

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #4 Transcript – Diana Autin

Marshall: Diana, a lot of your work is focused on addressing some of the cultural and linguistic barriers that interfere with the delivery of effective educational programs. What are some of the issues that you see related to race, culture, economic position that have bearing on the work that we're doing in dispute resolution?

Diana: I could talk about that for a long time because there are so many impacts that differences in race, and class, and language, and immigrant status have. First, on access to quality education services, but then we talk about the likelihood of disputes arising and how disputes get resolved. Issues around power. So when we work with families who are immigrant families or families that don't have financial resources, or families that have faced discrimination, maybe who have had very negative educational experiences themselves. The...difficulties that they face entrusting a system that is educating their child, in believing that that system is really intending to do the right thing by their child interferes, I think, sometimes with the development of positive relationships and causes, can cause conflict. When families don't have resources, unfortunately sometimes school districts take advantage of them. And there are a lot of reasons why that's true, I mean, you know there's growing economic burden on school districts, many school districts are cutting back all kinds of services and frankly it's easier to cut back or to not to involve a family than it is to just plow forward and do what it is you want to do or make the cuts that you that you feel you have to make, make the decisions that you feel you have to make. So, it's easier to do that though with families who don't have resources. You're not going to with a family that can go out and purchase an attorney, you're going to do that to a family who can't go out and purchase an attorney or who doesn't know what their rights are in the system. So particularly for immigrant families and often undocumented immigrant families, who in their country of origin, perhaps their children with disabilities don't even have a right to an education. They come to the United States, they don't know what to expect. They may go to their IEP or IFSP meeting year after year and sign off on whatever is put in front of them not really understanding or having the kind of expectations they should have about the services that would benefit their young child or their, their school aged child with

a disability. One of the experiences that we have had is immigrant families that become educated and now come to the IEP table and disagree with the school system for the first time, that are sometimes threatened by school personnel who are very unused to this kind of assertive behavior on their part and particularly if you're an undocumented immigrant family, even if you're an immigrant family in this age of anti-immigrant sentiment around the country, it can be very, it can feel very threatening and they can become very fearful and the word may spread that perhaps you shouldn't exercise your rights, or you shouldn't be an assertive parent, you shouldn't have high expectations for your child, because if you do there may be negative repercussions.