

# Make it Count:

## Five Overlooked Conflict Prevention and Resolution Practices



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# Olden Times

no.203.078

THE WORLDS OLDEST NEWSPAPER

- since 1879 -

## IDEA Dispute Resolution Practices



1. Due Process\*

2. Mediation

3. State  
Complaint  
Procedures

*\* Resolution Meeting must follow within 15 days of request.*

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white rectangular card. The hand is positioned behind the card, with the fingers visible at the top and bottom edges. The card contains the title 'Session Objectives' and a numbered list of four objectives. The background is plain white.

# Session Objectives

1. Present 5 Promising Conflict Prevention and Resolution Practices.
2. Discuss the research behind these overlooked practices.
3. Apply the implementation of the practices to the field of special education dispute resolution.
4. Access resources designed to utilize the practices.

# 5

## What Are the BIG Five?

1. **Include Fathers** as Active Team Members
2. Understand the **Role of an Advocate**
3. Create Pre-Service and Educator **Professional Development Opportunities**
4. Use the **Facilitated IEP Toolbox**
5. Implement **Student-Facilitated IEP Meetings**

# The Odd Man Out: Including Fathers as Active Team Members



# The Odd Man Out: Including Fathers as Active Team Members

- Moral guide
- Teacher
- Role model
- Protector
- Disciplinarian
- Caregivers
- Coach

*The “Modern Father”*





# Father Research: What we do know...

Carpenter and Towers (2008) qualitative study of 21 fathers

- Fathers felt “invisible” to educators
- Spoke of strong emotional bond with their children, a commitment to finding resources, and the need to become a strong advocate.
- Barriers included: employment, educators acting “exclusive” with mothers during meetings, and a lack of knowledge about the system.

# Head Start initiative Research About Father Involvement

Barriers to father involvement include:

- **Predominately female** staff
- Feeling “**unwelcome**”
- Environment **not** “father friendly,”
- **Lack of** knowledge about practices that encourage father involvement
- Female staff “**reluctance**” to work with fathers.
- Other deterrents include: **demographic characteristic** (e.g., employment, incarceration, marital status, and disjointed relations with mothers).



# Characteristics of Head Start Programs that Do Promote Father Involvement

- Employ **male staff**
- Allow staff time and resources for **father recruitment**
- “**Open**” to father involvement
- **Invite** fathers
- Philosophy that staff should “**bring the lens** of father involvement to their practice”

Raikes, H., Boller, K., van Kammen, W., & Summers, J. (2002). *Father involvement in Early Head Start programs: A practitioners study*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska.



# Research Method

- We began with a pilot study
  - Survey
  - 131 fathers participated
  - Identified barriers & “active” fathers had a lot to say
- Current Study
  - Qualitative phenomenology
  - Telephone Interviews
  - Interview Protocol

# Participants

- 20 “ active” fathers of a child with a disability.
- Experience with the special education system ranged from 1- 24 years.

Married	Bachelors degrees	Graduate degrees	Worked 40 hours a week	Spouse worked outside of the home.
19/20	9/20	8/20	19/20	13/20



# Data Analysis

Open, Axial, & Selective Coding:

- Identified concepts within the text
- Ensured mutual agreement
- Selected quotes to illustrate the themes
- Member check with 4 fathers

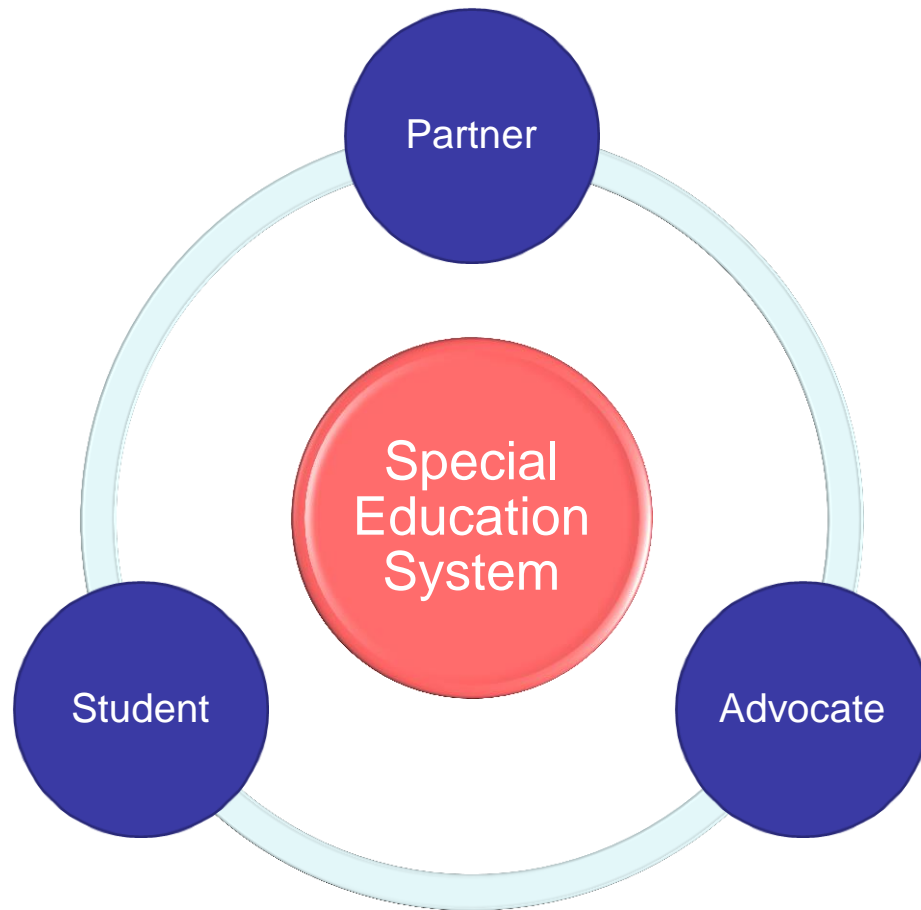
# Data Analysis

Two Major Categories Emerged:

- Fathers' Perceived Roles
- Fathers' Experiences



# Finding 1: The Odd Man Out Has 3 Pivotal Roles





# The “Odd Man Out”

*“I absolutely feel like I’m the **odd man out**, and I’m talking a different language coming from a guy’s point of view.... It’s both in general and obviously it’s more difficult because I’m not the one on the front lines. I think if I were the one that had the day-to-day relationship with the teachers, it might be different, but my wife has that.... and so, I just kind of feel like a wart.”*

# The “Odd Man Out”

*“It’s really a very uncomfortable and not always an enjoyable place for males to be. But, it’s essential. It’s an essential piece of your child’s world. So, I think males, men are often **on the outs of it** with that because... sometimes we’re **on the outs looking in** on some of this, so I think there’s a real challenge for fathers to try to, you know, get inside, get connected to their child..... “*

I'M NOT SURE WHY MR. BARTH  
ALWAYS FEELS COMPELLED  
TO BRING AN ADVOCATE TO  
THE IEP MEETING.



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OUTNUMBERED?

# Finding 2: Fathers' Experiences with the Special Education

1. IEP Meeting

2. Collaborating with Educators

1. Dealing with Conflict



# IEP Meeting

- Overwhelming
- Inefficient process



# Collaboration with Educators

- Building Relationships
- Establishing Communication
- Hearing the Parent Voice



# Conflict with Educators

- Fighting the battle
- Coming together for a resolution





# How Can Fathers Help to Prevent and Resolve Conflict?

## Role

- “Modern” father
- Advocate
- Partner
- Student

## Action

- Engaged
- Involved
- Informed
- Innovative

# Acknowledge Fathers as Team Members

- Reach out, partner, and invite fathers
- Be aware of verbal and nonverbal communication with fathers
- Ask open ended questions
- Send a note/email/letter home to both parents
- Provide fathers with a brief questionnaire to bring to the IEP meeting about the child's strengths and needs in the home

# Acknowledge Fathers as Team Members

- Reinforce father involvement
- Call the father before the IEP meeting to describe the process
- Provide opportunities for fathers to ask questions
- Ask fathers to identify goals for the IEP meeting outcome
- Send home helpful information about the IEP process
- Provide fathers with a role during the meeting (e.g., time keeper)
- If available, invite male educators to meetings (e.g., paraprofessionals or administrators who know the child).

# Create Opportunities for Father Involvement

- Father/child homework assignments
- Father/child reading challenges
- Sports team volunteer opportunities
- Doughnuts with Dad event for monthly breakfast
- Career day presentations
- Job shadow opportunities
- Science projects
- Afterschool father clubs
- Volunteer supervision on the playground
- Fathers only field day

# Create Opportunities for Father Involvement

- Monthly Father Friday night movie
- Encourage fathers to join any committees or serve as a member of the PTA
- See resources from the National Fatherhood Initiative for more ideas.



# Understand the Role of an Advocate: Adversary or Ally?



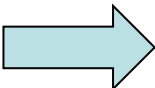
# Adversary or Ally: Advocates in Special Education

- Attorney presence at IEP meetings and mediation is not a new concern.
- The use of advocates; however, has begun to infiltrate IEP meetings and litigation.

“Special education advocate,” is defined as someone who is hired (non-profit or for \$) to provide parent support.



# Advocate Research Study

- Purpose  Explore educators (n=16), parents (n=15), and advocates (n=12) perceptions and experiences with the role and experiences with special education advocates.
- Qualitative interview study

## 12 ADVOCATES

Participant	Years of Experience	Mediation	Due Process
1.	27	10-15	Yes
2.	15	1	0
3.	21	2-3/year	2-3/year
4.	6	0	0
5.	4	1	0
6.	6	8	0
7.	9	15	0
8.	5	20	3
9.	20	0	0
10.	20	15	4
11.	2	N/A	0
12.	1.5	0	0

## 16 EDUCATORS

Interview #	Participant Role	Years of Experience	Mediation	Due Process
1.	Administrator	18	3	2
2.	Special Educator	30	0	1
3.	Administrator	14	6	Yes
4.	Administrator	45	5	3
5.	Special Educator	26	0	0
6.	Administrator	30	7	3
7.	Administrator	10	5	2
8.	SLP Assistant	1	0	0
9.	School Psychologist	10	0	0
10.	Administrator	25	N/A	13
11.	Special Educator	14	1	1
12.	Special Educator	8	0	0
13.	Special Educator	7	1	1
14.	Special Educator	11	1	0
15.	Special Educator	10	2	2
16.	Special Educator	16	2	2

## 15 PARENTS

Interview #	Mediation	Due Process
1.	1	1
2.	N/A	N/A
3.	0	0
4.	N/A	2
5.	0	0
6.	0	0
7.	1	1
8.	1	1
9.	0	0
10.	0	0
11.	1	0
12.	1	0
13.	0	0
14.	1	0
15.	0	1



# Data Analysis

Open, Axial, & Selective Coding:

- Identified concepts within the text
- Ensured mutual agreement
- Selected quotes to illustrate the themes

# Three Major Themes

- Two Types of Advocates: Adversary or Ally
- Benefit to Having an Advocate
- Need for Advocate Training



# *Adversary vs. Ally*

## **Adversary**

- Replaces the parent
- Misinterprets or is inaccurate about the law
- Unrealistic expectations for the student
- Brings their own baggage

## **Ally**

- Student-Focused
- Collaborative
- Knowledgeable
- Helpful

# Advocate as an “Adversary”

“We all want to do the right thing for the child. I feel like the advocates make it more about the adults than they do about the child.”

“There's some that pretend to know the law, there're some that don't, and they won't admit it.”

“They almost take on kind of a lawyer stance. So that's how I feel they were representing the parents as the lawyer.

“It [conflict] becomes their own fight, and you hear about, ‘well I had to fight for my child.’”

“Most of the advocates, I have to say, came in just ready to go to battle. They came in right away- we were wrong and they were right, we wouldn't do this and always they were ready to go to battle right away.”

“I think every advocate should read *The Art of War*.”



# Advocate as an “Ally”

“My ideal [advocate] definition would be .... I would call the person an advocate for the student. They were looking for what was best for the student regardless if it's what the parent wanted or if it's what the school wanted. They were looking for things based on the student they were advocating for.”

“I think that if they're, they're knowledgeable and educated and they come in with the best interested of the student and the family, then I think advocates are great.”

“They kind of knew what their role was and how to effectively work thorough meeting and really stand up for parents and work for the best interest of the child.”

“I make it really clear that I'm not here in contention, because there's conflict, I'm here to give mom some moral support. And it helps to position that, in other words they know before the very first 2 minutes of the meeting they know that I'm not there to pick a fight.”

## Parents can benefit from helpful support and guidance at the IEP meeting

“It's really to help in a good advocacy situation it is to **help the parent understand what they need to know**, what about their kid, and again that comes from a listening about their kid, and also observing, but getting something realistic and knowing when what the parent is saying is realistic or not, is realistic, and a lot of that comes from experience and gut knowing.” - Advocate

“An advocate has to walk them through it gently and **explain it in plain language**, but once parents understand these things, it's like a light comes on and the other thing that parents should be taught is that this whole process, beginning with the IEP, well even before, beginning with the initial evaluation to see whether a child is in need of special education or not, is the process concerned mainly with finding the truth.” - Advocate

# Benefit to Having an Advocate

## Educational Support for Parents

- ✓ *Someone to explain process & procedures*

## Emotional Support for Parents

- ✓ *Team member who knows the parent and the child*

## Balances Team Composition

- ✓ Another team member who can sit with the parents

“The basic problem here for parents is that they do not understand the fundamental procedures and processes that are imbedded in the IDEA and the regulations. Now they’re clear enough. They’re not vague. It’s like making cookies and this sounds silly, but I’ve been teaching parents this little thing for years and years. It’s like... Let’s say that you want to make some cookies. You get your recipe and the recipe tells you what the ingredients are and it tells you how to mix it up and what to put it in and what temperature the oven’s got to be. Well the IDEA is not anything different, but if you don’t follow the recipe, you’re liable to wind up with corn bread instead of cookies. The same thing works with the IDEA or any other body of law. I don’t care what body of law it is, criminal, civil, contract. It all boils down to a cookie recipe, but how you use the cookie recipe is what parents don’t understand. They don’t understand the legalese and that sort of thing.” - Advocate

# Need for Advocate Training: Law

“Anybody who's a special ed. advocate should have passed the special ed law class, at least one, and really understand at least the process and the basic mediation and collaborative problem solving and then know enough about the legal side.”- Advocate

“They should have training in understanding the law behind special education, so that they understand what's reasonable and what's not reasonable.” - Educator

“They definitely need to understand the IEP process and they need to understand the laws and rules and regs around special education.”- Educator

# Implications for Practice

- Advocates can be **adversaries** and **allies**
- Educators who **partner with advocates** are able to prevent or decrease conflict
- **Parents benefit from advocates** who can provide educational and emotional support
- Advocate training/education is needed for **quality control**

# Pre-Service and Educator Professional Development: Conflict Prevention Practices



# Pre-Service and Educator Professional Development: Conflict Prevention Practices

- Mock IEP Meetings
- Teach Live





# Mock IEP Procedures

1. Purposefully assign Mock IEP Groups (4-5 members)
2. Assign 1 case manager to each group
3. Provide each group with initial student & family profile
4. Students are allowed 2 weeks to complete an “IEP Case Study Analysis Form.”
5. Case Manager then provides IEP group with Student file (e.g., family background, assessment results, behavior data, social skills, present level information, classroom description).
6. Case manager meets with group to answer questions before the meeting

# Mock IEP Procedures Continued

7. Solicit IEP members (e.g., parents, directors, advocates, students)
8. Students are required to provide notice of the meeting, and may initiate pre-planning communication (e.g., parent/student input form)
9. Conduct Mock IEP meetings (scheduled for 1 hour)
10. Video meetings and requires students to watch videos and analyze their performance
11. Provide feedback to students about the process

# Mock IEP Research

Interviewed 60 graduates who participated in Mock IEPs (graduated 2007-2014).

## *Questions included:*

1. Demographic Information
2. Tell us what you remember about your Mock IEP experience.
3. Tell us what you thought about your Mock IEP experience.
4. Do you feel other teacher preparation programs should provide students with the opportunity to participate in a Mock IEP prior to graduating and working as a teacher in the field?
5. Other thoughts about the process

# 3 Major Benefits to Mock IEPs

- Team-based approach
- Preparation for IEPs after graduation
- Opportunity to learn, observe, and get feedback in a safe place



# Outcomes of the Mock IEP Experience

Provided Opportunities to

- Build confidence
- Know what to expect
- Practice a difficult parent/worst case scenario
- Provided techniques and strategies to problem solve with parents/families
- Practice communication skills



# Words Used to Describe the Process

- Nerve-wracking/Stressful
- Beneficial/Helpful
- Empowering
- Teamwork/collaboration
- Challenging
- Intense
- Exciting
- Scary
- Important
- Informative

# Mock IEP Video Clips



# The Facilitated IEP Toolbox: Success Without a Neutral

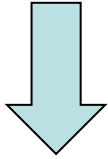




# The Facilitated IEP Toolbox: Success Without a Neutral

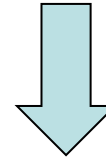


DO THIS



IEP Meeting Preparation

NOT THAT

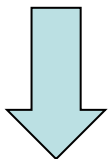


# Before IEP Meetings

The IEP meeting is a process, Not a product. . .

- Ask parents about previous year
- Invite parents to share upcoming goals
- Schedule meeting at a convenient time
- Provide reports early
- Invite parents to review draft IEP goals
- Obtain any necessary supports for families

**DO THIS**



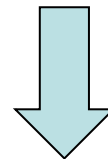
*Wouldn't it be nice if everyone who sat in on an IEP meeting had the best interests of the child...*

**During the IEP Meeting**



For This Awesome Family

**NOT THAT**



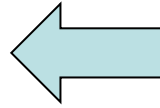
**"Let's begin our meeting. . . everybody talk, nobody listen."**

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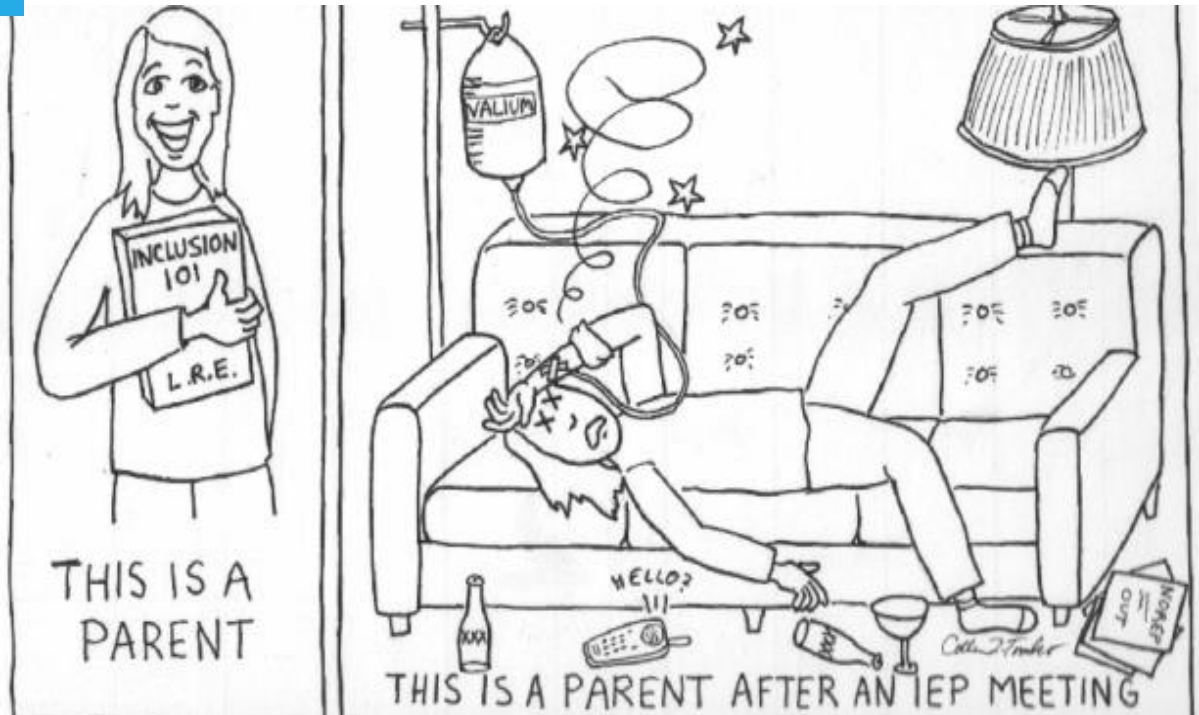
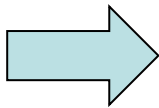
# During IEP Meetings

- Create a comfortable atmosphere
- Arrange seating to prevent power imbalance
- Utilize meeting norms
- Follow an agenda
- Chart meeting discussions
- Gain ongoing consensus
- Ask open-ended questions
- Always maintain the focus on the student
- Use a parking lot for off-topic issues

WE WANT THIS



NOT THAT



# After IEP Meetings

- Acknowledge the team
- Celebrate successes
- Create timeline for implementation
- Establish a procedure for potential disagreement
- Plan for ongoing communication
- Ask for feedback

# Student-Facilitated IEP Meetings: The Marriage of Self-Determination & Facilitated IEPs





# Student-Facilitated IEP Meetings: The **Marriage** of Self-Determination & Facilitated IEPs



Purpose → Using a three-pronged approach for students, educators, and family members, we designed a mixed methods research project aimed to enhance IEP meeting outcomes specific to student self-determination skills, goals/action planning, and improved working partnerships across the IEP team.



# What We Did....

We combined two essential components needed for effective IEP team planning: student-led strategies that promote self-determination and facilitated IEP tools for effective communication, dispute resolution, and collaborative decision-making.



# Status of Project

## 1. Training manuals for (In Progress):

- (a) Student
- (b) Teachers
- (c) Parents



## 2. Producing training videos for students

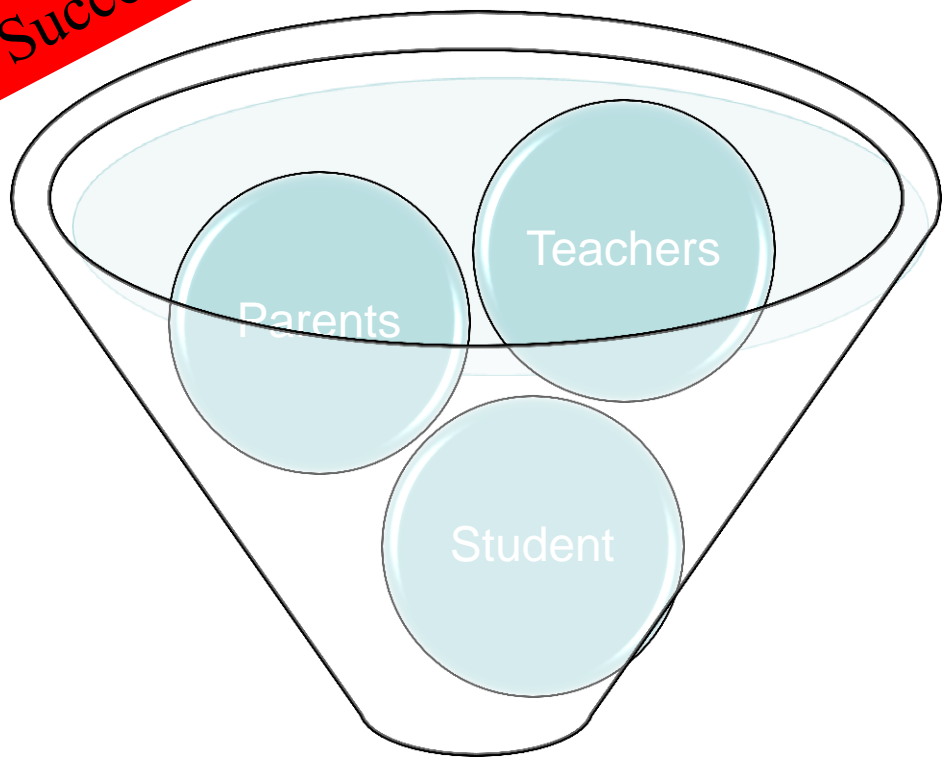
## 3. Piloting project with 10 students

# Project Partners

- Researchers in the area of transition and parent-school partnerships
- CO Parent Training and Information Center
- Parent Partners
- Secondary Education Teachers



**A Recipe for Success**



**Student  
Facilitated IEP  
Meeting**

# Educators: Student-Focused



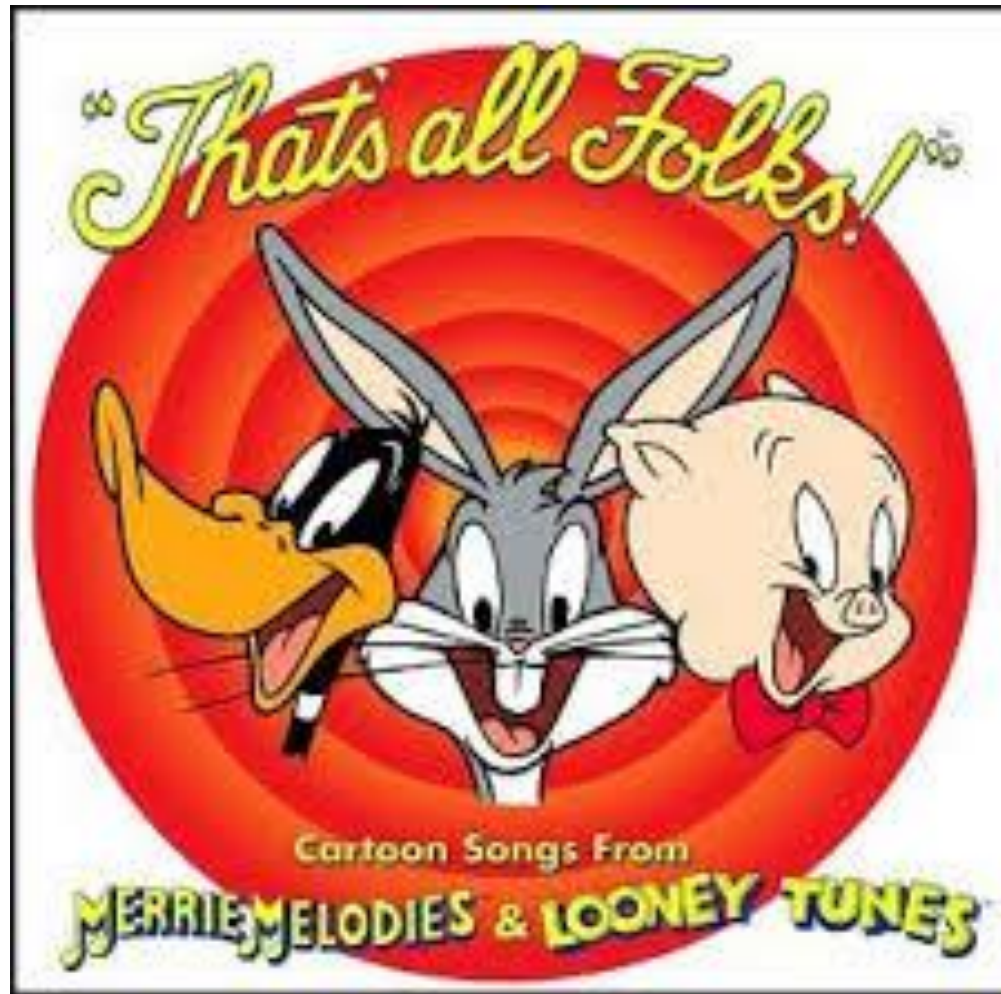
# Student: Self-Determination Focus



# Parents: Supportive Agent Focus







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