

Module: **Family-Centered Practices
for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments**

Session 1: Building Reliable Alliances

**Study Questions and Answers for Recommended Reading F:
Kalyanpur & Harry (a)**

Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (1999a). Legal and epistemological underpinnings of the construction of disability: Maya's story. In M. Kalyanpur & B. Harry (Eds.), *Culture in special education: Building reciprocal family-professional relationships* (pp. 15-45). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

1. The author discusses the “fragility of our own perceptions of competence“ and uses a vignette to illustrate this. List two ways cultures establish the meaning of disability. What influences both models and meanings?

The meaning of disability is established by legal or professional institutions or from “folk beliefs” and community understanding of people’s roles. Societal values influence both models and meanings.

2. On page 20 of this article, the author states, “Indeed, IDEA is a product of 20th century American culture.” What are three core values reflected in IDEA? In what parts of IDEA are these core values reflected?

The three core values are individualism, equity, and choice

- **Individualism: due process; individualized, appropriate education**
- **Equity: zero reject, nondiscriminatory assessment**
- **Choice: least restrictive environment, parent participation**

3. Other cultures may have alternative concepts of self where individualism may be antithetical to the beliefs of families with children with disabilities. Give an example of how values of participatory democracy and individual rights conflict with traditional Chinese values of propriety and individual duties.

Roles and status determine one’s dignity; differences in abilities are believed to be relevant in evaluating one’s worth; one’s behavior is constrained by social identity and the related obligations it imposes. These beliefs are opposed to the Chinese emphasis on the individual’s role within a group and on maintaining harmony and hierarchy within social order.

4. What is an “immutable characteristic” as defined in this article (see pages 27 and 28)? How is our perception of an immutable characteristic different from the perception of someone from another culture?

An immutable characteristic is a trait that is not changeable, such as skin color, birth order, gender, and disability. In our culture we feel that one should not be limited by an immutable characteristic—for instance, a woman should be just as able to achieve a professional career as a man. In contrast, among some Indian, Muslim, and Chinese families, for example, there is the belief that a woman need not work outside the home or have a career, and that may preclude girls from receiving an academic education.

5. Explain why some families may be uncomfortable with the professional expectation that a child with disabilities be “normalized.”

Early intervention for a child with a disability may be perceived as disruptive to family patterns and to the roles of non-disabled siblings. Also, the family may believe that the disability is an act of God, and that it cannot or should not be changed or improved.

6. On page 30, the authors state, “. . . our intention is not to imply that the law is inappropriate—indeed, quite the opposite, for a law that upholds and protects the most highly cherished values of the majority of the people is perfectly suited to its purpose . . . ” Why then, is it important to be aware of other points of view and value systems?

It is important to be aware of other points of view and value systems because they could contribute to parent-professional dissonance, and because they allow service providers to realize that there is more than one solution for a problem.

7. What does epistemological mean? To what fields does special education owe its epistemological roots?

Epistemological means the study of, or a theory of, the nature and grounds of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity. Special education owes its epistemological roots to the fields of medicine, psychiatry, and psychology.

8. Within the clinical perspective of disability, the author discusses four implicit assumptions. List all four and what is at stake with each of these assumptions.

- **Disability is a physical phenomenon: At stake is the issue of who gets labeled.**
- **Disability is an individual phenomenon: At stake is that the disability is perceived as located within the individual and that when all students are compared with the norm of the majority Caucasian culture, students who might have different cognitive and verbal skills that represent “concepts formed through exposure, experience, and their unique backgrounds” are perceived to have a deficit (page 35).**
- **Disability is a chronic illness: A chronic condition is permanent when considered in traditional, western time-consciousness. The concept of time as linear and arbitrarily divided has implications for transition and personal**

futures planning in special education.

- **Disability requires remediation or “fixing:”** The understanding is that individuals with disabilities can be “normalized” when provided with the repertoire of environments and activities to which typical peers have access and when taught the skills for successful participation through a process of behavior modification.
9. List four assumptions in defining disability that contrast with those of the medical model. Describe how each affects perception of disability.
- **Disability is a spiritual phenomenon: acknowledges possibility of a physical etiology, but may also ascribe spiritual or sociocultural causes.**
 - **Disability is a group phenomenon: the disability does not only reflect upon the child, but the whole family is implicated.**
 - **Disability is a time-limited phenomenon: those who see a spiritual explanation for the disability, such as soul loss, view the child’s condition as temporary, with the hope that either the soul would be recalled, or the child would outgrow the problem.**
 - **Disability must be accepted: a family’s perception of the cause of disability impacts whether they will seek help, and the types of intervention they will seek.**