

# Individual Placement and Review Committee Process:

## Perceptions of Parents of Students Who Are Both Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Autistic

### Abstract

The purpose of this mixed methods action research pilot study was to examine the parent's perceptions about participation in the Individual Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process for their deaf/hard of hearing and autistic child. A survey and interview revealed a lack of inclusion by the school of the parent.

### Introduction

There is a population of students within the education system who present with a unique set of strengths and challenges. They are a low-incidence group yet each student, like all other students, are entitled to equitable access to education. Students who are both deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) and have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) do not receive consistent and comparable support across the school boards and Canadian provinces (Parekh & Brown, 2018). The IPRC process in Ontario is similar to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) outlined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which is mandated federally in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a). For information on the similarities and differences between the IPRC process in Ontario as compared to the IEP process in the U.S., follow the QR located at the bottom for a detailed comparison.

#### ASD

1 in 50 children & youth aged 1-17, based on data collected in 2019 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022)

#### DHH

- No definitive estimates in the school age population (Millett, 2019)
- 7.7% of children between the ages of 6-19 had some degree of hearing loss in one or both ears according to a cross-sectional population based 2017 study (Feder et al., 2017).

#### ASD & DHH

No conclusive data regarding the prevalence of hearing loss among individuals who have autism (Beers et al. 2013). Some studies have noted a higher prevalence of autism in children with hearing loss (Fitzpatrick et al. 2014). It has been difficult to gain consensus and compile data regarding prevalence in this area (Nelson & Bruce, 2019).

There is very limited data in the current literature related to parents' perceptions about their participation in the IPRC placement process for their deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) and autistic (ASD) child, and so this study was aimed at addressing this problem. Understanding the perspectives of these parents may reveal important information about possible barriers to parent participation for other families and administrators looking to improve parent participation in the IPRC placement process for children dually diagnosed with DHH and ASD.

The **purpose statement** for this action research was to describe the process involved in the referral, identification, and placement for a parent of a deaf autistic student from a public school in Ontario, Canada.

This action research was guided by one **research question**: if I interview and collect data from one parent of a student who is deaf/hard of hearing and has autism, and who has participated in the IPRC placement process, in what way, if any, will the information and feedback lead to changes in the interview instrument?

- What placement and outcome were parents hoping for during the IPRC process and were their preferences satisfied?  
Sub question 1- How much consideration did the parents feel their input and preferences were given during the IPRC process?
- In what way did the parent feel the school was able to meet their child's complex educational needs?

Elyza Z. Polsky  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jamie Doronkin

### Literature Review

Research in this area is relatively new. "There is a significant lack of evidence guiding our understanding of the needs of families of children who are deaf/hard of hearing (Deaf/HH) with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)" (Wiley et al., 2018, p.378). It is necessary to draw on findings from studies that focus on students with autism, students with hearing loss, and students with other co-occurring conditions, due to the limited research available specific students who are both DHH/ASD. Parents are key collaborators in their child's education and they provide essential information for the school staff when discussions are made regarding placement intervention (Kurth et al., 2020). There is limited research however into the parents' perspectives of the IPRC process specific to the field of education of DHH/ASD students. Research examining the perspectives of parents of students who are autistic, DHH, or who have other co-occurring conditions have focused on prevalence, power imbalance, collaboration, barriers and facilitators to parental participation, and placement issues. These areas of focus have been useful in organizing the investigation in the DHH/ASD research as well.

### Methodology

#### Setting

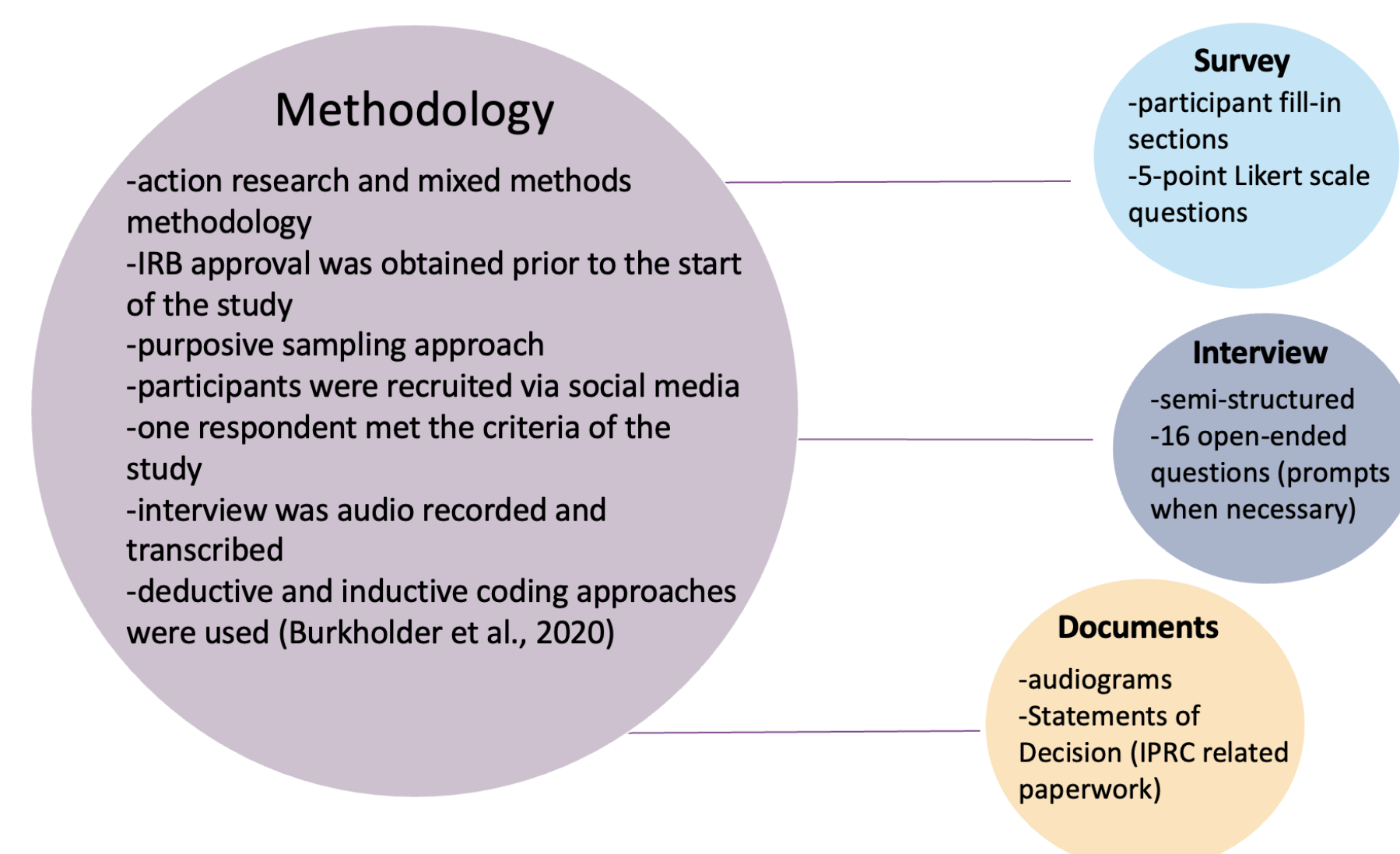
- province in central Canada
- both French and English public-school boards

#### Inclusion Criteria

- parents of children with both hearing loss and autism
- must have participated in their children's initial IPRC meeting in which the placement was discussed and decided

#### Sample

- mother of a child who has both hearing loss and autism
- at the time of the study, 11 years had passed since the *first* initial IPRC, which took place in kindergarten
- due to circumstances, there were two additional initial IPRCs, one in grade 6 and one in grade 8



This study used a **QUAL-quan model** in which the qualitative data generated by the open-ended interview were more heavily weighted than the quantitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both the qualitative data and the quantitative data were necessary in their support for the other, however, given the focus of the study was on the parent's perceptions, the rich data which resulted from the interview were the most effective way to investigate the topic.

### Results

The Likert-scale survey only had one statement that received a strong response. The participant responded 'strongly disagree' when asked if they felt comfortable asking questions during the IPRC meeting. The survey did not directly address whether or not the parent's preferences were satisfied. It did reveal that the parent had positive feelings towards the placement being appropriate. This was not in agreement with the information received from the interview. The results of the survey could not be evaluated because of the small sample size. It was, however, helpful towards establishing the validity of the study as they were used to triangulate the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

These four themes emerged during the interview.

- Parent Assumes New and Additional Roles to Meet Their Child's Special Education
- Parent's Feelings Towards School's Management of Their Child's Special Education Needs
- Challenges Facing the Parent During The IPRC Meeting
- Systems, Processes and Execution of the IPRC Meeting

The research question specific to the pilot study focused on information and feedback collected from the participant in order to lead to changes in the interview instrument. An example of specific feedback which will be resulting in change to the protocol relates to the multiple initial IPRC meetings. The participant attended three initial IPRC meetings, which was not something anticipated by the researcher when developing the protocol. The interview protocol including the survey will have to be updated to reflect the possibility of having more than one initial IPRC meeting.

Many of the comments and patterns noted during the interview were in keeping with those found in previous research conducted with similar populations of students and families. The participant in this study noted the lack of school personnel's knowledge of her son's exceptionalities, a finding discussed in research conducted by Kurth et al. (2020). Comments relating to the power imbalance were also a pattern found in this action research study and were similar to those discussed in earlier studies found on similar populations.

Conducting a pilot study provided an opportunity to not only determine if changes were necessary to the interview protocol based on participant feedback, but also to allow for the researcher to implement the entire study methodology and reflect on the process. Lessons learned in this process were both takeaways for improvement in the future as well as reflections on aspects which were successful and merit replication.

### Conclusion

This action research pilot study provided a glimpse into a Canadian parent's perspective of the IPRC process. The Canadian perspective is unique in that it is legislated provincially and not federally. The focus of this study was even more distinctive in that it discussed a low-incidence population of students who are both deaf and autistic. The researcher demonstrated the need for investigating this group of students and their families, supported by the national and situational context and the existing literature. The researcher's personal context was shared as a form of support for the need to explore the topic as well as their reflexivity. The research questions were reflected upon and answered through the analysis of the results. Ultimately the main goal and focus of this study was achieved. Having interviewed and collected data from a parent of a student who is both deaf and autistic and who has participated in the IPRC process, the researcher has been able to use the feedback and information to inform change in the interview instrument.

IRB #FBUIRB12152023-EP

Scan the QR to learn more about this pilot study.

