members authentic experiences of cultural understanding and the opportunity to clarify with parents right away.

If there are more resources, available then the review of how services provided could be better maintained for the integrity of their role. To address the shortage of DLSAs, some translators may have qualities to move into the DLSA role.

Research has indicated that there is a need to have more cultural brokering opportunities for translators (Conroy, 2012; Gallimore, 2005).

It is important to highlight that the DLSA role is specific to CBE. The specialization and creation of the DLSA role indicates the school board’s acknowledgment that professionals having experience working with children in
their native country are vital to providing the cultural bridge to families who are CLD and could be newcomers to Canada. Other school boards who recognize the need for cultural brokers, however, may still benefit from the distinctions of roles and importance of having both type of roles available.

**Communication and relationship building among IEP team members.**

The collective experiences between the three groups (classroom teachers, TVIs, and DLSAs) were mostly positive. TVIs and DLSAs already have a continuous relationship as they meet as required and repeatedly in regards to students with visual impairment who are CLD over a period of time. The growth of the relationship has recently increased with a larger population of students with visual impairment entering the school system. There is no hesitation in contacting DLSAs for assistance with the increasing need to have cultural understanding of visual impairment in their native cultures. The relationship is mutually rewarding as it provides information for DLSAs to learn more about visual impairments and services from the TVIs as well.

DLSAs did not really comment on the relationship between classroom teachers and saw that the work they performed was focused on the process of cultural brokering for the student and their family in meetings and in securing outside resources. DLSAs do not enter into classrooms to provide direct support to students who have English language learning (ELL) needs and who are CLD. Direct support in the classroom can be requested through other service units that help ELL learners and resources from school administration teams.
The relationship between TVIs and classroom teachers in the focus group discussions was more apprehensive. Both groups found that there were situations that caused disconnect in communication, which stemmed from the different responsibilities each role had in the education of students with visual impairment who are CLD. There are multiple reasons that disconnect could happen, since this is a small focus group discussion this apprehension is limited to the personal experiences of the TVIs and classroom teachers. However, while this finding may not directly relate to students with visual impairment who are CLD, it does suggest that a closer look may need to occur in regard to how the TVI and classroom teacher attempt to build a mutually respectful relationship so that they are more able to jointly address specific needs related to a student with visual impairment being CLD when they arise.

It is interesting to note that the work that DLSAs do may cause conflict among other service units. DLSAs are trying to provide community connections as well as provide understanding to families who are unaware of how the education system works, and they are allowed to advocate for families on their behalf. DLSAs have commented that they are cautious in how to convey thoughts and opinions to colleagues in respect to their specialization. DLSAs have stated that they “advocate for parents who don’t even know what questions to ask.” DLSAs work in a delicate balance as they often will have to advocate for parents who do not understand the school system and still be accountable for their work to the school board in intervening in situations within a cultural perspective. Another complexity within the DLSAs role is to provide cultural brokering while avoiding stereotypical or over-
generalizations of cultural viewpoints (e.g., general assumptions about children with special needs within the culture). They must keep in mind that the family, even though from the same culture, may have differing viewpoints from the DLSA that need to be interpreted and understand by the team.

This brings to light the complexities of services and relationships. It highlights how important it is to address the process and reason for cultural brokering among service units. Cultural competency and sensitivity has the potential to cause some friction in processes that are already in place within a school board. Flexibility on part of all team members to make a situation accessible to families who are CLD is imperative.

**Communication and inclusion of cultural understanding around visual impairments and the students with visual impairment’s education experiences.** All focus groups felt that there was a need to incorporate more personal experiences around education from students with visual impairment who are CLD and their families to build the cultural understanding for educators who work with them. The work of navigating between native culture and mainstream cultural belief systems was seen by classroom teachers and TVIs who felt that it would be a starting point for them to create the communication process.

Education experiences are unique to individuals and it is difficult to try to fit a new school system’s beliefs into pre-existing routines and expectations for families who are CLD. Cultural brokering in the education field is a complicated process because the exchange of information also brings expectations of elements of change from both the school and families.
The intervention process of the DLSA team is also expected to create a stronger connection to parent involvement with teachers in schools, TVIs and other IEP team members, and the community. One of the roles that DLSAs have is to build the capacity of school staff with families. This could empower staff to increase their cultural competency and build cross-cultural activities within the abilities of the school. Finding ways for DLSAs to do this more frequently would be beneficial.

There was also unanimous agreement that there is a need to know how visual impairments are viewed in the native culture of the student with a VI who is CLD. The interactions with cultural cues that students with a visual impairment who are CLD learn affect how they grow and progress as learners (Conroy, 2012). This information also provides a foundation for TVIs to create lessons that are culturally sensitive to the student. It would be important that students with a visual impairment are provided opportunities in multiple ways to build a relationship with their classroom teacher and TVI. The student needs to see that their learning is built around a community that is specific to their needs (Chu, 2012). The building of the community for the student also extends to families. The DLSA’s unique position allows them promote what the school thinks is important to parents. DLSAs can also do the same with parents by conveying their cultural viewpoints to the school; this creates an interpersonal relationship, which strengthens the community for the student (Jung, 2011).

Student needs and learning strategies could be communicated through DLSAs on behalf of the school to families. DLSAs have permission to seek and advocate on behalf of the families and school, which would allow families to have a
greater understanding of services that are provided to their child with a visual impairment and provide their viewpoint to back to the school.

**Terms are often lost in translation which has produced some feelings of disconnect in the IEP discussions.** The three groups all found that terms were often lost in translation that left members not fully able to trust in the process of the IEP meeting. TVIs have self reflected as a group that they need to use language that is simplified in order for non-experts to be able to understand. One way that this can be completed is a creation of a simple glossary of terms or an in-service package around the student with a VI to provide clarity.

Another way that information can be provided in a timely manner is having more face-to-face meetings and emails to convey information and allow questions to be answered as needed. However, a barrier that is part of the work is the lack of resources that is available for TVIs and DLSAs. There are not enough DLSAs for the student needs that exist. More et al., (2013) outlined detailed strategies that would help to provide guidance with interactions with language translators that could be directed towards DLSAs. These strategies included setting ground rules of how the translation process should flow, and conducting multiple meetings with the language translator before the parent meeting to make sure that terms and discussion topics are understood.

**Implications for Practice**

Based on the focus group discussions around the research questions and the commonalities and differences of the themes that emerged, the following lists contain recommendations that would support the continued development of strong
learning support teams when working with students with visual impairment who are CLD and their families.

Suggestions for Classroom Teachers:

- Participate in the referral process to access DLSAs who can provide professional development opportunities or discussions to understand the implications of the student with a visual impairment ‘s cultural beliefs and norms.

- Request meetings with the TVI to understand the implications on learning for the student with a visual impairment who is CLD.

- Ensure that goals are set out in the IEP document that clearly outline both classroom teachers and TVIs roles and working relationship.

- Look for opportunities to include a cultural aspect in curriculum.

- Have discussions with the student who has a visual impairment and is CLD to find out their experiences in learning.

Suggestions for TVIs:

- Create an in-service that introduces the student with a visual impairment and key considerations to provide to the DLSA and classroom teacher. This way the DLSA has time to prepare explanations if they do not exist in their native language.

- Create a list of terms that are often used and related to visual impairments for DLSAs to find language and cultural equivalents.

- Clearly outline the role and responsibilities that TVIs have within the school board for classroom teachers and DLSAs.
- Request meetings with DLSAs as needed to understand the cultural implications for a student with a visual impairment.
- Have discussions with the student who has a visual impairment and is CLD to find out their experiences in learning.

Suggestions for DLSAs:

- Create a brochure/flow chart of how services differ between DLSA and language translators for schools to access services more effectively and efficiently.
- Clearly provide the differing cultural viewpoints from parents to other team members and vice versa at the beginning of meetings and continue with the cultural exchange during meetings; so that all team members are engaging at the same level of understanding.
- Provide professional development opportunities/workshops for classroom teachers and other service units to engage in the practice of increasing their level of cultural competency.
- Seek out information from the TVI about aspects of visual impairment that are not clear.
- Set up a chart that describes the process of how DLSAs set up their IEP or family meetings that provides explanations of before, during, after meeting strategies that they use to provide accountability to their work (More, et al., 2013)
- Documentation and follow up meetings with IEP team and supervisors if DLSAs feel that that they are in an uncomfortable situation with a family.
Beyond specific implications targeting the three focus groups studied, results have implications for the broader system that uses DLSAs. A clarification of the DLSA role and their responsibilities by the school board would allow for greater understanding and lead to better use of the service. This process of clarifying roles can be used in other areas of the school board beyond working with students with visual impairments and their families who are CLD. In addition, the consideration by the school board to invest resources to expand the number of available DLSAs would provide additional opportunities to build cultural understanding and competency in a more authentic manner within the school community.

**Researcher Perspective**

The focus group discussions were very informative and provided opportunities to self reflect on the role that I have as a TVI. It was interesting to participate in the focus group discussion as a moderator as I am tasked to move the discussion along and gather responses to the focus group questions. I was able to empathize with TVIs and classroom teachers. Through their responses I could also see how these two groups of professionals could have a difficult time in understanding the cultural complexities that the family had.

Often there was doubt cast on whether parents understood the IEP process and if the assessments that TVIs and classroom teachers performed were truthful and authentic based on the student’s ability. This doubt also transferred onto parent teacher conferences with the appearance of different language translators versus DLSAs.
The specialized role and responsibilities of the DLSA was designed to benefit families who are CLD and school learning teams; however, there are not enough DLSAs to help with multiple needs that could occur in the school board.

It is also interesting to note, that some ethnic values that were described in the DLSA focus group were very similar to ones that I had experienced growing up within the Chinese community. TVI and classroom teachers as well as school-based professionals have often asked for clarification of norms, to which I was able to assist in explaining. This provided me reassurance that the information was correct.

Limitations of the Study

It is imperative to discuss some limitations of this study. One limitation was the number of participants in the focus groups. Traditionally focus groups range between 6-8 participants, however this study only had 3-4 participants in each group. The small number of participants is due to the highly specialized roles and criteria that the study required. There are only a small number of TVIs in the geographical area and DLSAs are specific to the CBE school board. The criteria for classroom teachers also reduced the pool, as they must have worked with a student with a visual impairment who is CLD and had interactions with DLSAs. While findings of this study do cannot be considered to generalize outside of the context of the CBE, the main themes are informative to other situations in terms of supporting students with visual impairment and CLD through cultural brokering. Another limitation was that the data collection and analysis was centered around written notes and discussion transcriptions by a third party individual. There may have been important physical cues that participants displayed which may indicate their
discomfort or reactions to other group members. Finally, the study’s findings would have been strengthened by the inclusion of a parent focus group.
References


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culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities.


Appendix A

Classroom Teacher
Demographic Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please complete the demographic questionnaire.

Please note that the information collected in this questionnaire is confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research study. Your name will not be attached to any results or data from the study.

Code Number: ___________________

Name: _________________________

My gender is: ________ Female    _________ Male

My age is: _______ 23-30 _______ 31-40 ________ 41-50 _______ 50 +

What is your ethnic background? ____________________

What grade/subject do you teach? ______________________________

How long have you been a teacher? _______________

Have you taught in any other countries other than Canada? _________

If yes, have you had the opportunity to work with students with visual impairments in that/those countries?

How many students with a visual impairment have you had in your class? Do you know what ethnic background they are from?

When do you require the services a diversity advisor? How often do you meet with the diversity advisor?

How does the service level of a diversity advisor change for students with visual impairments who are culturally and linguistically diverse?
Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI)
Demographic Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please complete the demographic questionnaire.

Please note that the information collected in this questionnaire is confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research study. Your name will not be attached to any results or data from the study.

Code Number: ______________________

Name: ____________________________

My gender is: _______ Female ________ Male

My age is: _______ 23-30 _______ 31-40 _______ 41-50 _______ 50 +

What grade/subject do you teach? ________________________________

What is your ethnic background? ____________________________

How long have you been a TVI? __________________________

Have you taught in any other countries other than Canada? __________

If yes, have you had the opportunity to work with students with visual impairments in that/those countries?

When do you require the services a diversity advisor? How often do you meet with the diversity advisor?

In what capacity does the diversity advisor assist you with students and families?
Diversity Advisor
Demographic Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please complete the demographic questionnaire.

Please note that the information collected in this questionnaire is confidential and will only be used for the proposes of this research study.

Name: ____________________________

My gender is: _______ Female _________ Male

My age is: ________ 23-30 _______ 31-40 _________ 41-50 ______ 50 +

What is your ethnic background?

In what languages do you provide language interpretation/translation?

Can you briefly describe your work experience before becoming a Diversity advisor with CBE?

How long have you been a Diversity Advisor? What are some general responsibilities of a Diversity Advisor?

Can you provide a brief description as to why you wanted to be a Diversity Advisor?

How many students with visual impairments have you worked with since being a diversity advisor?

Do you currently work with a student with visual impairments? And/or when did you last work with a student with visual impairments?

How often do you meet with the families of students with visual impairments?

In what capacity do you help the student and family?

Have you had the opportunity to work with students with visual impairments in your native country?