

How Parents of Exceptional Children
Describe Their Relationships with Educational Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals. The guiding question of this study was: How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals? Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory and Crockett's (2002) star model for Special Education Planning provided the framework for this qualitative inquiry. Methods included a content analysis of four decades of journal abstracts depicting the past voices of parents of exceptional children. This historical review spanned articles about the following topics: a child's exceptionality being the result of physical or social heredity; educators as experts who train parents; the involvement of parents sought in certain instances; and, finally, professionals seeking out parental impressions and perspectives of educational practices. Current voices of 14 parents of children with exceptionalities were captured by individual and group interviews, as well as observations at an open parent meeting led by state officials. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the qualitative data. The study found current parental dissatisfaction, mainly concerning their relationships with general education professionals. The study's findings were grouped into four thematic categories: Communication, Caring, Competence, and Continuity. A model of parent-professional relationships depicting these categories was developed to inform both special and regular educators of parents' concerns, and, to assist in the establishment and maintenance of ongoing positive relationships.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Ursula Rhoda Gibb (1911- 1975) who, because of economic depression was unable to finish high school, yet loved the pursuit of knowledge more than anyone I have ever known. It was she who taught me the value of children with exceptionalities and the necessity of according them the dignity they deserved as fellow human beings. I miss her still.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION & STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

I knew a father who rode the school bus to kindergarten with his son almost daily during the child's first semester of public school. This father made sure that his son (who had Down's Syndrome) got to class and then he hid, usually behind a large trashcan, to ensure the safety of his son. From his vantage point, he recorded in a stenographer's notebook every word and action of the first year teacher in charge of the class. At night, he would type up his notes and the next day give his report to the teacher, with copies for the principal and district administrator. He pointed out ways in which he thought the teacher could improve and noted what was happening in the class. Nothing could dissuade him from his actions. His son's teacher, who was quite young, ended up on medication for high blood pressure.

Eventually, the father returned to his own work. However, periodically his anxiety would get the better of him. Nobody knew when he would show up, and his presence caused consternation not just in his son's class but in other classes as well. His relationship with educational professionals would likely be described as "adversarial." Although this father's behavior was extreme, variations on his actions occur regularly in other classes with other parents, students, teachers and administrators. As educators, we feel that parental surveillance is not only inappropriate but also unnecessary. However, according to published reports, parents of exceptional children do have some exceptional concerns.

Exceptional Children, Exceptional Concerns

Parents of children with exceptionalities often have concerns over and above the usual concerns every parent has (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). For example, Turner (Nov. 3, 1999) reported cases in which teacher aides were charged with sexual improprieties taken against children with disabilities (p. B1). According to one mother of a child with a disability, "This is one of the biggest fears of parents of children with disabilities " (p. B1). She reported to the School Safety and Security Committee that "parents of children without disabilities instinctively consider school shootings to be the biggest safety threat, but parents of disabled children worry more about the possibility of abuse" (p. B4).

Safety is not the only issue of concern to parents of children with exceptionalities. Denise Swanson, whose daughter has a disability, helped to start a statewide advocacy center in Roanoke, Virginia, for parents of children with exceptionalities. According to Swanson: “Many school systems fail to comply with federal mandates for students with disabilities and appear not to want to work with parents” (as cited in Turner, Feb. 27, 2001).

As recently as October 1, 2004 parents of exceptional children in the New Jersey Township of Greenwich complained to school officials that “none of us have felt heard, understood, or received clear answers [as to why their children] are not receiving services they are entitled to receive by law, equipment that would benefit the students isn’t ordered, aides aren’t being trained and parents aren’t being informed” (Lisanti, Oct. 1, 2004).

In Oregon, two mothers formed their own Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for parents of exceptional children, to offer parents activities such as workshops in the area of special needs, as well as regular meetings (Blackmun, Sept. 16, 2004). According to an Illinois parent group:

The main difference between parents and professionals is one of power. Professionals act within a system, backed up by laws, regulations, colleagues, resources, training, status, clerical support, large offices, long words and emotional distance. Parents have only their love for their child and their desire that that child should be given the best possible chance to have a good life. How is partnership possible in such an unequal state of affairs? It is only possible if everyone involved is willing to examine the values and beliefs which lie behind their actions” (Mason, 2001, p. 1).

Parents want and expect their children with exceptionalities to receive the same quality of treatment as other children, but in reality they may find that their children with exceptionalities are even treated differently from their non-exceptional siblings (Seligman & Darling, 1989). In my own experience as a special educator, I have heard parents voice the following concerns: Will my child have friends? Will she ever have a life partner? Do the other children make fun of her? What kind of a man will he become? How is what he is learning going to help him when I am gone? What kind of a job (if any) will she be able to hold? Parents worry about what will happen when they are no longer able to provide for their child's care and they cannot find a permanent community residence that is satisfactory.

There are many specialized issues and areas of concern described by parents of children with exceptionalities. How school leaders respond to these concerns is important to negotiating productive learning for each and every child in American schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in order to gain an understanding of what constitutes a positive rather than adversarial relationship between these two groups. This study was guided by the following question: How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals? Specific issues were examined through these questions:

1. How has the research literature described the relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals?
2. How do contemporary parents of exceptional children describe these relationships?

Methods Used in This Study

The focus of this study is on the relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in the field of special education. Qualitative methodology was chosen for its appropriateness in researching relational topics. The qualitative approaches to data collection in this study included: (a) a content analysis of educational journal abstracts concerning relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals; (b) group and individual interviews with parents of exceptional children; and (c) a record of parent comments made at an open parent meeting hosted by a state department of education.

Part of the methodology included a content analysis of educational abstracts and a synthesis of selected studies concerning relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals over a time span of four decades, from 1966-1999. This time period was chosen to encompass the early years prior to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, through subsequent amendments including the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997.

The literature selected for inclusion focused on the relationship between parents of children with a broad range of exceptionalities and educational professionals working in all areas

of special education. Trends and themes were synthesized after analyzing the content of the journal abstracts to reveal what was being said about parents' experiences with educational professionals. The results of this historical content analysis were compared with the present findings from the contemporary voices of parents obtained via individual and group interviews.

Interviews conducted in this study comprised both individual and group interviews. The group and individual interview participants were parents whose children with exceptionalities had attended, or were attending, one of three school systems in southwest Virginia. The open parent meeting was attended by parents of children with exceptionalities currently attending public schools in one of the three counties surrounding Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Details of procedures can be found in the methodology section of this paper. Parents in the group and individual interviews, and the open parent meeting, constitute both a unique sample, in that they are parents of exceptional children, and also a convenience sample, in that these were parents that were available and willing to participate in the study. Their children were classified with a variety of exceptionalities, no attempt being made to focus on a specific area of exceptionality.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of the ecology of human development comprised the setting for the exploration, and Crockett's (2002) star model for special education planning comprised the theoretical framework for analyzing the data resulting from this study. Urie Bronfenbrenner grew up on the grounds of a state institution, where his father worked as a neuropathologist. Bronfenbrenner recalled his father's distress when children without disabilities were committed to the institution by mistake. By the time they could be re-tested their scores had fallen so low they now "belonged" there. To offset this tragedy, his father would arrange for the young girls to work in his home until they could pass the minimum on a standardized intelligence test.

As a result of his early experience, one of Bronfenbrenner's ecological premises is that the realization of human abilities depends upon both the social and institutional contexts of an individual's activity. He stated that, for him, ecological development is like a set of Russian nesting dolls, each system both surrounded by and interacting with the other: the smallest doll

being the microsystem, the next the mesosystem, the exosystem was the next largest doll and finally all other systems would be impacted by the macrosystem.

For the purposes of the present study Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four levels of the special education ecological system are categorized as follows:

1. The innermost environment, or microsystem, is the immediate setting of the individual, such as a child's school and his home.
2. The next environment, the mesosystem, looks at the relations between the single settings. This mesosystem would correspond to the relationships between parents of exceptional children (the home) and site-based educational professionals (the school).
3. The larger exosystem takes us farther away from the individual's setting and is an environment that has an effect on an individual even though that individual is not present and the effects are indirect. In the context of the present study, the exosystem could correspond to the school system's central or district office. The personal focus of this system would be the special education director who is responsible for influencing the policies, procedures, and philosophical beliefs emanating from that particular setting.
4. The last system is the macrosystem. It surrounds all the other systems and refers to the overriding system as a whole, addressing the culture, sub-culture and the values of that society. This overriding system could encompass the federal law, state statutes and county regulations and the culture from which they were derived.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that: "a key to the enhanced effectiveness of public education lies not within the school itself, but in its interconnections with other settings in the society" (p. 226). In the same work he asserted that the home and the school microsystems are becoming alienated from one another:

From the perspective of our theoretical model, the alienation of children and youth and its destructive developmental sequelae are mesosystem phenomena. They reflect a breakdown between the various segments of the child's life--family, school, peer group, neighborhood, and the beckoning or all too often indifferent or rejecting, world of work. It therefore becomes the social responsibility, as well as being an unparalleled scientific

opportunity, for the researcher on human development to undertake field and experimental studies that will illuminate the nature, consequences, and potential of these interconnections. (pp. 231-232)

To re-iterate, associations between the microsystems of home and school comprise the mesosystem wherein the concepts of parent-professional relationships reside. The microsystems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in the present study are the home (parents) and school (educational professionals) systems. The mesosystem is the system in which the relationship between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals reside. The exosystem corresponds to administrative systems manned by educational professionals that would not have the same quality of personal contact with either the child with an exceptionality or his/her parents. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses the federal laws, state statutes and county regulations and the professionals who work in these areas. Each level moves further away from direct contact with the individual child with an exceptionality, yet each level impacts the child who is the recipient of special education services. Movement occurs back and forth across the systems. Themes derived from the data in the present study look at what is important to parents in these associations.

The Star Model for Educational Planning

Crockett's (2002) star model for special education planning illustrated the connections between Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and what Crockett defined as the five core principles of special education. These core principles are:

1. Ethical Practice: Ensuring universal educational access and accountability.
2. Individual Consideration: Addressing individuality and exceptionality in learning.
3. Equity Under Law: Providing an appropriate education through equitable public policies.
4. Effective Programming: Providing individualized programming designed to enhance student performance.
5. Establishing Productive Partnerships: Developing leaders who are effective in communicating, negotiating and collaborating with others on behalf of students with disabilities and their families (p. 163).

These core principles are seen by Crockett as areas to develop in responsive leaders for inclusive schools. Leaders need to have the expertise to communicate best practices to those practitioners for whom they are responsible. Classroom teachers also need to develop these areas if they are to be effective practitioners in inclusive classrooms.

A question that haunts contemporary practice is this: How many principals and/or general education teachers are familiar with special education policies and procedures, and the ways to implement them to provide appropriate educational programming designed so that the child with an exceptionality can make educational progress? One county in Northern Virginia, where this researcher worked, had a policy of hiring vice-principals who had expertise and had completed higher education studies in special education. General education teachers were not required to have special education expertise. Hehir (1999) noted that:

the most frequently voiced concern was the quality of teacher education programs . . . [g]enerally speaking, educators and parents were concerned that general education teachers were not prepared to address the needs of the increasing numbers of students with disabilities in their classrooms. (p. 7)

Prior to the 1990s, Schulz (1982) stated similar concerns, but with respect to the relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals: “If the parent-teacher relationship is to develop in a positive manner, teacher training must also include strategies to foster active parent participation” (p. 22).

With respect to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, Crockett (1999) noted that Odom, Peck, Hanson, Beckman, Kaiser & Lieber, et al (1996) gave a good illustration of how this ecological system could be adapted to examine the instructional settings of children with exceptionalities. The microsystem contains factors that directly affect the student, such as social interactions, instruction and curriculum. The mesosystem looks at relationships between a student’s home and their school. The exosystem does not involve the student with an exceptionality directly, but the “organizational structure and policies of agencies responsible for instructional service delivery” (p. 66). The macrosystem wraps around the other systems with laws pertaining to special education of children with exceptionalities, as well as social and cultural values. The core value of productive partnerships and the mesosystem of relationships

provide the theoretical framework for this study within which the relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals will be examined.

Crockett (2002) wrote that if all education was going to be inclusive education, then there would be “more need, not less, for school leaders who are informed about educating learners with exceptionalities” (p. 157). Crockett also asked the following question: “When it comes to offering programs designed to make a difference for all students, are school leaders knowledgeable about special education and skillful in supervising its implementation?” (p. 158). The central question to this study, namely: “How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals?,” was asked to see if parental responses would lead to a partial answer of whether educational professionals are perceived as well-versed in the art and science of special education.

Definitions

Several terms are used in this study in ways that need to be explained for greater clarity. Although some of these terms may be familiar to educators and parents, each is defined in this section.

Child with an Exceptionality: The term "exceptionality" as used in this study is synonymous with the term "disability" which appears in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). According to this statute,

the term “children with disabilities” means children - (i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments, including deafness, speech or language impairments, visual impairments including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, need special education and related services. (20 U. S. C. sec. 1401 (a) (1) (A)).

Educational Professionals: For the purpose of this study, "educational professionals" will include educators and related service personnel, examples of which are: both special and general education classroom teachers; principals, vice principals, central office administrators, district coordinators, counselors, therapists, and psychologists.

Inclusion: “The process of bringing all, or nearly all, exceptional children into the general education classroom for their education with special educational support” (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow & Coleman, 2006).

Parent: This term is defined in the IDEA regulations as "a parent, a guardian, a person acting as a parent, or a surrogate parent who has been appointed in accordance with Sec. 300.514. This term does not include the State if a child is a ward of the state" (C.F.R, Sec. 300.13).

Partnership: [a type of relationship] An association between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals wherein the parties work together collaboratively towards a shared goal of providing appropriate educational benefit to each student. Such a partnership "implies and conveys the belief that partners are capable individuals who become more capable by sharing knowledge, skills, and resources in a manner that benefits all participants as a result of the cooperative arrangement "(Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1994, p. 7).

Relationship:

“[A] sequence of interchanges that is essentially dyadic, that occurs over an extended period of time, and that has specific cognitive and affective effects. The affective/cognitive states and the interchange sequences mutually inform one another about the status or condition of the relationship; hence they are relatively inseparable. Both must be examined to gain a conceptually defensible understanding of a relationship” (Hinde, as cited in Putnam & Roloff, 1992, p. 210).

Special Education: This term "means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including - (A) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (B) instruction in physical education" (34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.17 (A) (1)(I)(ii)).

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to make a contribution to the description of and to propose strategies to enhance the relationship between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals, by eliciting from parents how they view their present associations and by extension, what they desire in future relationships. The model for parent-professional

relationships developed for the present study can be used to enhance the positive interactions of parents and educational professionals, and, to inform the literatures of both special and general education leadership.

Catalyst for the Study

I spent much of my professional life working with individuals with a variety of exceptionalities both as a nurse and as an educator. Before leaving my work in schools, I taught children who had a wide range of cognitive impairments. As a teacher, I often taught children for more than one year. In one case, the same child was assigned to me for four years at a parent's request. I respected and admired many parents whom I had the privilege to know. I had some idea of how hard they had to work just to get through the day with their children. For some parents days stretched endlessly when their children did not sleep but engaged instead in head-banging against a closed bedroom door for most, if not all, of the night.

Although I empathized with these parents, it was not until I became a parent myself that I had a clearer view of their relationship with their child and how that relationship could affect their interactions with educational professionals. My daughter is adopted from China. The first night we spent together we both cried--she, because she was in pain and I had no idea of how to help her, and myself, because I feared that I had become the mother of an exceptional child.

My daughter was very small for her alleged age; she was covered in scabs and the skin under her arms had peeled off. What worried me more, however, was that her right arm was bent at the elbow and did not move at all. Indeed, she seemed unaware that she even had an arm on that side of her body. My husband was more worried about her "thousand mile stare" than about any physical abnormalities. When I looked at her with a clinical eye, I saw a child I thought had had a cerebral hemorrhage. I cried that first night because I was afraid of parenting a child with an exceptionality. But more than that, I wanted a "perfect child." I wanted a cute baby whom other people would exclaim over and one who would bring her parents joy with her wonderful accomplishments. As I held that little bundle in my arms all night long, I did not see how this child could fulfill my dreams of parenthood.

When I started out on the journey toward motherhood, I told myself over and over again that "the right little person would come to my door." I held fast to that belief through the months

of waiting and worrying. During the long night in that strange hotel in China, I realized that the right child had come to me. With all of my experience as a nurse and an educator, I would be able to maximize whatever potential she had. But this was not a "professional" decision. This was a decision from the heart. She would be my daughter forever, not because I thought I could help her, but because I loved her completely just as she was. It was then that I learned more about parents of exceptional children than I had in all of my years of teaching and nursing. These parents were not making the best of a bad situation. No matter how severe their children's exceptionalities were, they loved them, completely and utterly.

We were fortunate. When we returned to the United States, our daughter's initial assessment scores were low, but there was hope. After a year of early intervention, which consisted of physical and occupational therapy during the day and follow up exercises at night (it turned out both her right arm and leg were affected), as well as infant stimulation, she improved. More recently she has received speech therapy for an articulation disorder caused by weakness in the muscles on the right side of her face. Through these experiences, I have caught a glimpse of what other parents go through for a lifetime. Many parents of exceptional children are forced into relationships with professionals--first medical, then educational--that are not of their choosing. Exploring those relationships, and trying to ascertain ways of establishing and maintaining positive relationships is what this study is all about.

Organization of the Study

This study explored the relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals. In Chapter 2, the review of literature begins with a review of the history of special education legislation, provides a content analysis of the parental literature over time, and concludes with an historical review of literature that speaks to the concerns regarding the relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. Chapter 3 includes the methodology that was used to complete the study, beginning with a description of the setting, the participants, data collection procedures, and procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 reports the results, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Researcher's Perspective

It is my firm belief that it is a privilege to teach children with exceptionalities, and, that teachers engaged with these children learn far more from the children than the children do from them. My perspective as a researcher is thus that of parent, advocate, and teacher.

Parents of the children with exceptionalities that I taught were often overwhelmed with the day-to-day obligations regarding their children, thus, the onus for developing a positive relationship frequently came to rest with the educational professional. As I came to know the parents over the years, our meetings became more personal and they shared many of their fears and concerns. They knew that some educational professionals still wondered why children with exceptionalities were being taught in their neighborhood school, much less in a general education classroom. Parents felt called to be intimately involved in their child's education, and, advocate for innovative educational practices that could help their child make progress. As one mother stated "these are not throw-away children".

This research perspective is noted here, at the outset of the document, and will be revisited again in Chapter 5 when findings are discussed and recommendations made concerning the relationship between educational professionals and parents of children with exceptionalities.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LEGISLATION AND SELECTED LITERATURE

The review of literature for this study differed from the more usual synthesis of studies. The review began with a legislative retrospective regarding parental participation. The course of the parental literature over time was charted by doing a content analysis of abstracts from educational journals spanning four decades, and analysis of relevant studies to capture how parental-professional relations have been characterized. Analysis of these studies led to further pertinent literature to be reviewed. This process was continued until saturation was established.

Legislative Review

The following brief review will look back over key elements in the legislative history of special education and give brief comments on parental perspectives. A historical review takes into account the legal retrospective set out in Crockett and Kauffman (1999):

a national trend of parental activism born in the 1940s... matur[ed] in the civil rights era of the 1960s, with legislative victories securing access to educational opportunity for all students regardless of disability. The revolutionary federal legislation involving special education, PL 94-142, pulled together various components of local decisions and earlier legislation, resulting in the provision of a free, appropriate education in the LRE [least restrictive environment] for all school-aged children with disabilities. In 1986, PL 99-457 extended these benefits to exceptional learners 3 to 5 years...reauthorization of the law in 1990 as the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] embrac[ed] new students and services. (p. 6-7)

Parents of exceptional children have long been advocates for their children, often using the courts to clarify and enforce legislative rights to educational services. The first parental advocacy group--the Cuyahoga County Ohio Council for the Retarded Child--was established in 1933 (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). Rothstein (1995) stated that prior to 1975, "about three million children with disabilities were not receiving appropriate programming" (p. 12). Turnbull & Turnbull (1985) made the following incisive comment about programming related to their son Jay:

I shudder to think of how many programs children have been enrolled in without their parents ever truly knowing the who, what, where, how, why and how long. When did my trust turn to skepticism? When I first asked, "What's in it for Jay?" That simple question is not asked often enough. (p. 111)

The landmark cases that opened school doors to children with exceptionalities were: *PARC (Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens) v. Commonwealth* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972). In both cases the courts "approved consent decrees that enjoined states from denying education to children who were mentally retarded and children with other disabilities without due process" (Rothstein, 1995, p. 14).

In 1973, Congress amended the *Vocational Rehabilitation Act* by adding Section 504. The amendments provided that "recipients of federal financial assistance, such as schools, should not discriminate on the basis of disability" (Rothstein, 1995, p. 27). The most important legislation of this period occurred in 1975, when Congress amended the *Education of the Handicapped Act* with Public Law 94-142, *The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)*. In describing PL 94-142, Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (2006) state:

Schools were required to seek out and implement appropriate educational services for all students with disabilities, regardless of the severity, to provide appropriate, individualized services to students with disabilities, and, to actively involve parents in the educational process (p. 13).

Prior to the passage of this law many children with exceptionalities did not begin school at the same age as their siblings (Schulz, 1982). These delays in starting school had negative consequences for the children, as pointed out in Bronfenbrenner's 1979 classic work *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Human Nature and Design*, in which he stated that to separate the school from the home, the community, or from the myriad other social forces that influence a child's development is not only poor educational practice but harmful to the child (Ginn, 1994). Public law 94-142 also mandated that informed consent be given by the parents or guardians of exceptional children when their children were referred for educational assessment, evaluated and placed in an educational program, and, when children exited from special education service (Royster & McLaughlin, 1996).

Legal advances continued to play an important role in the lives of children with exceptionalities. In 1980, Congress established the Department of Education. In 1986 the reauthorization of the *EAHCA* occurred. A key feature of Public Law 99-457, the Handicapped Amendments of 1986, was extension of rights to children with exceptionalities, ages 3 years through 5 years. In this legal environment parents were often perceived as adversaries by education professionals. During this time period, Biklen (1985) wrote the following about parent/professional relationships:

Administrators talk about parents. Sometimes they speak with respect...Sometimes the talk is less flattering. 'Parents. I know all about parents. They know the law better than we do'. 'Some of them are never satisfied'. 'If they knew what we know, they would have us up on charges'...Administrators felt besieged by complaints...bewildered by parent pressures and distrustful of parent involvement...Their most common perception of parents was as adversaries. Their vision of parents was as 'the opposition' whom they saw on the other side of a table in a due process hearing, or at the microphone in a public meeting, or at a parent press conference, each time complaining that the school was not doing enough. (p. 136)

Empowerment of parents was a phrase used at this time to describe how educators could raise the level of parents' competencies, thereby aiding the establishment of positive relationships between the two groups. The term *empowerment* was not meant to imply deficiencies in parents, rather it was felt that:

Empowerment implies that many competencies are already present or at least possible...Empowerment implies that what you see as poor functioning is a result of social structure and lack of resources which make it impossible for the existing competencies to operate. It implies that in those cases where new competencies need to be learned, they are best learned in a context of living life rather than in artificial programs where everyone, including the person learning, knows that it is really the expert who is in charge. (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988, p. 16)

In 1990, the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (Public Law 101-336) was passed. That same year, Congress amended the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. It was renamed

the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (20USC 1400). The word "handicap" was replaced by the word "disability," with the focus being placed on the individual first and the "disability" second. In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized and certain provisions of the Act amended. Hehir (1999) stated that the 1997 re-authorization dealt directly with challenges faced in "securing educational equity for all children in the country" (p. 4).

The 1997 IDEA amendments increased the active role of parents in their child's special education (Annino, 1999; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). The amendments delineated four means of accomplishing the goal of ensuring a quality education for children with exceptionalities: "inclusion, parent empowerment, individualized education (IEP) agenda, and school administration/personnel preparation" (Annino, 1997, p. 125). With respect to parent empowerment, it was acknowledged that parents have a personal interest in, and intimate knowledge of, their children. Lake & Billingsley (2000) noted that both the experience and research of the past two decades has shown that strengthening the role of parents of children with exceptionalities, and offering them meaningful participatory opportunities, increases the effectiveness of their children's education.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations, the IDEA Appendix A to Part 300, Part I.I. Involvement of Parents and Students states:

The Congressional Committee Reports on the IDEA Amendments of 1997 express the view that the Amendments provide an opportunity for strengthening the role of parents, and emphasize that one of the purposes of the Amendments is to expand opportunities for parents and key public agency staff (e.g. special education, related services, general education, and early intervention service providers, and other personnel) to work in new partnerships at both the State and local levels (H. rep. 105-95, p. 82 (1997); S. rep. No. 105-17, p. 4 and 5 (1997)). Accordingly the IDEA Amendments of 1997 require that parents have an opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation and educational placement of the child, and the provision of FAPE to the child (300.501(a) (2)). Thus, parents must now be part of (1) the group that determines what additional data are needed as part of an evaluation of their child (C.F.R. 300.533(a)(1)); (2) the team that determines their child's eligibility (C.F.R.300.534 (a)(1)); and (3) the

group that makes decisions on the educational placement of their child (C.F.R. 300.501 (c)). In addition, the concerns of parents and the information they provide regarding their children must be considered in developing and reviewing their children's IEPs (C.F.R. 300.343 9c)(iii) and C.F.R. 300. 346 (a)(1)(i) and (b); and the requirements for keeping parents informed about the educational progress of their children particularly as it relates to their progress in the general curriculum (C.F.R. 300.347 (a)(7)). (p. 12472).

The legislative and regulatory guidance set out in the law provided the foundation for increased involvement of parents of children with exceptionalities in their child's education. Telzrow (1999) noted "the involvement of parents as decision-making partners is an important facet of the 1997 Amendments" (p. 14).

The following content analysis of journal abstracts, covering four decades and depicting parental relationships with educational professionals, shows an alignment between an increase in parental involvement and changes in the federal law.

Parents and Professionals: Historical Trends and Conceptual Themes

A content analysis of the abstracts of published journal articles on the topic of relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals from the 1960s to the 1990s follows. The analysis is organized in a chronological and conceptual framework that depicts the manner in which the relationships between these two groups has been studied and portrayed. Historical trends were analyzed to address how the content of the literature abstracts reflected the development of these relationships over time. Information from various abstracts was synthesized to reveal what was being said about parents' experiences with educational professionals.

Appendix A sets out charts and selected abstracts. The fruitful keyword search terms were: disabilities and parents and schools. The database was PsychInfo. Appendix B sets out graphs depicting the number of articles selected in each decade, with a breakdown of type of article.

Criteria for Selection of Abstracts

The criterion for selection of studies presented in the abstracts was that the journal article must have substantively dealt with the relationship between parents of exceptional (school age)

children and educational professionals. School age children were defined for the purpose of this study as children in public or private schools between the ages of 5 years and 21 years, assuming the children in the latter group were still attending school and had not transitioned to work.

School-to-work is a separate category of special education research.

The abstracts were classified into broad categories, relevant for historical analysis but also detailed enough to be assigned to a category based upon the information contained in the brief summary. Trends found in the literature give a sketch of how the tenor of the relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals changed over time.

Criteria for Exclusion of Abstracts

Certain articles identified by the search terms were excluded from analysis. The criteria for excluding articles from further analysis were as follows:

Early Childhood Education: This facet of an exceptional child's pre-school life is dealt with under a separate section of IDEA. An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) exists for the family members.

Medical: Abstracts that dealt solely with medical topics rather than education-related issues were excluded from further analysis. Examples are articles dealing with specific medical anomalies, such as "viral encephalitis" and "Weissenbacher-Zweymuller" syndrome.

Non-relational: Abstracts that only used the key word "parent" but offered no substantial parental perspective on their relationships with educational professionals were excluded (e.g. drug-addiction in parents).

Other: Articles that did not fall into any of the above-noted categories but were still beyond the present study were excluded for a variety of reasons; they may have dealt with post-school only, higher education, or other peripheral topics such as television watching.

Only American publications were included because IDEA is specific to the United States; incorporating other countries' relationships would obfuscate the analysis.

Trends and Themes: 1960-69

For the decade 1960-69, only 8 abstracts responded to the search terms, and of these, only one was considered to be related to the topic of relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. This abstract addressed whether parents of exceptional children were willing or unwilling to help their child by working with the school (Stringer, 1960). If parents were willing to help, social promotions would ensue, which could produce results. If not, the child would be retained in their previous grade.

The remaining seven abstracts addressed topics extending beyond the prioritized focus of parental/professional relationships, however they provide insight into how parents appeared in the literature during this decade before the passage of federal special education legislation. Meacham (1968) stated that students who identified with a parent who was nurturing but a poor reader would be poor readers themselves, and that the non-reading parent reinforced the child's poor reading, albeit unconsciously. Heckerl (1968) noted that in the families of boys who had severe reading retardation all the parents mentioned that they, too, had had some form of learning difficulty. A study by Kappelman (1969) set out statistical results stating that almost 56% of students had organic learning problems, and, that a high rate of neurologically based disabilities was to be found in children from city slum areas. Jonsson (1967) discussed delinquency as related to social heredity theories. Two other studies looked at behavior modification (token reinforcement system) and operant conditioning techniques for children with learning disabilities (Lovitt, 1969; Mckenzie, 1968).

The trend in this decade was more towards social heredity theories--the parent as cause of the exceptionality, indeed "until about 1960, it was strongly believed that heredity drove and determined various conditions related to intelligence, such as familial mental retardation (retardation without obvious neurological insult), giftedness, or mental illness" (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2003, p. 4). In the later years of this decade, there was less emphasis on social heredity and more emphasis on behavioral/operant conditioning (Lovitt, 1968).

Trends and Themes: 1970-79

The search results for the decade of 1970-79 yielded 42 abstracts. Of these, 9 abstracts were selected for analysis because of their focus on professional-parental relationships. The trend

in the decade of the 1970s was to focus on learning disabilities and the counseling of parents of these exceptional children. The relationship between educational professionals and parents of exceptional children was unidirectional--expertise flowed from the professional down to the parent. The topics in the included abstracts contained the following themes: (a) aiding parental adjustment; (b) creating multidisciplinary team (educational professionals and parents of exceptional children) approaches to the identification of children with disabilities, with an emphasis on specific learning disabilities; (c) counseling parents of exceptional children; (e) developing the counseling skills of school personnel to guide parents; (f) providing parent services in a clinical school; (g) establishing liaisons with parents of children with learning disabilities.

Professionals were viewed as experts who could aid parents in adjusting to their roles and in training parents to respond appropriately to their child's behavior (Ellis, 1979; Gold & Richmond, 1979). Friedman (1978) noted that some parents might need a referral to a community health resource, and Bricklin (1970) described a program, part of which was directed towards giving parents of children with learning disabilities the chance to decide if they themselves needed/required psychotherapy. McWhirter & Cabanski (1972) looked at a program for counseling parents of children with learning disabilities, in which parents were required to take courses in behavior modification techniques, child development, and emotional dysfunction. Counseling in parental groups included teaching parents effective communication skills, as well as strategies to achieve emotional catharsis.

Trends and Themes: 1980-89

The next decade, 1980-1989, yielded 193 abstracts from the search terms, of which 18 were selected for analysis because they dealt of the topic of parent-professional relationships in some way. The educational professional's role as a consultant and trainer of parents of exceptional children was still a focus. Topics in these abstracts included: (a) mainstreaming, (b) integration, (c) inclusion of exceptional children, (d) parent-professional communication and (e) parent counseling and training.

Two abstracts indicated that parents of children with exceptionalities wanted an exchange of information and ongoing communication with educational professionals (Hanline &

Halvorsen, 1989; Simpson 1982). There were still indications that parents might require intensive therapy as well as information (Roth & Weller, 1985), and, that some families might need therapy or counseling, as well as behavioral technique training (Harris & Fong, 1985). Parents had concerns that their child's exceptionality might be interpreted as an indication of pathology on their part (Seligman & Darling, 1989).

Interdisciplinary services for families could include both parent counseling and training (Lynch & Stein, 1982). Shapero and Forbes (1981) in their review of studies found that the most common programs for parents and their child with a learning disability were counseling and tutoring. Goldstein and Turnbull (1982) determined that parental involvement in IEP meetings increased when a school counselor acted as a parent advocate.

Trends and Themes: 1990-99

The final decade (1990-1999) using the same search terms yielded 259 abstracts, of which 16 were selected for analysis. The high number of exclusions in this decade reflected the large number of articles that dealt primarily with transition from school to work, and a similarly large number that dealt with inclusive schooling. The abstracts to these studies suggested that, although parents were referred to in the abstract, parental-professional relationships were not the foci of these inquiries.

Each decade served up an increasing number of articles relating to parents and exceptional children. It is in this final decade that parental voices began to be heard more clearly. The topics in the included abstracts contained the following themes: (a) inclusion, (b) building parent-school relationships, (c) needs/wants of parents of exceptional and general education students, and (d) homework issues for parents of exceptional children.

Inclusion became a more consistent topic, with related topics being those associated with the integration of exceptional children into general education classes. Studies and articles following the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 focused more on parents of children with exceptionalities and the relationship between these parents and schools. Lovitt & Cushing (1999), and Margolis (1999), looked at building relationships between schools and parents, based on mutual collaboration and communication. Commentaries concerning the needs/wants of parents of both exceptional and general education students were published. A secondary area of

interest during this decade was helping parents to address the issue of homework for students with learning disabilities.

Trends and Themes Over 40 Years

Looked at through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the 40 year abstract analysis covered the span from the early years when the microsystems of home and school interacted the least, and in the case of families with children who were denied access to school, not at all, to the time after the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, in which the microsystems of home and school worked together. The passage of time from 1960 to 1999 covered advances in federal law and state statutes (macrosystem), and the development of policies and procedures for local education agencies (exosystem) that brought about changes in education for children with exceptionalities and their families.

Crockett's (2002) star model for special education planning is also reflective of the legal advances that have occurred in educating children with exceptionalities over time, and encourages the involvement of parents of exceptional children in their child's education as one of the examples of the core value of productive partnerships. Crockett stated that principles of best practice are grounded in the law, proving a "trinity of FAPE, LRE and best practices" (p.158). The federal law grants children with exceptionalities a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, with an onus on educational leaders to provide individualized programming that "fosters high expectations, supports research-based strategies, and targets positive results for learners with exceptionalities" (p. 163). Crockett's fifth core principle of establishing productive partnerships "develops leaders who are effective in communicating, negotiating, and collaborating with others on behalf of students with disabilities and their families" (p. 163).

Parent-Professional Relationships in Historical Perspective

The purpose of this review of selected literature is to offer a sample of the historical literature that speaks to the concerns regarding the relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. The following review of parent-professional relationships presents a further mining of the literature that was begun in the abstract analysis.

Parents of exceptional children have a history of associations with both medical and educational professionals of past eras. The use of terms that might be perceived as pejorative by parents understandably played a part in determining the character of the associations between parents and professionals. Terminology such as the word “idiot” (which comes from a Greek word meaning “a private person...one not allowed a share in public affairs”) was once used to describe individuals with exceptionalities (Pletsch, 1997, p. 11).

In 1848, American educator Samuel Gridley Howe (considered a 19th century reformer) wrote about classes and subclasses of individuals with exceptionalities all of whom were at the time labeled as “idiots”. According to Howe: (a) idiots were to be considered as belonging to the lowest level of classification, being “mere organisms”; (b) fools were above the class of idiots, as their brain and nervous system systems were considered to be more developed than those of ‘idiots’; (c) and simpletons were the highest form of idiot (Pletsch, 1997, p.13). Despite this chilling classification of children and adults with developmental disabilities, his work and that of Horace Mann and Dorothea Dix, did help to give rise to the formation of residential schools such as the Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feebleminded Youth founded in 1859, followed in 1869 by the establishment of the first special class for developmentally retarded children in a public school in Rhode Island (Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiow, 2003).

The aftermath of both the Civil War in the mid-19th century and the two World Wars in the 20th century resulted in heightened awareness of individuals with disabilities as veterans returned home (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). Starting in 1933 with the first parental advocacy group, subsequent parent groups arose that promoted the education of previously neglected exceptional children. In 1950, The National Association for Retarded Citizens (NARC) was formed. In that same year, Pearl Buck published her book, *The Child Who Never Grew* & Dale Evans published her book *Angel Unaware*; both books depicted the lives of their exceptional children (Pletsch, 1966). Also at this time, Rose Kennedy made speaking tours in both the United States and Canada depicting the life of her exceptional daughter. These women had a wide audience and their experiences helped to inform public opinion.

In the latter part of the 1950s Congress passed measures concerning training and research in the areas of hard of hearing/deafness and mental retardation and in 1963, under President John

F. Kennedy, PL 88-164 was passed allotting funds for, among other areas, training professionals to work with exceptional individuals (Kirk et al., 2003).

Parents were at one time felt to be the cause of their child's disability. The "parents-as-cause" theory has been applied to multiple exceptionalities, with professionals as late as the 1970s describing parents of children with autism as perfectionists and cold -- "refrigerator parents" (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 4-5). More recently, some professionals have characterized parents as "too emotionally involved, not having the skills needed to interact collaboratively, and wanting professionals to guide and advise them" (Fine & Gardner, 1994, p. 296). Conversely, professionals have been called to task for exhibiting "aloof, elitist attitudes" and stating that parents of children with exceptionalities "lack[ed] sufficient expertise to be involved in educational decision making" (Yanok & Derubertis, 1989, p. 198).

Even if professionals are not aloof, parents may be correct in sensing that certain professionals do not enjoy working with children with exceptionalities. With the advent of inclusion, most teachers now work with students who receive special education services, since children with exceptionalities are mainly educated in the general education classroom. However, not all general education teachers are, or have been, prepared to assume their expanded responsibilities. Some may lack training, have been exposed to stigmatizing attitudes, or feel inadequate or unable to meet the needs of an exceptional student (Seligman & Darling, 1989). Despite their feelings, teachers need to listen to parents of children with exceptionalities since, as Hornby (1989) pointed out, "All parents can contribute valuable information about their child with special educational needs" (p. 161).

Crockett (2002) addressed the issue of inclusion and its effect on the field of special education. As an administrator, she had noted that there was "the lack of consensus about the purpose of schooling in general and about why we pursue special education in particular" (p. 157). Crockett argued that increased instructional inclusion would create a greater (not lesser) need for educational leaders to be informed about appropriate means of educating children with exceptionalities, noting that different administrators had different concepts of the correct meaning of least restrictive environment and inclusion. The concept some educational

professionals have drawn from IDEA, namely that all children with exceptionalities would be served in the general education classroom, is false. As Crockett stated:

The law allows the inclusive presumption to be rebutted on an individualized basis when the evidence suggests that instruction in a general education class does not support a student's appropriate education despite the use of supplementary aides and services....school systems are required to make a range of alternative learning environments available to respond to the severity of individual students' needs. (p. 158)

Different geographical areas follow different practices with respect to inclusion of children with exceptionalities in general education classes, despite what the law intended, with respect to students found eligible to receive special education services. The law intends that, not only are these students to be provided with an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, they are also to be taught by trained teachers who use research-based practices.

Parents have legitimate concerns that many general education teachers have received inadequate training on how to address the needs of exceptional children in their classrooms (Cheney & Osher, 1997; Hehir, 1999). Administrators and teachers themselves have voiced their own concerns regarding their lack of training in communicating with parents of exceptional children (Strickland, 1982). Parents may feel that educational professionals who lack training also have little awareness of their attachment and total commitment to their child. Ginn (1994) quoted a mother of an exceptional child as saying: "I've said to teachers: You have my child for one year. This child I'll have until the day I die and if there's such a thing as an afterlife, I'll have them there too" (p. 46). Lovitt & Cushing (1999) pointed out that despite a history of barriers to positive relationships, with respect to the law, the IDEA states:

Teachers, principals, and other school personnel must communicate with parents regarding the educational programming of their children and, in fact, stipulates that specific educational programs must be developed in conjunction with the interests and desires of the parents. (p.134)

According to Seligman & Darling (1989), "the degree to which professionals are able to meet parents' expectations may determine the nature of the relationship they will have with a family" (p. 218). In fact, parental collaboration and participation in special education has been

called essential to the success of the education of an exceptional child and necessary for effective partnership as advocates (Hamre-Nieutupski, Krajewski, Nieutupski, Ostercamp, Sensor, & Opheim, 1988; Schulz, 1982). Nevertheless, conflicts can arise not only between classroom teachers and parents of exceptional children, but also between the parents and other educational professionals. Misunderstandings between administrators and parents of exceptional children have been described as due to miscommunication, prior negative experiences with educational professionals, a feeling of being “talked down to” and a difference in value systems between the two parties (Rocha, 1983, p. 94).

Royster & McLaughlin (1996) stated that “professionals and parents should understand that they are equal partners in the education of children, [and that] they should work together to remove barriers and promote collaboration for the benefit of the students” (p. 26). Supportive of this statement is the code of ethics and standards for professional practice of the Council of Exceptional Children (1998). Portions of the code concerning relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals refer to the concepts of: mutual respect; effective communication; respect for confidentiality and privacy; acknowledgement of parents’ knowledge and expertise; recognition of cultural diversity; and keeping parents informed.

The CEC code of ethics and standards recognizes that the relationship that exists between the environments of the home and community affects the behavior and outlook of the exceptional person (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985). These environments relate to the micro and mesosystems in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecology of human development, and, to one of the core principles of the star model for special education planning, namely productive partnerships (Crockett, 2002).

Fine (1991) described the parent-professional particular form of relationship as “an association between a family and one or more professionals who function collaboratively using agreed-upon roles in pursuit of a joint interest and common goal” (p. 28). His requirements for such a relationship included collaboration, equal contributions of resources and expertise, loyalty and trust, and a balance of power.

This type of collaborative relationship appears to be difficult to achieve. Schulz, as cited in Turnbull & Turnbull (1985), spoke of the parent-professional conflict from the dual perspectives of teacher and parent. She stated, “While I have been offended as a parent, I have

also been rebuffed as a teacher” (p. 7). A major speaker at a conference she attended recommended a book for parents of children with mental retardation, since it was “written on an eight-grade reading level” (p. 6), implying the inability of these parents to read material at a higher level. In contrast, as a teacher, parents have told her that she could not possibly understand what they go through. Schulz described that kind of comment as inappropriate, since teachers put in long hours working with their students, as well as designing developmental and remedial procedures that may not be followed at home.

According to Kotler (1994), “There has never been a commonality of purpose or viewpoint between parents and special educators” (p. 363), but he also noted that “neither parents nor educators can be trusted with the sole decision-making responsibility under the Act [IDEA]” (p. 396). Lake & Billingsley (2000) held that there is “an imbalance of power between schools and parents, suggesting that parents are overpowered by school systems” (p. 249).

Erwin & Soodak (1995) stated that parental frustration was not related to being parents of a child with an exceptionality, but rather with the manner in which society, and educational professionals in particular, treated their children. McWilliam, Maxwell & Sloper (1999) stated that the lowest ratings by parents of children attending elementary school were given to specialized services for children with exceptionalities, indicating to the authors that personnel and policy development should be directed towards procedures and processes employed in the service of those children. The differences and difficulties in being a parent or a professional in such a relationship are reflected in Turnbull, Turnbull, Summers, Brotherson & Benson’s (1986) comment regarding one of the authors’ newfound roles as the mother of an exceptional son: “nothing really prepares you for it, certainly not three degrees in special education” (p. 137).

Brantlinger (1991) stated that “a universal need of parents is to have accurate information about the child’s handicapping condition and program options for the child” (p. 254). Al-Hassan & Gardner (2002) reported that parents of children with exceptionalities need to have precise information conveyed to them on a frequent basis. They also suggested that educational professionals should not assume that they have conveyed information effectively, but check for accuracy of their message and understanding on the part of parents.

Communication between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals was strongly emphasized by parents in a study by Blue-Banning et al (2004) that investigated components of collaborative partnerships. The Blue-Banning et al. study was funded by a grant from The National Institutes of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U. S. Department of Education. Of the 137 family members in the study, over half (70) were parents of a child with an exceptionality. Severity levels of the children's exceptionality were almost evenly divided between mild and moderate exceptionalities, with only a few parents having children with a severe exceptionality. The researchers conducted 33 focus groups and 32 individual interviews. Participants in the focus groups included groups composed of adult family members of children both with and without exceptionalities and separate groups of administrators and service providers. Interviews were used to provide a means of capturing information from 18 diverse families of limited or non-English speaking abilities who had children with exceptionalities and 14 professionals who provided direct services to these families. Open-ended questioning was used to elicit characteristics of both successful and unsuccessful parent-professional partnerships. In this study, service providers included educational professionals as well as professionals in human/social services, health care and a combination of the fields.

The authors identified six themes of collaboration between parents of children with exceptionalities and professionals charged with their care: (a) communication; (b) commitment (to the child); (c) equality; (d) skills; (e) trust; and (f) respect (p. 174).

Communication was the most important factor found by Blue-Banning et al (2004) with respect to the establishment of positive parent-professional relationships. In illustrating "trust" the authors quoted a parent as stating how "good" a doctor was, that "he even returned phone calls to parents!" (p. 179). Being a skilled professional committed to the betterment of those entrusted to one's care was also a major focus in this study. The category of "equality" in this study emphasized "a sense of harmony or ease in the relationship" as well as "the importance of having professionals acknowledge the validity of parents, points of view" (p. 176). The authors also stated that their categories were interrelated and looked at "indicators of professional behaviors" (p. 173). They further pointed out that "common sense and ordinary decency are at

the heart of positive partnerships between families and professionals serving children with disabilities” p. 181.

Kasahara & Turnbull (2005) investigated the meaning of family-professional partnerships in Japanese parents of children with exceptionalities, by asking 30 mothers via interviews and focus groups what constitutes a good relationship/desirable partnership between these two parties. The study’s findings regarding aspects of the parent-professional relationship include parents wanting their children treated with respect and feeling that “professionals must recognize and take seriously, the irreplaceable value of each child’s life” (p. 255). Parents wanted professionals who genuinely cared for their children, were committed to doing their best for the children, and, who also found joy in working with children with exceptionalities. Many parents had had encounters with professionals who lacked the qualities of respect and genuine caring for their children with exceptionalities. Parents in this study called for a “fundamental change to alter such negative views and assumptions about individuals with disabilities and their families” (p. 256).

Parents in the Kasahara & Turnbull (2005) study wanted professionals who would “listen to and respect” the family’s needs, and, who could provide “high quality [individualized] services, based on the unique characteristics of each child” (p. 257). Parents also mentioned the issue of good family-professional communication, suggesting that “open and honest communication would, in turn, nurture the establishment of trusting relationships between families and professionals” (p. 258). The concept of professionals empowering parents was also espoused. Zaretsky (2003), notes that parents of children with exceptionalities often turn into advocates for educational reform, and have been empowered by their involvement in the process to become “strong agents for social change in schools on behalf of individuals with disabilities and their families” (p. iii).

Parental advocacy is a positive force in the ongoing evolution of providing a free and appropriate public education to children with exceptionalities. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) pointed to the future of parental participation by stating that there is “a continual need for parents’ participation in both their children’s education and the political process. Their

participation is necessary to protect the best interests of their children and to focus educational interventions on equity and effective instruction” (p. 170).

The historical review of professional and parent relationships presented in this section comprised the voices of the past of parents of children with exceptionalities. Voices of parents of children with exceptionalities were rarely sought out or heard before the decade of the 1990s. Over time, the work of parent advocacy groups towards empowering and eliciting the voices of parents of children with exceptionalities, combined with enactment of federal laws, increased community awareness and acceptance of individuals with exceptionalities. The next chapter describes the methodology employed to capture the voices of the present, by listening to parents of children with exceptionalities describe their contemporary relationships with educational professionals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will set out the manner in which research was conducted to blend parental voices of the present with those from the past to address the research question: How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals?

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in order to gain an understanding of what constitutes a positive rather than adversarial relationship between these two groups. Specific issues were examined through these questions:

1. How has the research literature described the relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals?
2. How do contemporary parents of exceptional children describe these relationships?

Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze the data. This section will look at assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design, give an overview of qualitative data collection methods and specify the data collection procedures used to capture current parent voices.

Assumptions of and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

A qualitative research design was considered appropriate for this study because of the nature of the inquiry into relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. Qualitative research looks at human qualities that are not quantifiable, in a manner that empathizes with the people from whom the data is gathered (Kincheloe, 1991).

Certain factors influenced the original choice of this research design, one of which was that group interviews are a good method for doing exploratory research. Group interviews have been defined/described in various ways: (a) as either a research strategy or a method of data collection; (b) a supplement to other research methods; and (c) as a way to garner data wherein group consensus is achieved, and/or recommendations are made (Krueger, 1994; Mertens, 1998; Morgan, 1988). Scott (1997) stated that one advantage to interviews is that the researcher can collect data in [the] participants “own words” (p. 5). Morgan (1993) stated that the goal of focus groups “is to collect concentrated discussions on topics of interest to the researcher” (p. 8).

The present study was exploratory, in the sense that it asked new questions of a select group of participants in order to uncover factors relating to the establishment of positive relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. Communication/understanding gaps may exist between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals, which act as barriers to positive relationships. In this study, open-ended comments were valued and the atmosphere of exchange was exploratory. According to Ginn (1994), qualitative studies give parents an opportunity to “tell their stories” (p. 39). Giving parents an opportunity to voice their ideas about their relationships with educational professionals, analyzing their statements and developing a model of positive relationships is one way to help bridge gaps that might exist between the two parties.

Overview of the Procedures

The qualitative data collection methods used in this study included the following: (a) historical content analysis; (b) individual and group interviews; and, (c) observation and recording of comments by parents at an open parent meeting led by state officials.

Content Analysis of Literature Abstracts

In an attempt to capture the voices of parents over time, a content analysis was conducted of journal abstracts published over four decades. The historical trends and conceptual themes concerning relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals were identified. The methods for conducting and analyzing the abstracts in the educational literature were presented in Chapter 2.

Charts and graphs depicting this analysis can be found in Appendix A. Types of articles are classified as PC (Professional Commentary), QNT (Quantitative), QUAL (Qualitative), Program Evaluation/Description, Survey, or a mixture of these methodologies. Graphs were created depicting the types of articles, sorted by decade.

In counterpoint to the historical analysis of parental perspectives, individual and group interviews were conducted, as was a recording of comments made by parents at an open meeting. This was done in an effort to capture the current voices of parents of exceptional children. The following sections are concerned with the methodology related to current voices of parents of exceptional children.

Selection of Interview Participants

Individual interviews were conducted with four parents of children with exceptionalities, three of whom were known to the researcher, and one parent who had attended the open parent meeting. The parent officer for the Parent Resource Center in one of these communities provided initial contact with parents of children with exceptionalities who would be willing to participate in a group interview process. Follow up communication by phone led to their agreement to participate in the study. The invitation to attend and record comments made by parents at an open parent meeting led by state officials came from a parent officer working at a different parent resource center.

Parent Resource Centers proved to be a fruitful source of guidance in locating parents who might be invited to participate in group portions of this study. Community parent resource centers have been defined as:

Centers that serve families of children and young adults birth to age 22 with all disabilities; work to improve education results for all children; train & inform parents and professionals on a variety of topics; resolve problems between families and schools or other agencies and connect children with disabilities to community resources that address their need. (Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers, 2005).

The coordinator of a community parent resource center must be the parent of a child with an exceptionality. Although parent resource centers are listed for each county in the state of Virginia, there is not always a coordinator for each center. The coordinator for one of the parent resource centers that provided assistance for this study no longer serves with that center and has not been replaced. Coordinators generally only work part-time hours. Of the four surrounding counties asked to participate in this study, only one county had a full time coordinator. Two centers had only phone numbers that gave information concerning the hours of operation, when parents could look for written material on their own, and, one had a part-time coordinator who has since left that position. Personal communication with a PRC Coordinator during the course of this study indicated that funding is not available for full time staff at each center. Regulations that govern special education programs for children with exceptionalities state that parent counseling and training mean:

- i. assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child;
- ii. providing parents with information about child development; and
- iii. helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child's IEP or IFSP. (34 CFR 300.24 (b) (7), 2002)

A mother who participated in this study was completely unaware that there was a parent resource center in her county, even though she had walked past it daily when she went to pick her son up from school.

Both group and individual interviews were held with parents of children with exceptionalities. Originally 4 parent focus groups comprising no less than 3 and no more than 10 participants were proposed. However, it became apparent that voluntary attendance as part of a research study was not a priority for these busy parents, given the many demands on their time. Parents who did not attend scheduled focus groups were contacted and in each case they stated that they assumed their absence would not be crucial, since other parents were also scheduled to attend.

In order to ensure an adequate number of participants, a decision was made to continue data collection using both group and individual interviews, and to attend and record comments made by parents at the open parent state meeting. In this study parents were more likely to follow through with an individual rather than group interview, although cancellations still occurred.

Description of Interview Participants

Table 1 presents the demographics of six parents from the group interview and individual interviews. Mother 1 (high school child) and Father 1 (preschool child) participated in a group interview. The remaining four parents in the table participated in individual interviews. Demographic data of parents at the open meeting could not be validated and thus were not included in the table.

The parents depicted in Table 1 all have post-high school education. Only one was a single parent and none were unemployed. They were articulate in their comments about their relationships with educational professionals. Three of the six interviewees also appeared to have significant knowledge of the special education process. Although two fathers are listed, one of

Table 1

Demographics of Parents Participating in the Group and Individual Interviews

Participant	Post High School Education	Marital Status	Employment Status	Child's Exceptionality	Child's Educational Placement
Mother 1	Yes	Married	Professor	Moderate to Severe Mental Retardation	High School
Mother 2	Yes	Married	Homemaker	Learning Disability & Attention Deficit Disorder	Elementary
Mother 3	Yes	Married	Teacher	Learning Disability & Attention Deficit Disorder	Middle School
Mother 4	Yes	Widow	Homemaker	Severe Mental Retardation	Vocational Training
Father 1	Yes	Married	IT Manager	Developmentally Delayed	Non-categorical, pre-school.
Father 2	Yes	Divorced Remarried	Business Owner	Moderate Mental Retardation	Vocational Training

the fathers acknowledged that his wife was the person who had wanted to participate, but when she was unable to make her appointment because her child was sick, her husband came instead.

Of the parents at the open meeting from whom data were obtained but not validated, there were six women and two men. These parents had children whose exceptionalities included learning disabilities with attention deficit disorder (5), developmental delays (2) and multiple disabilities (1).

The 14 participants in this qualitative study were parents of children with exceptionalities drawn from three rural communities in southwest Virginia. It should be noted that no attempt was made to select parents whose children had particular exceptionalities; the only caveat was that one of their children was receiving, or had received special education services.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Participants were given assurance of confidentiality. The informed consent form and IRB-related documents are reproduced in Appendix F. The informed consent stated that individuals would only be identified by a code, and that only the primary investigator would be able to associate any individual with particular data. Audiotapes would remain in the possession of the primary investigator, secured in filing cabinets, except when being transcribed. Tapes would be destroyed after the study was completed. Assurance was also given that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained if findings of the research were ever published in journals, separate articles, or mentioned at conferences and/or speaking engagements. Participants were free to not answer any question and to withdraw without penalty.

Refining the Interview Protocol

The following five questions were originally designed to be asked in the interviews: (a) Do you feel you have a relationship with educational professionals; (b) is it a positive relationship; (c) what makes it a positive relationship; (d) what barriers have you had to overcome; (e) what are your common goals? A pilot study was conducted after which the questions were re-designed. Finally, following discussion and feedback from colleagues, it was decided that only one initial question would be asked: How would you describe your relationship with educational professionals? This open-ended question would provide parents with an

opportunity to tell their story in their own words, rather than lead the parents by focusing on positive relationships and common goals and purposes that might not exist.

Group Interview Procedures

Originally four focus groups were planned. Two focus groups were scheduled to be held in the meeting rooms of different local libraries that were a convenient and familiar location for the participants from two counties. As previously noted parents who had agreed to attend one of the focus groups were unable to follow through due to the ongoing needs of their child with an exceptionality. This led to the decision to include individual interviews as part of the methodology.

Parents referred by one of the PRC coordinators as being willing to participate in a focus group were contacted and five parents agreed to attend the initial group. The meeting was scheduled to be held in the evening, at a time convenient for the parents. Refreshments were available immediately upon the arrival of the participants. Five parents had agreed to attend the meeting, but only two arrived. The other three were contacted and it was determined that one parent was home with a sick child, one did not want to drive in the rain and one had decided not to participate. Rather than ask the parents who had come to return home, a decision was made to conduct the group as scheduled. The following statements describe the procedure. Although the focus group procedure was followed, due to the scarcity of participants, this group cannot be called a focus group; rather this interview is referred to from herein as a group interview.

At the beginning of the interview session, a statement was read concerning the confidentiality of the participants' remarks. This statement was intended to help participants feel at liberty to give their honest opinions. The first activity was based on the methods used by Scott (1997), designed to help groups sort their thoughts into affinity groups. Participants were each handed a package of self-sticking notes. The participants were asked to brainstorm characteristics of the relationship between themselves and educational professionals and to write one characteristic on each note. This part of the group interview session was done in silence. Participants were given 15 minutes to complete this activity after which they placed each self-sticking note directly onto a display board so that the writing on the notes could be easily read by others.

Once the notes were arrayed on the display board, the participants were asked to move the notes from the display board to the sheets of chart paper taped to the wall with the goal of clustering the characteristics written on the notes into categories describing different aspects of their relationships with educational professionals. The participants could move their own notes or the other person's to any category and back again, however, the activity was still to be done silently. Once a silent consensus was reached that the categories were conceptually consistent, the two participants chose their roles as either facilitator or recorder. At this point conversation was permitted and they began their discussion by giving a title to each of the categories, then explaining why the characteristics were clustered in certain ways and why the specific title for each category was chosen (Scott, 1997).

Once the participants began their discussion, the session was audio taped. When the group interview was completed, the tapes were transcribed, and the data then coded and analyzed. The data from the notes on the chart paper were entered into categories on the computer for subsequent analysis.

Individual Interview Procedures

Four parents of exceptional children agreed to participate in interviews, responding to the research directive to describe their relationships with educational professionals. These parents constitute a convenience sample (Merriam, 1998). Three of the 4 parents were known to the researcher and knew of the study. The other parent was contacted after she failed to arrive for a scheduled group interview and agreed to an individual interview. Their exceptional children either had attended, or were attending, one of the four counties selected as the geographic research area.

The use of individual interviews as qualitative methodology has been defined as "conversation with a purpose" (Berg, 1998, p. 57). Two major interview categories are generally recognized: the formal or structured/focused interview, and the informal or unstructured/non-directive interview. The most frequent type of interview is the "person to person encounter" (Merriam, 1998, p. 71). The individual interview procedure followed in the present study was the unstructured/informal person to person encounter. This less structured type of interview assumes that "individual respondents define the world in their own terms" (p. 74). The interview process

is guided by the issue to be explored (Merriam, 1998). Probes followed key statements made by interviewees as a means of having them clarify or elaborate their views.

The parents of exceptional children participating in individual interviews were asked the following question: "Please describe your relationship with educational professionals." Educational professionals referred to personnel who interacted either directly (general education teacher, special education teacher, paraprofessional, occupational, physical, or speech therapist) or indirectly (principal, vice principal, special education area coordinator, director of student services, or psychologist).

The readiness of these parents to share their experiences made the interview procedure appear, at times, to be an almost therapeutic encounter. With respect to individual interviewees, all of them cried at some point during the interview as they described their relationships with a variety of educational professionals. For some of the participants, this appeared to be the first time they were able to voice their concerns and experiences to someone they viewed as an "educational professional," as they related their relationship with other educational professionals who interacted with their child.

Ely (1991) stated that in qualitative research interview questions can emerge and take shape during the data-gathering stage. The interviews with parents were open-ended and conducted at their convenience with respect to time and place. The interviews were audio taped (if permission was granted) and the tapes later transcribed. The three mothers interviewed did not wish to have their comments taped. The father interviewed freely gave permission to have his interview taped. When permission was not granted, a written record was made of the interview. The constant comparative method was used for analyzing the various sources of data.

Parent Meeting Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected at an open meeting for parents of children with exceptionalities arranged by the Virginia State Department of Education and held at a local county school. Permission was granted by the parent officer of the PRC to attend the meeting and to take notes. Recording of parent comments was done continuously and codes assigned to the eight individuals who made regular contributions. At the conclusion of the meeting, these individuals

were approached for participation in a follow up focus group meeting. Follow up phone calls led to parents initially agreeing to attend a focus group.

Arrangements were made to hold the session at a nearby library in order that the parents would have access to a familiar and easily accessible location. Although confirming phone calls were made prior to the meeting, on the night in question, none of the parents who had agreed to participate arrived. Follow-up phone calls led to one individual interview. Parents who responded to the follow up phone calls and could not commit to an individual interview stated that they sincerely wanted to help but that their child's needs at this time precluded their participation.

Hand-written notes were taken at the open-parent meeting. These notes were subsequently transcribed onto a computer, and the data were then coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis described more fully in a later section of this chapter.

Rationale for Data Analysis Procedures

As the researcher, I took the following steps in analyzing the data, as outlined by Scott (1997). For the parent meeting notes, and both group and individual interview data: (a) Analysis was not a one-time event, it occurred throughout the research process; (b) I transcribed the audio tapes (if the interview was recorded), or wrote up notes, and then reviewed the transcripts; (c) I reviewed both audio and written statements multiple times; (d) I identified emergent themes; (e) A third party reviewed the analysis and the consultation provided inter-rater reliability; and, finally (f) I identified new categories.

Krueger (1994) listed several types of interview analysis--transcript-based, tape-based, field note-based, or memory-based. The present analysis conforms most closely to Krueger's definition of transcript-based analysis, which he considered to be the most time-consuming. The constant comparative method of analysis was used for the analysis of the individual, group and parent meeting interview data. The choice of using individual and group interviews for this study was based on the criteria outlined previously and on my previous training in leading focus groups as a doctoral student and in conducting interviews as part of my duties as a psychiatric nurse on an in-patient unit at a metropolitan Canadian hospital.

According to Berg (1998), after the interviews are completed “researchers must closely examine potential patterns to see what findings actually emerge directly from the data; [these are] grounded findings, emerging from the data themselves” (p. 94). In addressing validity and reliability, external validity is a concern with qualitative research. However, it has been noted that generalization is not an issue here as it would be in quantitative research, since qualitative researchers pursue discovery through richness of description. Internal validity in the case of qualitative studies attempts to answer this question: How do the findings match reality? Triangulation methods were used in order to minimize possible threats to internal validity. The use of triangulation through the content analysis, the meeting notes, and the group and individual interviews helped to dilute threats to validity (Merriam, 1998). Credibility will rest upon the trustworthiness of the study. Internal validity is related to credibility and whether the results reflect reality (McMillan, 1996). To address reliability, a colleague read and assisted in coding both the group and individual responses, as well as the content analysis of abstracts. The responses were reviewed multiple times until consensus was reached. No significant disagreement in coding occurred.

The Constant Comparative Method of Analysis

Qualitative analysis is inductive and all raw data needs to be analyzed (McMillan, 1996). In an inductive qualitative study such as this, the data collected relate to a focus of inquiry, rather than being a test of an experimental hypothesis. Strauss & Corbin (1997) described the constant comparative method as follows: “The constant comparative method of analysis and its coding procedures were used, first comparing items in each category, then drawing up categories, and, finally, comparing categories” (p. 5).

The first step in the present analysis was to go over the raw data comparing items and drawing up categories for both the individual and group interviews. Both the original statements (raw data) and the potential categories were reviewed several times. Codes were assigned to the participants. The following quote from Maykut & Morehouse (1994) sets out the steps taken in analyzing the data:

The process of qualitative data analysis is one of culling for meaning from the words and actions of the participants in the study, framed by the researcher’s focus of inquiry. This

search for meaning is accompanied by first identifying the smaller units of meaning in the data...As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed...[Thus the constant comparative method of data analysis] combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. (pp.128 & 134)

In the open parent meeting portion of this study, information from notes taken at the meeting was transcribed onto a computer. A frequency count of the subject of comments made by the parents was done to get an overview of the data. The constant comparative method of analysis was used to analyze the data, and, the units of meaning derived from the data were coded to establish meaningful categories.

In the group interview portion of this study, initially the information from the notes placed on the chart paper was transcribed onto a computer. A frequency count was done to get an overview of the importance of various factors to the participants. The higher the frequency count (i.e. the number of times a specific issue such as communication is mentioned) the more important this issue would appear to be to parents. These units of meaning were categorized, coded, and combined with the categories derived from the taped portions of the group interview. The group discussion that followed the placement of the self-sticking notes comprised the audio taped portion of the interview and it was transcribed in its entirety. Transcripts were read and re-read, and tapes were listened to multiples times to ensure familiarity with the data.

With respect to the individual interviews, the tapes or interview notes were transcribed, and, a similar analytic approach was used as described for the group interviews. As I read through the raw data, the words, phrases, events and patterns of behavior that repeated, stood out, or were in some way like each other became units of meaning and later coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). When working with coding categories, individual items were first compared in each category, then categories were drawn up, and, finally the categories themselves were compared (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Once the codes were established, I looked for relationships among the patterns/categories that emerged. Coding was used as a way to boil

down the raw data to meaningful categories. Themes were then derived from across categories. Co-rater agreement with respect to the categories and themes supported the reliability of the analysis.

Once data had been reduced into categories and combined into themes, a third level of analysis--developing a schema and making inferences occurred (Merriam, 1998). A second person went through the data and consensus was arrived at with respect to the viability of the proposed schema. Finally the results were used to answer the research question: How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals?

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The present research was conducted to explore how parents of exceptional children describe their relationships with educational professionals. According to Crockett's (2002) five core principles of special education leadership, positive relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals fall into the category of productive partnerships. The development and sustenance of such relationships are relevant to the practice of educational leadership.

This chapter begins with a general introduction, followed by an overview of the findings, including a brief sketch of parental voices of the past as set out in the content analysis of four decades of abstracts from published journal articles discussed previously in Chapter 2. The findings from group and individual interviews, and the open parent meeting are presented, illustrated by quotes from the parental voices of the present.

Merriam's (1998) three levels of thematic analysis were adapted for use in describing themes derived from the individual and group research. A general description of each theme is followed by an exposition of commonalities or patterns found in them, and illustrated by quotes from parents who participated in the study.

Overview of the Findings

One of the characteristics of qualitative educational research should be the commitment to listen to voices of persons who may have previously been marginalized (Pugach, 2001). The parents of children with exceptionalities in this study agreed to let their voices be heard describing their struggles with educational professionals in part because they had concerns they needed to express.

Parental Voices from the Past

A detailed description of the methods used to analyze the historical trends and conceptual themes related to parent and professional relationships was presented in an earlier chapter. Readers are reminded that in order to elicit a snapshot of parental voices from the past, a content analysis was conducted of abstracts from the professional literature from 1960-1999, on the topic of relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. The

abstracts found by the search terms and databases employed in the present study, suggested that the majority of articles were professional commentaries. Qualitative studies showed an increase in the decade of the 1990s, reflecting the time period surrounding the re-authorization of IDEA in 1997.

The historical analysis indicated that parental voices were mainly silent within the research literature in the early decades of the 1960s and 1970s. At the beginning of the span of these decades, parents were seen as the cause of their child's exceptionality (Kirk et al., 2003). As the move towards an ecological rather than medical model progressed, parents were no longer viewed as being causative agents; instead, by the 1980s, they were seen as persons in need of training and counseling in order to deal effectively with their child (Lynch & Stein, 1982). By the 1990s a focus on relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals was developing in the literature, while the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 and amendments made to certain provisions of the Act increased the active role of parents of exceptional children in their child's education. In this final decade of the 20th century, mention was made of the term "parent empowerment" (Annino, 1999).

From 1990-1999, research abstracts reflected content addressing communication and collaboration between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals (Lovitt & Cushing, 1999; Margolis, 1999). Clarity of parental voices was aligned with progressions in the federal law relating to children with exceptionalities. To the minimal extent that parental voices appeared in the early literature, parents called for greater exchange of information and communication with education professionals, presaging some of the major findings in this study of parental voices from the present.

Parental Voices from the Present

Three means of capturing parental voices from the present were used: an open parent meeting observation; a group interview; and individual interviews. The preceding chapter set out the procedures detailing the manner in which the analysis of data gathered from group and individual interviews was carried out. To re-iterate, the constant comparative method of data analysis was used to derive 4 themes from parental voices of the present: (a) Communication, (b) Caring, (c) Competence, and, (d) Continuity. Communication was identified as the theme

with the highest frequency of parental comments. Parents wanted positive home-school communication. They also wanted educational professionals who would exhibit a caring attitude towards their children with exceptionalities, and, who were competent in their ability to provide individualized instruction and effective programming. Parental comments were also made about the perceived lack of continuity of programming and instruction both within and between counties. Table 2 illustrates these themes and sub-themes.

Table 2.

Themes from Parental Voices of the Present

Themes	Sub-Themes
Communication	Listening Initiating Character of the Communication (Positive or Negative)
Caring	Trust Respect Confidence
Competence	Knowledge Ability Professionalism
Continuity	Within Schools Between Schools Between School Systems

Presenting the Findings - Coding Categories for Interview Subjects

Quotes from the individual and group interviews and open parent meeting are used to illustrate concerns expressed by these parents. Participants were assured of anonymity in this study. Each participant was given a code that depicted the manner in which data were obtained, the gender of the participant, and the order in which the participant spoke in a group, or was interviewed personally. The coding categories are: GM (Group Meeting); OPM (Open Parent Meeting); and II (Individual Interview). Each participant was listed as F for female and M for male, and given a number to indicate if this was the first (or later) person who spoke in a group or to be individually interviewed (F1, M1, F2, M2 etc). Thus OPMF2 after a quote would indicate that this quote came from the second woman to speak at the open parent meeting.

In the sections that follow, each theme is described and illustrated with commentary from the parents who participated in this study. The most prevalent theme was communication and this theme in parental-professional relationships is discussed first.

Communication

Communication was the theme with the highest frequency of parents' comments. These comments were, in the main, negative. One parent in this study simply stated: "I do not have communication with staff or teacher" (IIF3). It would be difficult for this parent to develop a positive relationship with educational professionals, since communication is essential in order to establish a foundation for productive relationships (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

Parental data from this study indicated the parents' desire that educational professionals would strive to create positive home-school communication. Three sub-themes of communication were described by parents in this study: listening; initiating communication; and the character (positive or negative) of the communication that ensued.

Listening

The parents in this study generally did not feel that educational professionals were listening to them. As one parent stated at the group meeting: "We need professionals who are ready to listen to parents" (GMM1). The mother of another child commented on this area of communication during a personal interview by indicating that listening is more than just hearing, it is hearing with respect and openness to what the parent is saying. She stated:

When I am talking to teachers, I feel they think I am making excuses, but I'm just trying to tell them about my child. (IIF2)

When parents attempt to share the knowledge they have about their child, it would seem obvious that they need to be in contact with a professional who is ready to hear what they have to say. This, however, was not always the case as one mother stated at the meeting:

I think parents aren't going to continue trying, if they keep getting thwarted, or, [if] when you do call, you get the impression that you are bothering somebody. (GMF1)

Parents have been known to feel that even if they have frequent interactions with educational professionals, the school personnel disregard their honest concerns (Strickland, 1982). The feelings to which Strickland referred two decades previously were experienced by one contemporary mother who stated:

I keep telling them--just tell me what you think and I'll try and get something for him. (IIF2)

She reported that she had not received any feedback from educational professionals involved with her son concerning her suggestion that he might have a specific learning disability and/or attention deficit disorder.

Initiating Contact

Instead of professionals reaching out and initiating communication, parents in this study stated that they were the ones who have to make the approach. Several parents spoke to this point at the general meeting. One mother commented on how she would have liked to be engaged with the professionals who worked with her child:

It would be nice if they (educational professionals) were more active and say, "Let's get together every couple of weeks, and put it in place," and fine, I would say, fine, I'll be there. (GMF1)

Continually being the initiator of communication can lead to exhaustion and burnout on the part of the parent of a child with a moderate to severe cognitive exceptionality. One mother simply stated:

It got to where I just couldn't do it [arrange meetings with professionals]...I mean you can't imagine...for a while there I was just so burned out, I couldn't keep it up any more. (GMF1)

When professionals do not act proactively to keep parents informed, parents may become angry and set out to get the communication they feel is lacking. One parent who felt this way stated:

I don't have a problem with communication because I go and show up and I go to the teacher...I watched for her at 8 am. If I call them and they don't call me back, they know I'll be there at 8 am. (IIF3)

It is regrettable that any parent should feel they have to lie in wait for teachers to arrive at school in order to engage them in communication about their child. Could it be, as some research has indicated, that some teachers may feel they have the expertise and do not need to involve parents in the decision making process (Schulz, 1982)? One parent in the study asked:

Do we have a say in what they are doing? (OPMM1)

Another had finally decided that she could not continue constantly initiating matters on behalf of her child. She stated:

It got to where I just couldn't fight...for a while I am able to do it and then I get exhausted and quit for a while. (IIF1)

Is it possible that educational professionals are not aware parents of exceptional children want them to take initiative with respect to communication between the two parties? Effective communication requires both parties to be cognizant of the other's perspective.

Character of the Communication

Parents in the present study did not feel that they received the kind of communication from educational professionals that they wanted – communication that shows respect for, and openness to, their ideas and feelings (Davern, 2004). Rather, they felt that what they were told was mostly negative information. Parents stated that they only heard negative assessments of their child's performances or behaviors. One mother was appalled that there was nothing positive on the report card. She stated:

I got a lot of negatives--they were not concerns about him--but just negatives. There were no nice comments on the report card. (IIF3)

The lack of any positive communication has been shown to have a greater impact than just a lack of communication per se (Lovitt & Cushing, 1999).

At times, communications are sent home that are not meant to be negative, however by virtue of their content, the message is received as such. An example is given in the words of a mother whose son had significant disabilities:

He got an assignment [sent home] to write an essay about dating and marriage. It really hit me between the eyes and I wrote a note and said: "I know you don't mean to be insensitive, but this is a very painful topic. This child is never going to grow up and have normal dating relationships. He's never going to get married. He's not going to have children or a family, and being given this kind of assignment just rubs it in." (IIF1)

Most parents want some kind of regular contacts with educational professionals, whether it is in the form of home-to-school notebooks, telephone calls, or weekly reports (Hornby, 1989). However, even if home-to-school notebooks, or other established means of communication exist, they may not be used at all, or used incorrectly. A mother in this study stated:

We have a parent notebook that goes back and forth, but most of the time there is nothing in it. I will write notes and sometimes they don't get answered, and you know, it's like... Isn't anybody reading this? (GMF1)

Another mother stated:

Mrs. (name of teacher) has a form to fill in every week, but doesn't do it. (IIF3)

Positive and effective communication may have been easier to attain and maintain when special education teachers had their own classes and knew the students and families over time. One parent, both of whose children had received special education services, had this to say about communication with educational professionals who were special education teachers:

The [special education] teachers went well beyond what one would expect teachers to do... The special education teachers had my cell phone number and I had their home

phone number. They [the students] could have called her up in the middle of the night and she would have helped them. (IIM1)

Communication Synthesis

Negative comments were voiced by parents of children with exceptionalities with respect to the theme of communication between themselves and educational professionals. Parents stated that they had to be the ones to initiate contact, and, that even when they did this, replies were often not forthcoming. They also stated that if communication was sent home concerning their child, it was frequently negative. Forms were sent home that did not apply to their child or inappropriate assignments were given that caused them emotional distress. Notebooks and required documentation were not completed. Communication had the largest number of parental comments and appeared to be an area of considerable concern and frustration for parents of children with exceptionalities.

Caring

Parents in this study expressed concerns about a perceived lack of caring on the part of educational professionals and the overall theme is noted throughout parental comments. Sub-themes of the caring theme are more a blend of issues and, as such, are not specifically delineated as were the three sub-themes of communication. Although caring was mentioned by parents with respect to communication, the concept of care was also mentioned separately and had the second largest number of parental comments. Parents want to feel their child will be accepted and wanted in their school and classroom. They want their child's teacher to be a caring teacher, to regard their child as a child, not as an object (Noddings, 1984). Parents of exceptional children may not always have that feeling of acceptance and caring from the educational professionals who "care" for their child. Ongoing assessments, testing, and data collection are essential components of teaching children with exceptionalities, and activities of educational professionals may seem to be more analytical than caring.

Inclusion of exceptional children in the general education classroom was the practice of the school systems from which parent interviews were drawn. Parent responses indicated that they felt certain general educational professionals did not exhibit a welcoming or caring attitude towards their exceptional child. One father stated:

I think the social awareness of the mainstreamed teachers [could be shown if they] would take a little time to exhibit tolerance. It works better if you work out of kindness.

(OPMM2)

It would seem to be self-evident that teaching would work better if educators worked out of kindness, but, as Noddings (1984) indicated, being a teacher who is a caring teacher is difficult. If all teachers were caring teachers, parents would not have to ask the following question, as one in the present study did:

Is this person doing what they love to do, or is it just a job? (OPMM2)

Parents of children with exceptionalities expressed concerns about caring or the lack thereof, exemplified by one parent who stated:

I was told what he can't do. Nothing caring...She [child's teacher] probably didn't like him. (IIM3)

One mother said she had heard from other parents of children with exceptionalities that:

Regular education teachers may not want the [special education] kids. That is what I heard. I think that won't change. (OPMF1)

A mother in this study, who is also an educational professional, confirmed she had heard teachers stating that they, in fact, did not want the "special education kids." She stated:

I get upset when I come into the school at the beginning of the year and I hear them (general education teachers) saying: "I don't want all these special education kids in my class". (IIF3)

Crockett (2002) made a case for qualified leaders who are willing and able to serve a wide range of students. The same case can be made for classroom teachers who understand the law, are capable of addressing the unique educational needs of a child with an exceptionality, can provide specialized instruction in a caring and ethical manner, and want to establish positive relationships with the child's parents. According to these parents, this is not always the case in education today. One mother stated this about her child's teacher:

I think she had had it. She moved him to the back of the class. (IIF2)

Moving a child to the back of the class indicated to this mother that the teacher had given up on her son and nothing would be done to help him for the rest of the year.

One father felt that the special education department needed special people. He stated:

Certain jobs require special people...[the] Special Education Department needs to have the crème de la crème. (OPMM2)

With inclusive classes increasingly prevalent, it is not the special education teacher who has daily contact with children with exceptionalities; rather, it is the general education teacher, who may not have had adequate preparation for teaching children with special needs.

Parents in this study stated that they wanted someone to teach their child who wanted to be there. Wanting to be there and being involved with their child were characteristics parents felt were mainly demonstrated by the teacher aides. One mother stated:

There is not a lot of that [caring] except from the aide. He loved his aide. She was very nice. She said he was sweet. . . . I don't think he's ever established rapport with any teacher. This is what I want--I want someone who wants him. (IIF2)

Caring Synthesis

Comments voiced by parents of exceptional children were consistently critical of general education teachers, whom they felt did not want their children, did not exhibit caring towards, or make positive comments about, their child. The statements by parents regarding the concept of caring are also reflected in a recent study indicating that parents of exceptional children want the professionals who interact with their children to exhibit at least ordinary human decency (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Competence

The heading for this theme was chosen after much discussion between the co-raters. For the purposes of the present study, competence refers to the ability of an educational professional to address the unique educational needs of a child with an exceptionality and to provide effective programming to meet those needs. According to the principles of special education leadership guiding this study (Crockett, 2002), components of effective programming for children found eligible for special education services include “high expectations for all students, the use of validated teaching practices and methods for assessing student progress” (p. 164). International standards for the preparation and licensure of special education professionals have been established by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). In setting out the knowledge and

skill standards for beginning special educators, the CEC affirms that general education professionals must also possess knowledge and skills in order to effectively work with students with exceptionalities, and collaborate with special education professionals (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998).

In the main, parents made statements that could be deemed negative with respect to the competency level of general education teachers. Comments regarding special education teachers were somewhat more positive and dealt more with the availability of special education practitioners rather than any issue of competence. Although recording and reflecting on the results of the interviews is part of the writing process, it should be noted that the comments considered to be pejorative with respect to general education teachers quoted in any section reflect the perspectives of the participating parents and are not affirmed by the present researcher.

According to most of the parents participating in this study, general education teachers who worked with their children needed more training and had not been adequately prepared for their role as teachers of children with exceptionalities. Several comments reflect their perspectives that unprepared teachers were not meeting the disability-related learning needs of their children:

We are mainstreaming the kids but the teachers aren't prepared for them. (IIF3) The regular education teacher does not know anything about the kid. . . . Why can't we mandate regular education teachers to take credit hours in special education? (OPMM1)

Even if general education teachers have taken credit hours in special education, these courses may not have given them the specific information they need concerning children with exceptionalities in their class. If the general education teacher has not been made aware of the student's IEP, he or she would not have the appropriate basis upon which to provide needed modifications and accommodations in the classroom.

Lovitt & Cushing (1999) mentioned that parents in their study were surprised when they learned general education teachers had not been given information relating to the needs of their children with exceptionalities. A lack of knowledge concerning children with exceptionalities

could lead to low expectations. According to Kotler (1994), an attorney and father of a son with autism:

Low expectations lead to ineffective programming. Poor programming yields poor results. Poor results are then interpreted by many as proof of the original misperception that education for the disabled child is a well meaning but ultimately futile gesture (p. 42).

Parents in this study felt that the professional priorities of special educators differed from those of general education teachers, and, that choosing to be a special education teacher was more of a “calling” or vocation than a professional career decision. The following comments were made by two of the fathers in this study:

A special education teacher has to be a different type of person, a special person. I’m sure it can be tough with different kids. (OPMM1)

It takes a special instructor...and a special group to deal with these children on a day to day basis – this is not a 9 to 5 job – [they should] treat it like a doctor or a pastor treats it. (OPMM2)

According to the parents in this study, many of the general education teachers who worked with their children had not received adequate preparation for teaching children with exceptionalities. However, despite their comments about general education teachers, some parents had positive feelings about the inclusion of their children in general education classes. Although they thought self-contained classes had teachers with experience and expertise, they felt that inclusion could provide social benefits for their children. A father stated:

Self-contained classes have [teachers with experience] but inclusion is good socially. (IIM1)

Even though the philosophy of social inclusion was viewed in a positive way, parents still had concerns about the way inclusive practices were being implemented in their children’s schools, as one parent indicated when he stated:

Kids need social skills, but this county is in the dark ages. (OPMM1)

Some parents were under the impression that neither the general education teachers nor the aides had received any training with respect to children with exceptionalities. One mother asked:

Why can't aides be trained...[and] have someone who can teach regular education teachers too? (OPMF2)

One parent felt that the general education teacher lacked critical information concerning their child's educational program because the teacher had no knowledge of her child's individualized education program, having not read it. She stated:

When you mainstream, the teacher never gets to read the IEP so the child has "silent lunch." (IIF3)

Parents reported that general education teachers sent home report cards that did not give parents the information they were expecting regarding the student's IEP goals. One mother was concerned because "not applicable" (NA) appeared on her child's report card despite the legal requirement that IEP goals are relevant and specific to the unique needs of the student. She stated:

When the report card came home NA was written in for the IEP goals. How can the goals not be applicable? (OPMF3)

When a goal from a child's IEP has not been addressed in a particular semester, NA can be written on a report card for that particular goal, given that other goals in the IEP had been addressed, and, with the assumption that the goal listed as NA would be addressed in the following semester before the annual evaluation of the IEP. However, it is not appropriate for none of the goals to be addressed in any given semester.

With respect to competence, some parents shared concerns that assessments to determine if their children were eligible for special education services were not started early enough, as a result of a lack of knowledge on the part of the general education teacher. Parents also expressed feelings of guilt about waiting for the educational professional to recognize their concerns and act upon them. In one instance, a teacher had told a parent that it would not be appropriate to test a child in Grade 1, as exceptionalities would not show up so early. The mother, who felt her son

needed to be identified as eligible to receive special education, trusted that her child's classroom teacher knew what to do, and ended up blaming herself. She stated:

The school said to me not to test him until Grade 3 as it [any disability] probably wouldn't show up before then. I didn't push hard. . . . I thought "Well they have their job to do and they'll do it." I don't expect them to test everyone, but a lot of time was wasted. The whole year in Grade 1 he was apart. No help was given. (IIF2)

Some parents were concerned about the timeliness of meetings scheduled to address their children's needs. Although parents in this study tended to be more concerned with their ongoing relationships with educational professionals rather than with problems specific to the annual IEP meeting, one parent did comment on this important aspect of special education:

In February [my child] was diagnosed with a hearing loss. There was supposed to be a new IEP meeting with her new teacher, the principal, the OT and PT. Nobody came except the old teacher who re-iterated the old IEP. (OPMF4)

Parental concerns about the timeliness of initial evaluations and interventions have a long heritage. Two decades earlier, Lynch & Stein (1982) expressed similar findings noting that a slight majority of parents reported feeling that their children's needs had not been identified early enough.

In the present study, special education teachers came in for criticism as well. Statements made by parents indicated that, with the onset of inclusive schooling, special education teachers had taken on more of a consulting role and consequently had less contact with students with exceptionalities and less opportunity to provide direct instruction. Instruction related to specific goals was reported as being carried out by the teacher aides who were supervised by the general education teacher. The absence of specific and intensive special education instruction delivered by a qualified special educator caused one parent to say:

The special education teacher does not work with the kid at all--only observes. Aides are not always qualified--they are not the specialist. (OPMM1)

Another parent felt that children who were included in the general education classroom did not receive individualized instruction at all. She stated:

They [kids in the mainstream] don't get help. (IIF3)

This mother thought that the general education teachers were not given information from the IEP for the children with exceptionalities for whom they were responsible. This lack of information concerning the identified needs of these students indicated to her that the students were not getting the assistance they required in order to make educational progress.

Parents in this study wanted educational professionals with specialized training to deliver individualized instruction. When these parents voiced their concerns, they made it clear that they wanted educational professionals who were aware of the unique learning requirements of students with exceptionalities, and who would be able to design and implement effective individualized programs for their children, leading to positive educational progress. As previously noted, two of the five core principles of special education leadership set out by Crockett (2002), individual consideration and effective programming, are directly related to these parental concerns. Kotler (1994) stated that the failure to provide effective programming for children with exceptionalities in general education classrooms results in what he termed *secondary exclusion*, rather than *appropriate inclusion*.

Competence Synthesis

Parental comments about competence centered on their impressions that general education teachers had not received sufficient, if any, training in special education, and were thus not competent to provide individualized instruction. Special education teachers were deemed competent, but absent from daily or other frequent contact with children with exceptionalities. Parents favored inclusive schooling for social purposes, but expressed concerns that their children were not receiving the appropriate education guaranteed to them by federal law.

Continuity

Aspects of continuity in the parent-professional relationship referred to both continuity within a specific school and also continuity in relationships and services as students moved between schools in the same geographic area. Continuity was the theme with the fewest comments, but the parents' comments concerning this component of their relationships with educational professionals were forcefully made. A perceived lack in the continuity of services provided for the child with an exceptionality can also affect the perception of a professional's communication, caring, and competence. One parent in the study described necessary but

disruptive changes that occurred in the semester that her child was identified as having a learning disability (LD). Although her child stayed in one school, he received instruction in several different classes over the first semester.

We went from mainstreaming, to (identification as having) LD, to just special education. It took until Christmas time to get things straightened out. [Name of child] also has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) so consistency is important. (OPMF5)

Another parent of a child with ADD was critical of the middle school programming which necessitated having her son move to different classrooms with different teachers. She expressed very strongly that this constant change was detrimental to his learning, stating:

In middle school most students move between teachers. Put him with one teacher, no movement! (IIF3)

When self-contained classes were generally the settings for the education of exceptional children, it was possible for the special education teacher to have the same children in his/her classroom for a number of years. Parents had the opportunity to get to know their child's teacher over time and teachers were more easily able to develop a personal relationship with parents. This long-term relationship gave continuity to services and instruction that may be more difficult to achieve as a wider variety of educational personnel interact with parents throughout their children's educational careers. One father stated:

A special education teacher has to be a...special person. I'm sure it's tough with different kids. We need the continuity of a special education teacher who knows them all year. (OPMM2)

Speaking on the same topic at the open meeting sponsored by the Parent Resource Center a second parent said:

I am looking for consistency/continuity. [You] have momentum and then you lose it. (OPMM1)

This father implied that a lack of continuity and consistency, coupled with loss of momentum, could lead to a lack of educational progress on the part of his child with an exceptionality.

Another father in this study, whose children were educated in both self-contained classrooms and inclusive classrooms, had this to say:

Mrs. [name of teacher] had [name of child] all the way through [name of elementary school]. I would meet with her. She had students for four years. . . . The [public school teachers] went well beyond what one would expect teachers to do. [I] had a partnership with their self-contained teacher. (IIM1)

Parents expect educational professionals to provide professional educational services for their children, and they expect these educational services to be similar regardless of geographic location. Moving can be a traumatic experience for families of children with exceptionalities. A mother in the present study commented that she wished they had not moved from their original home. She stated:

I don't like it [area to which family moved]. I wish I were back in [original home school]. In [name of former area] they have a Reading Recovery Group--but they [do not appear] to have one in [name of child's new school area]. (IIF2)

When special education students move to a new school, parents expect an existing IEP to be followed, prompting this parent to state that after moving, her daughter's individualized program was not followed. She expressed her opinion that her daughter needed direct instruction in mathematics, rather than exposure to a more challenging curriculum without the intensive and specific support she had received previously in a program for students with LD.

The child went from learning to count money to pre-algebra and fractions. That was a big jump. She should have had math that matched her needs all along. It gets frustrating. (OPMF5)

Parents wondered about the inconsistencies and lack of continuity in implementing appropriate IEPs that they encountered, even in the same school system. One father stated:

There is no communication across schools. [Integration into general education classes] should have started in August, not January. Consistency and cross communication between schools in the same county [is needed]. (OPMM1)

This same parent had a problem with lack of continuity in placement options. He reported that an educational professional told him that "it was more restrictive for a student to be included with an aide than to be in a self contained class" (OPMM1). This prompted his statement that even the

opinions given by educational professionals within the same school system differed and “there is no continuity at all” (OPMM1).

Continuity Synthesis

Parents expressed concern that there appeared to be a lack of continuity of services, even among schools in the same school system. They found that their child’s IEP was not followed when they moved to a new area and that there was a lack of communication between the sending and receiving schools. Finally, parents seemed to describe the lack of continuity in professional opinions regarding instructional placement settings and the use of instructional assistants as being disconcerting to them and disruptive to their child’s education.

In the National Association of State Directors of Special Education report of 1999 linking the IEP to the general education curriculum, it was noted that greater opportunities were needed to assure special and general education program continuity.

Discussion

With respect to the findings described in the preceding pages, one question to be asked is: “Did the interviews have face validity--was that which was sought, found?” (Krathwohl, 1988, p. 68). The findings from a recent study conducted by Blue-Banning, et al (2004) that looked at family and professional partnerships, and had a much larger sample came to similar conclusions regarding certain aspects of the parent-professional relationship.

The findings in the present study are also indicators of areas of concern in the relationship between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals. The findings provide a snapshot of these relationships, both over time and in a specific time frame and geographic location.

With respect to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system, the present study was limited to the statements of specific groups concerning particular mesosystems, namely the school and the home. The fifth of Crockett’s (2002) five core principles, establishing productive partnerships with others on “behalf of students with disabilities and their families” is directly related to the establishment of positive relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals.

In describing their relationships with educational professionals, parents of exceptional children voiced their concerns and shared opinions of their particular parent-professional relationships. Analysis of the data recorded by these parental voices yielded the four themes of communication, caring, competence, and continuity.

Statements made by parents in the present study indicated that they did not think general education teachers had been adequately prepared to either welcome or instruct their child with an exceptionality. Difficulties in communicating with educational professionals led to parent burnout, and, a sense that neither the child with an exceptionality, nor his or her parents, were welcomed at their local school. Comments also indicated a lack of awareness by educational leaders with respect to continuity of services, once a child had been identified under IDEA.

Although parents knew that they could describe their relationship with a range of educational professionals, most of the comments were directed towards their relationship with their child's general education classroom teacher. As schools become increasingly inclusive of students with exceptionalities, it is the general education professional who has the most contact with the child with exceptional learning needs, and, who has daily responsibility for implementing specially designed instruction based upon a formal, individualized educational program.

In the next chapter, the themes of communication, caring, competence, and continuity are visually depicted in a graphic representation of parent-professional relationships that could be used to inform both special and general education leadership personnel. The findings are further discussed, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made for both practice and research in the area of relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals by listening to parental descriptions of these relationships and by examining how these relationships have been characterized in the research literature. The study attempted to answer the guiding question: How do parents of children with exceptionalities describe their relationships with educational professionals? Parental issues from the past were gathered by conducting a content analysis of journal abstracts spanning four decades, and a further research review of studies related to the issue of parental relationships with educational professionals. Parental voices from the present were collected via parent meeting observation, and both group and individual interviews. Fourteen parents of children with a variety of exceptionalities provided information concerning their relationships with educational professionals. This research resulted in a model that illustrates four themes of positive parent-professional relationships, namely Communication, Caring, Competence, and Continuity. In this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings and research findings are discussed, as well as recommendations for future research and practice in this area of educational leadership.

Discussion of the Findings

This section briefly sets out the theoretical underpinnings of this study and provides a visual representation of how the parents in this study perceived the layers of professional responsibility for their children, with the final onus falling on the general education teacher in an inclusive classroom. Findings from the content analysis are reviewed and a model of parent-professional relationships depicted as a means on informing educational professionals of the thematic categories expressed by the parents of children with exceptionalities in this study.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical underpinnings of this study were Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, and Crockett's (2002) Star Model of Educational Planning that illustrated the five core principles of special education (ethical practice, individual consideration, equity under law, effective programming, and establishment of productive partnerships). These core principles are seen as areas to develop in responsive leaders for inclusive schools. Parents' comments in this

study indicated that these were also areas in which classroom teachers of children with exceptionalities needed to develop expertise. The five core principles, needed as a guide for leaders and practitioners, become activated in the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, wherein the relationship between educational professionals and parents of children with exceptionalities reside. The two conceptual frameworks worked together in the present study to highlight areas of concern in this relationship.

Parental Perception of Pivotal Role Played by General Education Teachers

A key aspect of the results that was surprising to this researcher was that parental comments focused almost entirely on the general education classroom teacher, despite the generality of the stimulus for parents to describe their relationships with educational professionals, and the choice of professionals set out for them. It became increasingly clear that, in these parents' eyes, the general education professional was responsible for ensuring that the mandate in federal law with respect to children with exceptionalities was carried out.

Visually these layers of responsibility could be seen as a large inverted triangle. As illustrated in Figure 1, the broad section at the top would represent the federal laws. The next section, state regulations, would be followed by policies and procedures of local education agencies. The local elementary school and its site based leaders follow, and, finally, at the smallest point of the inverted triangle, is the linchpin of the classroom teacher. If this person is unable or unwilling to carry out their professional responsibilities with respect to the education of students with exceptionalities, then the enactment or re-enactment of laws and all that entails could be ineffective at the individual level.

Content Analysis

The content analysis of abstracts conducted as part of the research methodology spanned four decades, from 1960 through the 1990s. The early literature tended towards heredity theories--the parent being the cause of the particular exceptionality visited upon the child. The parent-professional relationship was presented in the literature as a relationship between problem-causers (parents) and problem-solvers (educators), with the problem being the exceptional child's disability.

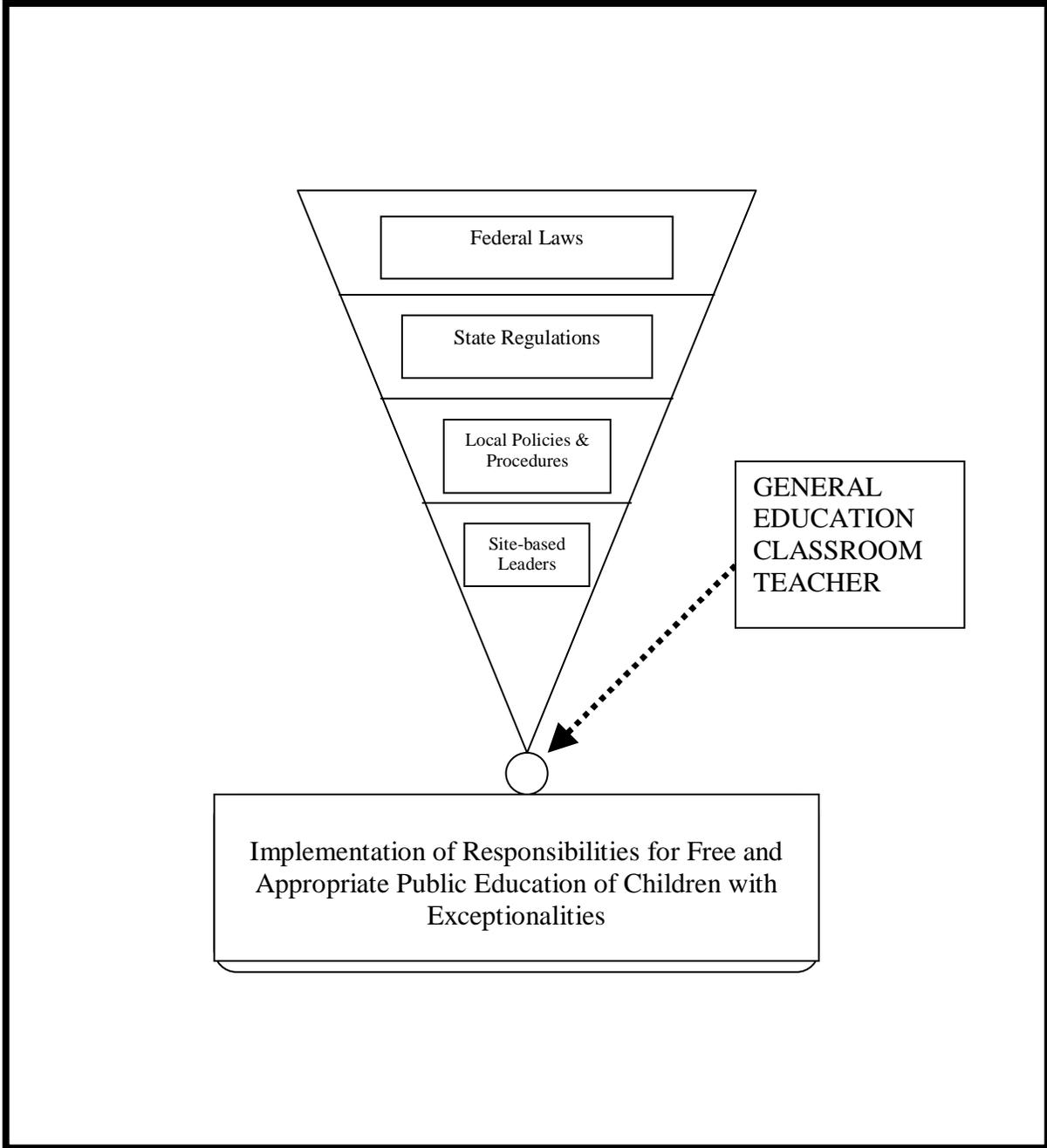


Figure 1. Parental perception of the layers of professional responsibilities.

The emphasis in the abstracts moved from a medical model to an ecological model over time. Public Law 94-142: Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 provided parents with the assurance that they would be informed of, and encouraged to participate in, decisions made about their children (Taylor, 2000). Initially, the journal literature of the 1970s and 1980s described a relationship that could be described as much like the old “empty vessel” approach to education. In this instance, parents were seen as the empty vessels to be filled by education professionals. Communication was not truly reciprocal and consisted mainly of professional educators training parents or imparting information and counseling. In this academic context it is perhaps not surprising that there was very little reporting of parental voices in the journal articles during this period. With the passage of time, research findings, the advent of mainstreaming, and later on inclusion, communication became less one-sided, but could not be considered as balanced, in terms of equality of importance.

The concept of partnerships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals was not found in the professional literature until the 1990s (Brantlinger, 1991; Katsiyannis & Ward, 1992; Margolis, 1999). Parents participated in the work of inclusion for their child with an exceptionality, and were informed enough to criticize the effectiveness of educational programs (Erwin & Soodak, 1995; Fisher, Pumpian & Sax, 1998; Lovitt & Cushing, 1999; Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, & Widaman, 1998). Competence was a focus in the literature reviewed, but the themes of Caring and Continuity gleaned from the analysis of parent voices of the present, were not found as an historical trend or a conceptual theme in the abstract analysis.

Interviews

Group interviews and individual interviews were held, and notes were taken at an open parent meeting. Individual interviews were conducted with four parents of children with exceptionalities, three mothers and one father. The themes of Communication, Caring, Competence, and Continuity were drawn from the analysis of this collective data. In the following section a model of parent-professional relationships derived from these themes was created to illustrate the components and outcome of this relationship. This model is presented in Figure 2.

Conclusions Based on the Findings

A Model of Parent-Professional Relationships

The model was created to visually inform professional educational audiences of the thematic categories parents expressed as important. The conceptual framework developed from the research consists of the following broad themes: (1) Communication, (2) Caring, (3) Competence, and (4) Continuity. Comments from parents concerned with issues of communication, caring, and competence were mainly directed toward classroom teachers. Issues of continuity were aligned more with educational administrators.

Figure 2 visually depicts these themes and possible outcomes of parent-professional relationships, given adequate or inadequate parent-professional interaction in each theme. This schema was derived from the data, after multiple sessions of analysis with a second rater. The final results generated the themes depicted in the model. The identified themes of parent-professional relationships move from left to right in order of importance as indicated by the frequency of parent comments. A more detailed description of the model follows.

As noted in Chapter 4, Communication was the theme with the highest frequency of parent comments. Parental data from this study indicated the parents' desire that educational professionals would strive to create positive home-school communication. Three sub-sets of communication were described by parents in this study: listening; initiating communication; and the character (positive or negative) of the communication that ensued.

Several parents in this study did not feel that educational professionals were listening to them. They indicated that listening is more than just hearing, it is hearing with respect and openness to what the parent is saying. Parents in the present study often expressed the feeling that they were not listened to in that way.

The second Communication sub-theme was initiating contact. Several parents offered negative comments about a perceived failure of education professionals to reach out and initiate communication. When professionals do not act proactively to keep parents informed, parents may become angry, according to parents in the present study.

A third Communication sub-theme was identified regarding the character of the communication. Most parents in the present study felt that what they got was mostly negative

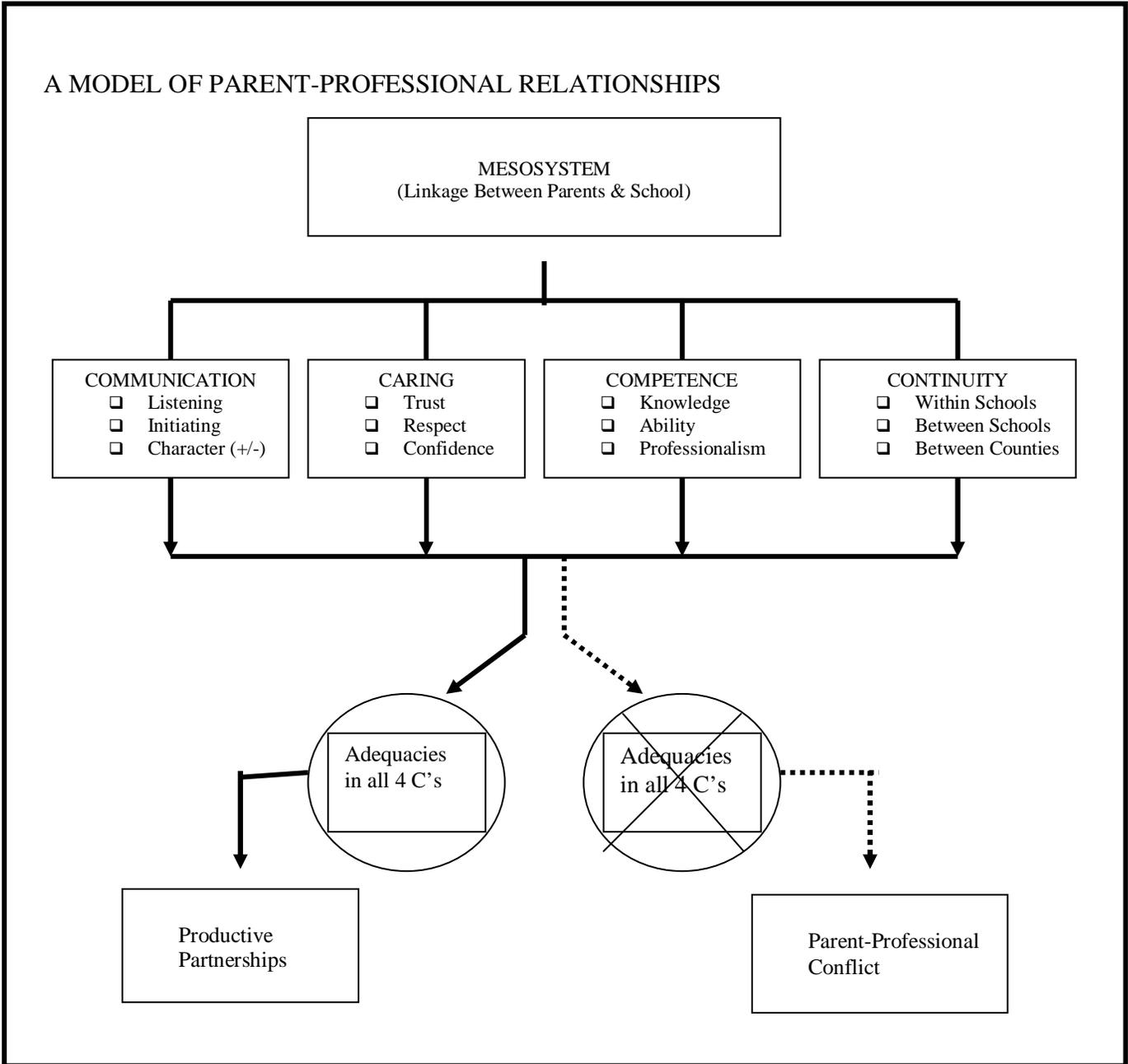


Figure 2. A Model of Parent-Professional Relationships

information. They did not feel that they received the kind of communication from educational professionals that they wanted. There was a perceived lack of positive content in the communication from professionals to parents.

Caring was the subject of the second-largest number of parent comments in this study, as indicated by its position in the model (Figure 2). All parents in the study indicated that it was very important to them that teachers liked their children and cared about them, but this was often not the case. Inclusion of exceptional children in the general education classroom was the practice of the counties from which parent interviews were drawn. Parent responses indicated that they felt certain general educational professionals did not exhibit a welcoming or caring attitude towards their exceptional child. Parents felt it was difficult to place trust and confidence in educators who apparently did not want their child in the class. Likewise, parents felt that they and their exceptional children did not get the basic respect they deserved as individuals, when general education teachers did not appear to welcome exceptional children in the classroom.

Competence is the third theme represented in the model (Figure 2), having garnered the third-largest number of parent comments in this study. Competence, as depicted in the model, refers to the ability of an educational professional to address the unique educational needs of a child with an exceptionality, and, to provide effective programming to meet those needs. Parents made statements that could be deemed negative with respect to the competency level of general education teachers. Comments regarding special education teachers were somewhat more positive. However, statements made by parents in this study indicated that, with the onset of inclusive schooling, special education teachers had taken on more of a consulting role and thus had less contact with students with exceptionalities and consequently less opportunity for direct instruction. One-on-one instruction was described as carried out by the teacher aides who are supervised by the general education teacher. The CEC standards affirm that general education professionals must also possess knowledge and skills in order to effectively work with students with exceptionalities, and collaborate with special education professionals (CEC, 1988), but parents in this study felt that general education teachers had not been adequately prepared for their role as teachers of children with exceptionalities.

As previously noted, two of the five core principles of special education leadership set out by Crockett (2002), individual consideration and effective programming, are directly related to parental comments. Parents of children with exceptionalities voiced their concerns about these components in this study, making it clear that they wanted educational professionals who were aware of the unique learning requirements of students with exceptionalities, and, who would be able to design and implement effective individualized programs for their children that led to positive educational progress.

Continuity is the final theme represented in the model. This aspect of the parent-professional relationship refers to both continuity within a specific school and also among schools in the same geographic area. As noted in Chapter 4, Continuity was the category with the fewest comments, but the parents' comments were forcefully made. A perceived lack in the continuity of services provided for the child with an exceptionality can also affect the perception of a professional's communication, caring, and competence. Parent comments indicated that the stress of moving can be compounded for a family if there is a lack of continuity in services or instruction among schools within the same geographic area. Continuity within schools was also seen as an issue in the parent-professional relationship. When self-contained classes were generally the settings for the education of exceptional children, it was possible for the teacher to have the same children in his/her classroom for a number of years. Parents had the opportunity to get to know their child's teacher over time and instructional continuity was easier to achieve. With inclusion, continuity of services and instruction may be more difficult, as a wider variety of educational personnel interact with parents throughout their children's educational careers.

As depicted in the model, the parent-professional relationship may take on a different character, depending on adequacies or inadequacies in Communication, Caring, Competence, or Continuity. Almost all parents made it clear in the interviews that parent-professional relationships were made more difficult by perceived failings in these areas. When serious deficiencies occur in one or more area, the parent-professional relationship can become adversarial instead of collaborative, proceeding down the path of school-based conflicts, mediation/dispute resolution, and ultimately, due process hearings and litigation. On the other hand, parents also made it clear that where Communication, Caring, Competence, or Continuity

are adequate, a greater possibility exists for the parent-professional relationship to advance through collaboration, agreement, coordinated services, appropriate programming, and ultimately, productive partnerships.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study

Bronfenbrenner's Mesosystem Analysis

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Hypothesis 34 describes the mesosystem relationships in a way that mirrors the attributes of what a positive relationship between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals could look like:

The developmental potential of settings in a mesosystem is enhanced if the roles, activities, and dyads in which the linking person is engaged in the two settings encourage the growth of mutual trust, positive orientation, goal consensus between settings and an evolving balance of power responsive to action in behalf of the developing person (p.214).

In the present study, the categories of Communication, Caring, and Competence can be seen as factors that feed into the attributes that Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified as trust, positive orientation, and goal-setting consensus. Measured against Bronfenbrenner's theoretical standard, the parent-professional relationships described by parents in the present study fall short in all areas, but show positive movement in the evolving balance of power (thanks to federal legislative initiatives), and a growing goal consensus. Parents in the study strongly indicated that the areas needing work and attention were aligned with the following areas of Bronfenbrenner's standard: (a) a positive orientation on the part of education professionals, and (b) mutual trust between parents and educators. It should be noted, however, that these generally negative parental attitudes were not reported regarding special education teachers and aides.

The category of Continuity, as identified in this study, could be a useful construct to enhance the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical analysis to the special education context. Exceptional students are engaged in the education system for long periods of time and that participation includes unavoidable changes in schools and personnel as students progress within this particular microsystem. From time to time, each of the dyads and activities of the educational microsystem may change, including IEPs, teachers, and school administrators.

Despite regular changes in its major elements and people, the microsystem continues and so does the mesosystem involving the home setting. At some point, according to the parents in the present study, a lack of continuity in the education microsystem damages its relationship with the home setting, thus disrupting the functioning of the home-school mesosystem. It might be useful to recognize this finding at the theoretical level, with respect to Bronfenbrenner's criteria. The present study contained insufficient data to conclude which elements are critical for continuity, or how much change in the mesosystem's elements might be tolerated before function is impaired, but these would appear to be areas for productive future research.

Crockett's Leadership Curriculum

The core values of Crockett's (2002) star model for educational planning relate directly to parental concerns stated in the study concerning the ability of general education classroom teachers to address effectively the unique educational needs of students with exceptionalities and to develop specialized instruction to facilitate progress towards their educational goals. If educational professionals are perceived as lacking the capabilities needed to ensure individual consideration and effective programming--areas of competence--it is not surprising that there could be a lack of productive partnerships and positive relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals.

This study's visual model for positive relationships could inform the preparation curriculum for both special and general education leadership personnel. Crockett's (2002) proposed leadership curriculum addressed the challenge of including the key areas related to ethical practice, equity under the law, effective programming for students with exceptionalities, and the building and maintenance of productive partnerships with parents of exceptional children . The thematic model in the present study builds on Crockett's productive partnership analysis and identifies elements that could be included in an integrated leadership curriculum to prepare educational professionals for productive partnerships with exceptional families. The model is intended to help both parents of exceptional children, as well as educational professionals, to better understand and enhance their current relationships.

Recommendations for Practice

Communication

Parents in this study stated that they did not feel educational professionals listened to what they said. They also voiced concerns about the character of communications received from educational professionals (negative rather than positive) and the desire that professionals would initiate communications, rather than having that burden fall on the parent of the exceptional child.

These remarks by parents of children with exceptionalities allude to poor communication skills on the part of educational professionals. The research literature examined in this study indicates that for many years educational professionals have been concerned that they lack training in ways to communicate effectively with parents (Strickland, 1982). This inability to communicate effectively fosters difficulties in the ecological systems where communication is required for positive relationships between educational professionals and parents of exceptional children. Lovitt & Cushing (1999) noted that communication between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals is an important aspect in the successful education of youth with disabilities. Based on the findings from the present study, the following four recommendations are made.

Recommendation #1. Improve verbal and written communication training for educators.

A recommendation from the findings of this study is to have educational leaders improve training for both pre-service teachers and professionals in the field, in ways that facilitate effective parent-professional communication. Both verbal and written communications need to be part of this training. Recent studies confirm the present study's findings that current written communication, for example via the home-to-school notebook, is ineffective as a means of communication between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals. (Davern 2004; Hall, Wolfe & Bollig, 2003)

Recommendation #2. Encourage educators always to include positive statements when communicating directly with parents of exceptional children.

Parents in the present study wanted to hear positive comments about their children, not just current areas of difficulty teachers might be having. This finding leads to a simple

recommendation that could produce enormous benefits to the parent-professional relationship: The first comment spoken by an educational professional to parents about their child with an exceptionality should be a positive one.

Recommendation #3. Institute regular, educator-initiated, verbal communication with parents of exceptional children.

With respect to verbal communication between educational professionals and parents of children with exceptionalities, parents in the present study wanted educational professionals to initiate contact with them and not wait until the parents took the initiative to speak to the educators. Some parents felt they were bothering educational professionals when they tried to speak with them. Such deference or diffidence to educational professionals would not be a sound basis for developing a productive partnership.

Recommendation #4. Include listening skills training in staff development programs.

Parents in this study felt that educational professionals did not know how to truly “listen” to what they were trying to say with respect to their child with an exceptionality. Professionals in the areas of counseling and nursing are required to take courses in how to listen effectively to the persons entrusted to their care. Listening skills training could be part of the staff development program for effective communication between educational professionals and parents of exceptional children, and part of pre-service college programs.

Caring

Parents in this study commented that they believed general education teachers did not want children with exceptionalities in their classroom. Among the most difficult things to hear from the parents in this study were comments that they did not feel their children were liked or wanted by the teachers entrusted with their care. It was when making statements that they felt their child was not liked and not wanted that two mothers in the study cried. Noddings (1984) has written extensively about caring in the context of schooling. Based upon her research, one might ask the question: “Is the child with an exceptionality receiving the caring that he/she requires in order to make educational progress?”

The idea of a caring teacher having specific qualities can be found early in the history of special education. A description of teachers who were wanted to work in this field, and who were

required to be both caring and competent in working with children with exceptionalities, was given by Superintendent William H. Maxwell of the New York City school system in 1905:

The teacher who is to take up this work should be peculiarly adapted to it by nature. She should have insight into child nature, affection for children, and ability for leadership. She should be resourceful and inventive, reaching and quickening the spirit of those who suffer. She should be wise and tactful, not only with children but with adults, for if she is to succeed, she must become friend and adviser of the family, in order to get the cooperation so necessary to the best work of the child. She must be sanguine, cheerful, optimistic, patient, and have infinite capacity for taking pains. (as cited in Kode, 2002, p. 40)

Comments made by the parents in this study indicate that these qualities, couched in more contemporary language, are still in demand for teachers of children with exceptionalities.

Recommendation #5. Provide training for parent advocates.

Most of the comments made by parents in this study dealt with the ongoing relationship they had with educational professionals, not with specific interactions at formal meetings such as Individualized Education Program meetings. The meetings themselves, if they were contentious, appeared to be so because the relationship itself had not been a positive one. To address these issues, it is recommended that parent advocates be trained, via public or private funding, to:

- (a) assist novice parents of children with exceptionalities to understand, and more fully participate in, the special education process
- (b) model a caring attitude towards the child with exceptionalities for educational professionals involved in that child's education
- (c) help the parents express their concerns in front of professional groups or meetings that can be intimidating (Hamre-Nietupski, et al, 1988), and,
- (d) provide a means of informal liaison, at initial screenings and thereafter, between the two microsystems, and a way of initiating a positive relationship between parents of children with exceptionalities and caring educational professionals.

Competence

It is stated in the Council for Exceptional Children's (1988) international standards for the preparation and licensure of special educators that the quality of educational services provided to children with exceptionalities rests in the competencies of the educational professionals who provide these services. It is not only special education professionals who need to be competent when educating children with exceptionalities, since the Council noted that these skills and this knowledge are something that all general educators must possess in order to work in collaboration with special educators, and with students with exceptionalities included in their schools and classrooms.

Recommendation #6. Enhance pre-service training and in-service staff development for all education professionals by integrating knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to the successful education of students with exceptionalities.

As noted earlier, prior to the re-authorization of IDEA in 1997 educators and parents were concerned that general education teachers were not prepared adequately to address the needs of students with exceptionalities (Hehir, 1999). Information from the present study indicates that parents continue to feel general educators have not been adequately prepared to address the educational needs of their children.

This finding leads to a recommendation about Competence, that pre-service and in-service training for all educational professionals should address special education policies and instructional practices proven to support the academic learning and social growth of students with exceptional learning needs. Such integrated preparation programs or staff development initiatives would enhance the capabilities of general education teachers and administrative personnel for meeting the educational needs and helping to ensure educational progress of students with exceptionalities.

Continuity

One finding of the present study was the existence of parental concern and dissatisfaction because of a lack of continuity in personnel, practices, and policies, even within school districts. This seemingly minor category illuminates a potentially major problem area. The primary concern about continuity in this context is not for the continuity of teachers or other personnel,

but rather a continuity of programming and services. In the United States special education is grounded in federal law, adopted by state regulators, and put into practice via county regulations. If there is a lack of continuity of programming and services for children with exceptionalities, then there can be an uneven adaptation of the laws for local areas. Continuity of services is the responsibility of administrators. The goal of preparation programs for administrators needs to be the development of leaders who are cognizant of the law and its implications for effective practice (Crockett, 2002). This is precisely what parents in the present study who spoke to the issue of continuity wanted for their children with exceptionalities.

Recommendation # 7. Encourage school system administrators to review the policies and practices that they are using across the system to provide continuity in procedures and practices (with parents of children with exceptionalities involved as critical stakeholders in this review process).

Areas for Future Research

Responsive Leadership

Further research is needed to explore the response of educational administrators to the parental concerns expressed in the present study. The themes of Communication, Caring, Competence, and Continuity might be used as indicators for administrators to consider in conducting program evaluations or in instituting staff development programs to meet their specific needs.

International Comparisons

In conducting the abstract review, it became evident that researchers in other countries had looked in-depth at relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals. A review of non-USA abstracts and synthesis of foreign research would add to the body of knowledge concerning these relationships and provide a wider spectrum of information.

Parents of Non-identified Children

Comparing the description of the relationships by parents of children with exceptionalities set out herein, with how parents of non-identified children describe their relationships with educational professionals would be a further research recommendation. Is

there common ground between the parents, or do the special concerns of parents of children with exceptionalities create singularly different expectations, resulting in widely differing relationships with educational professionals?

Personal-Professional Relationships

The findings of this study were derived from a relatively small sample of parents of children with exceptionalities, however, a study conducted by Blue-Banning et al (2004) that had a larger sample (33 focus groups and 32 individual interviews) identified six similar themes of collaboration with parents of children with exceptionalities: (a) communication; (b) commitment (to the child); (c) equality; (d) skills; (e) trust, and (f) respect. Could it be that the themes set out in the present study are themes that relate to personal-professional relationships in a variety of professional fields? Future research could investigate how the model of parent-professional relationships set out in the present study relates to other fields of professional endeavor within the bounds of educational leadership and practice.

Practice as Research

The areas identified as recommendations for practice in Communication, Caring, Competence, and Continuity are also fruitful fields for further research. It might be of interest to attempt to replicate the present study, using the same research question, but with a larger sample of parents of children with exceptionalities. Such a project could take into account the suggested addition of Continuity to Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem criteria. As noted above, the present study contained insufficient data to conclude which elements are critical for continuity, or how much change in the mesosystem's elements might be tolerated before function is impaired, but these would appear to be productive areas for future research.

Historical Analysis

The content analysis in this study spanned four decades reflecting how, or how not, parental voices from the past were reflected in the research literature, within the parameters of the key word search. A second historical analysis, based on themes derived from the parental voices of the present, would give further foundation to the body of knowledge surrounding relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals by listening to parental descriptions of these relationships and by examining how these relationships have been characterized in the research literature.. Themes derived from the responses of parents interviewed in this study were used to develop a model of parent-professional relationships to inform both special and general educators of parents' concerns, and to assist in the establishment of ongoing positive relationships.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the present study are obvious: the small size of the sample (N=14); the majority of parental voices from the present being well-educated, middle-class, Caucasian parents, and either selected as in a convenience study or suggested by a third party as having comments they wished to express; all parents being from a specific geographic area in Virginia; and the shifting of methodology due to lack of parental participation in the methods originally planned for the study. Did the observation and interviews have face validity--was that which was sought, found (Krathwohl, 1998)? The fact that the study by Blue-Banning et al (2004) came to similar conclusions regarding aspects of the parent-professional relationship supports the possibility that the findings from this study reflect the views of parents of exceptional learners toward their partnerships with educational professionals.

The content analysis reflected parental issues from the past within the parameters of the key word search that was conducted prior to the interviews conducted with present-day parents. The themes identified in the voices of the present-day parents were not reflected in the abstract analysis of parental issues from the past. A second historical analysis, based on the themes derived from the parental voices of the present, would give further foundation to the body of knowledge surrounding relationships between parents of children with exceptionalities and educational professionals.

References to federal law in the study referred to the 1997 re-authorization of IDEA. This law was more recently authorized in 2004. Federal and state regulations regarding this recent re-authorization will be implemented with respect to parental consent for the initiation of special

education services; disciplinary issues; dispute resolutions between parents and school systems; and interactions between parents and the educational professionals who interact with their child in the IEP process (Riley, 2005). Although these revisions are of great interest, they are beyond the scope of the present study that focused on the four decades from the 1960s through the 1990s. This is a limitation that could be corrected when further research is done that looks at relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals from the year 2004 and onwards.

Researcher's Perspective Revisited

In Chapter 1, statements were made with respect to this researcher's perspective as a parent, advocate and teacher. I am a parent of a child who received early intervention services. I taught children with a variety of exceptionalities for more than a decade. As part of the two previously mentioned roles, I have also been an advocate for both the parents of children with exceptionalities and the students themselves. It was truly a privilege to teach my students with exceptionalities and to get to know their parents. I learned many things from these families over the years, not the least of which was how much they loved their children--exceptionality notwithstanding. As one mother said "There is no such thing as a throw-away child." From the children themselves I learned what it means to be truly human. I received lessons from them on compassion, patience, understanding, and how strong the will to learn can be.

My current position as a professor teaching pre-service teachers provides an opportunity to share with future educational professionals how fortunate they will be to have students with exceptionalities in their classrooms and how much they will learn from them. It is my hope that the new generation of teachers, many of whom went to school with children with exceptionalities, will be better prepared to provide the individualized instruction, based on effective programming, that their students with exceptionalities require.

The experience of conducting the present study has given me a much greater appreciation and understanding of parents of exceptional children. I hope that this will inform my teaching and help me give my students some useful tools that will, in turn, help them form productive partnerships with the parents of their exceptional students.

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- Turner, J. (1999, 11/3). Warrior school hiring urged: Disabled children are more likely to be abused in school, a worried mother says. *The Roanoke Times*, p. B1.
- Turner, J. (2001, 2/27). Roanoke County woman aids disabled children's education. *The Roanoke Times*, p. B1.
- Yanok, J., & Derubertis, D. (1989). Comparative study of parental participation in regular and special education programs. *Exceptional Children, 56*(195-199).

Ysseldyke, J. E., Lange, C. M., & Gorney, D. J. (1994). Parents of children with disabilities and open enrollment: Characteristics and reasons for transfer. *Exceptional Children*, 60, 359-372.

Zaretsky, L. (2003). *Parent advocates' and principals' perspectives on their interactions in special education*. University of Toronto, Toronto.

APPENDIX A

Abstract review summary materials organized by decade from 1960-1999
(including frequency count tables and selected abstracts)

1960- 1969: 8 ABSTRACTS REVIEWED

EXCLUSIONS

NON-RELATIONAL: 5

EARLY CHILDHOOD: 0

MEDICAL: 1

NON-US: 1

OTHER: 0

SELECTIONS

Total: 1

TOTAL OF EXCLUSIONS AND SELECTIONS = 8

Frequency Counts of Educational Abstracts

1960-1969: Articles Selected = 1

	1960-62	1963-65	1966-68	1969+	TOTALS
<i>TYPE OF ARTICLE</i>					
PC					
QNT					
QUAL					
Prog. Eval/Desc.	1				1
Survey					
Mixed					
<i>TOPIC/FOCUS</i>					
Assistance					
Collaboration					
Conferences					
Counseling					
Liaison					
Partnerships					
Relationship					
Training					
Other	1				1
<i>DISABILITY</i>					
LD	1				1
PDD/Autism					
DD					
BD/ED					
MIXED					
OTHER					
<i>JOURNALS</i>					
RASE					
JASH/TASH					
Am.Jrnl. of MR					
Journal of LD					
Ed. & Training in MR					
Excep Children					
Other	1				1

ARTICLES SELECTED

Stringer, L. (1960). Report on a retentions program. *Elementary School Journal*, 60, 370-375.

Abstract: The findings “suggest that more learning failures are due to emotional problems...than to specific organically determined learning disabilities...If they (parents) are willing and able to work with the school to help the child, social promotions can produce results...Where the parents are not willing or able retentions can help a significant proportion of failing children” if certain criteria for selection are followed.

1970 - 1979: 42 ABSTRACTS REVIEWED

EXCLUSIONS:

NON-RELATIONAL: 19

EARLY CHILDHOOD: 0

MEDICAL: 5

NON- U.S.: 9

OTHER: 1

SELECTIONS

Total: 8

TOTAL OF EXCLUSIONS & SELECTIONS = 42

Frequency Counts of Educational Abstracts

1970-1979: Articles Selected = 8

HEADINGS	1970-72	1973-75	1976-78	1979+	TOTALS
<i>TYPE OF ARTICLE</i>					
PC	1		1	2	4
QNT					
QUAL				1	1
Prog. Eval/Desc.	2	1			3
Survey					
Mixed					
<i>TOPIC/FOCUS</i>					
Assistance		1			1
Collaboration					
Conferences	1				1
Conflict					
Counseling			1	1	2
Liaison	2				2
Partnerships					
Training					
Other				2	2
<i>DISABILITY</i>					
LD	2	1	1	3	7
PDD/Autism					
DD					
BD/ED					
MIXED					
OTHER	1				1
<i>JOURNALS</i>					
RASE					
JASH/TASH					
Am.Jrnl. of MR					
Journal of LD			1	1	2
Ed. & Training in MR					
Exceptional Children					
Other	3	1		2	6

ARTICLES SELECTED

Bricklin, P. M. (1970). Counseling parents of children with learning disabilities. *Reading Teacher*, 23 (40), 331-338.

Abstract: Describes a program of parent-counseling sessions conducted with parents of children with learning disabilities. The program is designed to:

(a) provide information concerning disabilities; (b) provide a liason between home and school; (c) aid parents in understanding their children's feelings and behavior; (d) aid parents in developing a total approach to the child's behavior; and (e) provide parents with the opportunity to determine whether or not they themselves wish to seek psychotherapy.

Ellis, W. (1979). The school principal as advocate for the child with learning differences. *Bulletin of the Orton Society*. 29, 245-250.

Abstract: States that school principals have an important role in identifying learning disabilities in students at the middle and high school levels. The author stresses the importance of the principal in developing programs to overcome the disability, aiding in the adjustment of parents and providing guidelines for teachers.

Freidman, R. (1978). Using the family school in the treatment of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 11(6) Jun-Jul, 378-382.

Abstract: Argues that the family is a school, that the family school plays a significant and often decisive part in the etiology of a learning disability...School personnel have the counseling skills to guide parents in making changes in the family school that will assist the child in overcoming a leaning problem. In contacts with parents...opportunities to assist parents in making the family school a positive factor will often be present. In some situations, however, referral to a community mental health resource may be needed.

Fuchs, Lucy (1972). Special classes for the learning disabled. *Social Work, 17 (6), 86-92.*

Abstract: Describes experiences with special classes for elementary and junior high school children with learning disabilities and minimal brain damage in a small public school system. Liason with parents is discussed and case histories to illustrate the variety of problems encountered. Interactions with children and with teachers are also discussed. It is concluded that the variety of problems involved indicate the need for a range of alternative programs.

Gold, P. & Richmond, L. J. (1979). Counseling parents of learning disabled children. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 14 (1), 16-21.*

Abstract: The emphasis here is on training parents to listen, observe and respond more appropriately to their children's behavior. [Model discussed in article] focuses on educative and interpretive counseling design to assist parents in increasing their children's internal control and self-esteem. Parents are also encouraged to deal directly with their own negative feelings about themselves and their offspring. Both approaches seek to establish a coordinated relationship between home and school.

Hagberg, B. L. (1970). The reading therapist and parent conference. *Reading Horizons, 10 (3), 107-110.*

Abstract: Stresses the importance of parent-teacher conferences in relation to the development of a successful corrective reading program. It is suggested that the conference provides essential information to both parties and allows for remediation of the "whole child" by making it possible to organize activities both at home and in the school.

Neyhus, A. & Neyhus, M. (1979). Relationship of parents and teachers in the identification of children with suspected learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 12(6) Jun-Jul, 379-383.*

Abstract: Interviewed the parents and teachers of sixty 5-15 year old disabled students to determine (a) whether the home or school first suspected the problem, (b) the age of the

child at the time, (c) the first impressions of the problem as reported by both home and school, (d) the nature of any communication between home and school and (e) the age of the child at the time of application for a psycho-educational evaluation. Among results it was found that... the delay between observation and application was significantly greater for children whose difficulties were first observed in the home. It is suggested that professionals who work with parents should stress the importance of early identification and intervention to minimize the effects of learning disabilities.

Pascale, M. et al (1975). Assistance to parents at the Frostig Center: A discussion of parent services at a clinical school. *Journal of Research & Development in Education*, 8(2), 64-69.

Abstract: Describes how parents are involved with staff in treatment services for children with learning disabilities. Each staff member contributes to parents' programs, which vary according to the needs, but also include certain procedures with all families.

1980 - 1989: 193 ABSTRACTS REVIEWED

EXCLUSIONS:

NON-RELATIONAL: 30

EARLY CHILDHOOD: 4

MEDICAL: 16

NON- U.S.: 48

OTHER: 77

SELECTIONS

Total: 18

TOTAL OF EXCLUSIONS & SELECTIONS = 193

Frequency Counts of Educational Abstracts

1980-1989: Articles Selected = 18

HEADINGS	1980-82	1983-85	1986-88	1989+	TOTALS
<i>TYPE OF ARTICLE</i>					
PC	1	2	2	2	7
QNT	3	1	1		5
QUAL				1	1
Prog. Eval/Desc.	3	1			4
Survey				1	1
Mixed					
<i>TOPIC/FOCUS</i>					
Assistance					
Collaboration	1				1
Conferences					
Counseling	3	1			4
Liaison					
Partnerships				1	1
Realtionship					
Training	2	1			3
Other	1	2	3	3	9
<i>DISABILITY</i>					
LD	4	3			7
PDD/Autism					
DD	2	1		1	4
BD/ED					
MIXED			3	2	5
OTHER				2	2
<i>JOURNALS</i>					
RASE					
JASH/TASH					
Am.Jrnl. of MR					
Journal of LD	2	1			3
Ed. & Training in MR	2				2
Exceptional Children	2				2
Other	2	3	3	3	11

ARTICLES SELECTED

Abramson, M. et al (1983). Parents' perceptions of their learning disabled child's educational performance. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 6(2), 184-194.

Abstract: A questionnaire was developed to assess how parents of a learning-disabled (LD) child viewed (a) their relationship with school personnel, (b) their child's academic and social progress, and (c) integrated programs involving handicapped and non-handicapped students. Questionnaires were returned by 43 parents. Results indicate that parents were not actively involved in making educational decisions regarding their child and that they were uncertain about how their child was functioning in an educational setting. Findings are discussed as they relate to the need for greater parent involvement and attitude changes on the part of school personnel towards parents' role in the educational process.

Boe, M. J. (1983). Home visiting the LD child. *Academic Therapy*, 19(10), 47-51.

Abstract: Discusses the benefits of the classroom teacher visiting the home of the learning-disabled student. The visit involves meeting the family, discussing the child's individualized educational plan with the parents, and performing a demonstration lesson for the family. The closer touch with the learning disabled child's home enables the teacher to give the family the help and support it may need; it also benefits the child through greater understanding and rapport.

Correa, V. I. (1987). Working with Hispanic parents of visually impaired children: Cultural implications. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 81(6), 260-264.

Abstract: Discussed two types of problems faced by teachers working with visually impaired Hispanic children and their families: difficulties associated with accepting the impairment and cultural and linguistic differences. A framework is provided for understanding the cultural differences in the Hispanic population so that teachers can be more sensitive to the needs of these families.

Downing, J. (1989). Identifying and enhancing the communicative behavior of students with severe disabilities: The role of the school psychologist. *School Psychological Review*, 18(4), 475-486.

Abstract: Presents guidelines for the school psychologist (SP) in assessing and planning interventions for students with severe disabilities, focusing on techniques for identifying communicative behaviors and strategies for enhancing communication skills. The SP's role as a consultant to teachers, parents, and other team members is stressed. Suggestions are provided that target the SP's ability to positively influence programming.

Giannotti, T. J. & Doyle, R. E. (1982). The effectiveness of parent training on learning disabled children and their parents. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 17(2), 131-136.

Abstract: The parents of 46 learning-disabled 4th-6th graders participated in an 8 week Parent Effectiveness Training program or served as delayed-treatment controls. Post-intervention scores on the Parent Attitude Survey showed a significant improvement on all 5 scales, with parents in the experimental group reporting more confidence in themselves as parents [as well as other effects]. The Peirs-Harris Children Self-Concept Scale also showed a significant difference...scores remained low compared to those obtained with non-handicapped children. It is argued that parent training should include a follow-up and be accompanied by direct child interventions and teacher training.

Goldstein, S. & Turnbull, A. (1982). Strategies to increase parent participation in IEP conferences. *Exceptional Children*, 48(4), 360-361.

Abstract: Tested 2 strategies to increase parental attendance at and participation in conferences regarding the individualized educational program (IEP) for their learning-disabled (LD) child... The preliminary questionnaires increased the attendance of fathers at the IEP meeting but did not increase parental participation there. The presence of the school counselor as parent advocate, however, significantly increased parental involvement in the meeting.

Gottesman, R. I. (1980). Clinic, school and parents: Working together. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 13(3), 167-171.

Abstract: Describes a collaborative effort between a children's evaluation and rehabilitation clinic, a school district, and parents to provide comprehensive evaluations for 12 children with severe learning difficulties. Recommendations for similar programs are presented.

Hanline, M. F. & Halvorsen, A. (1989). Parent perceptions of the integrations process: Overcoming artificial barriers. *Exceptional Children*, 55(6), 287-492.

Abstract: The parents of 14 students (aged 4-22 years) with a variety of disabilities participated in interviews to evaluate the support they received during their child's transition to an integrated educational placement, explore their concerns, and discuss the effects of integration. Although parents identified areas of concern (e.g. safety, attitudes of regular education students), they consistently expressed satisfaction regarding the outcomes of integrating their child, including professional and personal support. Responses emphasized the importance of commitment from local school districts and professionals and an individualized approach to parent involvement, and ongoing communication with parents.

Harris, S. I. & Fong, P. L. (1985). Developmental disabilities: The family and the school. *School Psychology Review*, 14(2), 162-165.

Abstract: Reviews current literature on the experiences of mothers, fathers, and siblings of developmentally delayed children with an aim of sensitizing the school psychologists to how these factors may impact the disabled child's experiences. It is suggested that parent training in behavioral techniques will be valuable to the extent that parents have the physical and emotional resources to follow through on these programs. Some families may require counseling or therapy to enable them to integrate effectively the handicapped child into their lives, although most families manage their lives as effectively as other families in the community. The school psychologist is in an especially good position to assess ongoing family needs, bridge the gap during transitions from one resource to another, and make appropriate referrals when members of the family require additional

resources. It is concluded that if a professional dealing with a developmentally disabled child always asks himself/herself what impact an intervention will have on the family as a whole, more efforts may have enduring benefits for all participants.

Lynch, E. W. et al (1982). Interdisciplinary services provided to handicapped children by university affiliated facilities. *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded*, 17(1), 61-64.

Abstract: Examined services that supplement public school programs and provide support for parents of handicapped children and young adults. Special education directors from 23 university-affiliated facilities (UAFs) completed questionnaires...data...indicate that UAFs provide a wide range of support services to parents of handicapped children. These services range from evaluation and parent training and counseling to the provision of transportation, recreational and residential services. It is concluded that through UAF supplemental services to public schools and families, children with disabilities requiring interdisciplinary assessment and programming are more efficiently and effectively served.

McKinney, J. D. & Hocutt, A. M. (1982). Public school involvement of parents of learning-disabled children and average achievers. *Exceptional Education Quarterly*, 3(2), 64-73.

Abstract: Administered a Parent Involvement Questionnaire and a structured interview to 33 parents of learning-disabled (LD) children and to 37 parents of average achievers in the same regular elementary school classrooms in 4 local school systems. Findings show that while parents of LD children were more involved in setting up individualized education programs than parents of the average children, the frequency of contacts for LD and non-LD parents with classroom teachers was not significantly different.

Morrow, R. D. (1987). Cultural differences: Be aware. *Academic Therapy*, 23(2), 143-149.

Abstract: Reviews Southeast Asian (including Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian) cultural attitudes toward handicapped persons. It is suggested that Southeast Asians view

emotional disturbance, mental retardation and physical or sensory disabilities as negative-valued behavior and that traditional views of what causes handicaps create family shame, embarrassment and stigma. It is recommended that special education teachers learn cultural differences, recognize the family's "face-saving" needs, and develop a sense of trust.

Parish, R. (1989). Young children at risk: Language development and intervention. *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 17, 18-21.*

Abstract: Discusses how language develops and considers the remedial intervention program available to help children who are supposedly failing school because of their inability to learn. The role of speech-language pathologists, teachers and parents in ensuring that children with language problems are not misdiagnosed and in motivating them to succeed is addressed. A successful intervention program in which children receive intensive individualized language stimulation is described. The program emphasizes parent participation. Effective partnership models for improving language development are addressed.

Roth, L. M. & Weller, C. (1985). Education/counseling models for parents of LD children. *Academic Therapy, 20(4), 487-495.*

Abstract: Describes 4 models of parent education/counseling for the parents of learning-disabled (LD) children that were designed to meet the variety of parent needs and to help teachers select appropriate programs: the therapeutic, informative, management and helpful hints models. The therapeutic model offers parents intensive therapy...[I]nformative models emphasizing the delivery of information...[M]anagement models highlight the principles of behavior modification and child management provide parents with an understanding of basic human behavior theory, and train parents in the use of appropriate techniques (e.g. positive reinforcement, contingency contracting). These models may not meet family emotional needs, however, and often require parents to change their own behavior. Helpful hints models describe ideas and strategies useful for particular situations (e.g. how to give directions, how to structure time). Examples of each type of model as they appear in the literature are presented.

Sandler, A. & Coren, A. (1981). Integrated instruction at home and school: Parents' perspective. *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 16(3), 183-187.*

Abstract: Examined parent evaluations of an integrated home/school program model by administering a 20-item questionnaire to 26 mothers of Down's syndrome, multiply handicapped, moderately retarded, and learning-disabled children. High parent satisfaction with various components of this program suggests the need to offer training experiences to interested parents that allow them to take an active role in facilitating their child's educational growth at home.

Shapero, S. & Forbes, R. C. (1981). A review of involvement programs for parents of learning disabled children. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 14(9), 499-504.*

Abstract: A review of studies in the literature showed that the most common program types for learning disabled children and their parents were tutoring and counseling, and that results for both were generally positive....The value of parental involvement was supported. Implications include the need for stronger experimental research, comparison studies between tutoring and counseling programs, more efficient evaluation, and follow-up studies.

Simpson, R. L. (1989). Needs of parents and families whose children have learning and behavior problems. *Behavioral Disorders, 14(1), 40-47.*

Abstract: Assessed parent service requests and services used by parents of 117 learning-disabled and 44 behavior-problem elementary-aged children. Fifteen special education teachers estimated the services they perceived that parents needed. Results reveal that the needs of behaviorally disordered and learning disabled children differed within and between groups. The most widely used or requested services in both groups involved information exchange. Teachers perceived parents to have needs in excess of those they used or requested. Implications of the present study are discussed in relation to teacher training and service delivery systems.

Simpson, R. L. & Myles, B. S. (1989). Parents' mainstreaming modification preferences for children with educable mental handicaps, behavior disorders, and learning disabilities. *Psychology In The Schools*, 26(3), 292-301.

Abstract: Examined which educational modifications would persuade parents to accept mainstreaming for their children with educable mental handicaps, behavior disorders, or learning disabilities. Parents of such children completed the Mainstreaming Modification Survey. Results suggest that successful full-time mainstreaming requires parent involvement. Contingent upon recognition and implementation of their recommendations for mainstreaming, most parents supported full-time integration of their mildly handicapped children in regular classrooms. Parents' specific mainstreaming recommendations are discussed.

1990 – 1999: 259 ABSTRACTS REVIEWED

EXCLUSIONS:

NON-RELATIONAL: 18

EARLY CHILDHOOD: 7

MEDICAL: 14

NON-US: 52

OTHER: 152

SELECTIONS

Total: 16

TOTAL OF EXCLUSIONS & SELECTIONS = 259

Frequency Counts of Educational Abstracts

1990-1999 Articles Selected = 16

HEADINGS	1990-92	1993-95	1996-98	1999+	TOTALS
<i>TYPE OF ARTICLE</i>					
PC	1		1	1	3
QNT	1			2	3
QUAL	1	1	4		6
Prog. Eval/Desc.				1	1
Survey		1	1		2
Mixed	1				1
<i>TOPIC/FOCUS</i>					
Assistance					
Collaboration					
Conferences					
Counseling	1				1
Liaison					
Partnerships	1				1
Relationship	1			1	2
Training					
Other	1	2	6	3	12
<i>DISABILITY</i>					
LD	1				1
PDD/Autism					
DD		1	5		6
BD/ED					
MIXED					
OTHER	3	1	1	4	9
<i>JOURNALS</i>					
RASE	1		2	2	5
JASH/TASH		1			1
Am.Jrnl. of MR			2		2
Journal of LD	1				1
Ed. & Training in MR			2		2
Exceptional Children		1			
Other	2			2	4

ARTICLES SELECTED

Bragg, R. M., Brown, R. L. & Berninger, V. W. (March 1992). The impact of congenital and acquired disabilities on the family system: Implications for school-counseling. *School Counselor*, 39(4), 292-299.

Abstract: Compared 10 families with congenitally disabled children and 10 families with child who acquired disability of five scales of Family Assessment Inventory: Differentiation, Dependency, Support, Adaptability, and Satisfaction. Parents in two groups differed significantly on adaptability. Parents having children with acquired disabilities scored significantly lower on differentiation than on other scales.

Brantlinger, E. (Jan. 1991). Home-school partnerships that benefit children with special needs. *Elementary School Journal*, 91(3), 249-259.

Abstract: Summarizes research on disabled children's effects on families' influence on children's adjustment. Offers (1) guidelines for family support programs involving school-home partnerships; (2) cautionary notes on provision of family support programs; and (3) methods for preparing professionals for such programs.

Dyson, Lily L. (Nov. 1997). Fathers and mothers of school-age children with developmental disabilities: Parental stress, family functioning and social support. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 102(3), 267-279.

Abstract: Parental stress and family dysfunction were examined in 55 families with and 55 families without young children with developmental disabilities. Although families of disabled children showed higher levels of stress, they were only minimally different from control families in their family functioning, indicating high degrees of resiliency.

Erwin, E. J., & Soodak, L. C. (Sum, 1995). I never knew I could stand up to the system: Families' perspectives on pursuing inclusive education. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 20(2), 136-146.

Abstract: The experiences and perspectives of nine parents committed to inclusive education for their children with disabilities are analyzed. Findings include: parents viewed inclusive education as a fundamental right for their children, and they employed numerous strategies to obtain inclusive education as a fundamental right for their children, including seeking assistance from the courts and the media.

Fisher, D., Pumpian, I., Sax, C. (1998). Parent and caregiver impressions of different educational models. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education, 19(3), 173-180.*

Abstract: Evaluated parent and caregiver perceptions of educational opportunities for students with severe disabilities. Parents and caregivers of students (aged 14-18 yrs) from 2 high schools were interviewed over the phone. One school (n=17) used an inclusive service delivery model, while the other school (n = 23) used a special-day class model with limited mainstreaming. Results suggest that interviewees support inclusive schools and believe their children are acquiring new skills. Questions remain regarding the balance of community-based instruction and the amount of teacher training provided.

Grove, K. & Fisher, D. (Jul-Aug. 1999). Entrepreneurs of meaning: Parents and the process of inclusive education. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education, 20 (4), 208-215 & 256.*

Abstract: A study analyzed the process of inclusive education experienced by 20 parents of children with severe disabilities. Results found that the process of inclusion extended beyond the parents' initial placement decision to their ongoing involvement at the school site. At the schools parents actively participated in the work of inclusion.

Katsiyannis, A., & Ward, T. J. (Sept.-Oct. 1992). Parent participation in special education: Compliance issues as reported by parent surveys and state compliance reports. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education, 13(5), 50-55, 62.*

Abstract: School division compliance with Virginia state and federal regulations concerning the parent's role in the special education process was examined. Analysis of parent surveys and state department of education compliance reports found a high

incidence of parent nonparticipation, inadequate communication to parents of their rights, and difficulties in meeting required deadlines.

Lovitt, T. C. & Cushing, S. (1999). Parents of youths with disabilities: Their perceptions of school programs. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education, 20 (3), 134-142.*

Abstract: Data reported here were obtained as part of a larger 3-year study designed to assay the curricular offerings and related instructional matters available for high school youth with disabilities. Data were gathered from general and special education teachers, special education administrators, principals, counselors, para-educators, pupils with disabilities, and their parents. The youth attended five public schools and one private school. This study focused exclusively on data obtained from parents: Interviews were conducted with 43 parents of youth with disabilities in public school and with 3 parents of youth with disabilities who had graduated from a private school; 11 parents from the latter group completed surveys. Four themes emerged from the parent interviews and surveys: we discuss these themes and then offer seven recommendations for parents that are intended to enable them to better communicate and collaborate with schools so as to provide more effective services for their youth with disabilities.

Margolis, H. (1999). Mediation for special education conflicts: An opportunity to improve family-school relationships. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation, 10(1), 91-100.*

Abstract: Discusses the IDEA Amendments of 1997 that requires states to establish mediation procedures to resolve special education disputes. Mediation provides an opportunity for school personnel to improve parent perceptions of them. With the assistance of a mediator who structures conversation, problem solving, and negotiations, school personnel have an opportunity to build trust through sincere, honest efforts to seek solutions that satisfy the child's needs, the parents' needs, and their needs. Through the mediation process, school personnel can begin to gain parent trust and begin to build a relationship that is based on mutual problem solving, cooperation and collaboration.

McWilliam, R. A.; Maxwell, Kelly L.; Sloper, Kimberly M. (1999). Beyond “involvement”: Are elementary schools ready to be family-centered? *School Psychology Review*, 28(3), 378-394.

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to understand parents’ and educators’ perspectives of family-centered practices in the early elementary school grades (kindergarten through third grade). 88 special educators, 67 regular educators, 75 parents of children with disabilities, and 46 parents of typically developing children completed a scale measuring perceptions of typical and ideal practices about the school’s responsiveness to families, the quality of specialized services involving parents, the school atmosphere regarding parents, and how much the school encouraged parent advocacy. All groups favored more family-centered practices than they currently provided or received. Families of children with disabilities reported (1) receiving less family-centered services than reported by other families and (2) receiving less family-centered services from the school than reported by teachers as being provided by the schools.

Palmer, D. S., Borthwick-Duffy, Sharon, A., Widaman, K., Sherwood, J. (Nov. 1998). Influences on parent perceptions of inclusive practices for their children with mental retardation. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 103(3), 272-287.

Abstract: A survey of 460 parents of children with mental retardation found that perceptions of inclusion were significantly influenced by characteristics of the parent and child as well as by factors associated with the child’s placement history. Factors influencing these perceptions differed according to varying dimensions of inclusion being considered.

Ryndak, D. L., Downing, J. E. , Morrison, A. P., & Williams, L. J. (March, 1996). Parents’ perceptions of educational settings and services for children with moderate or severe disabilities. *RASE: Remedial & Special Education*, 17(2), 106-118.

Abstract: Interviewed parents of 13 children (aged 5-19 years) with moderate to severe disabilities who were receiving educational services in inclusive settings across 7 school districts about their perceptions of services in self-contained and inclusive settings.

Interviews were analyzed for common themes across parents per type of setting, with 3 major themes being identified: (1) comments related to the location in which services are provided; (2) the content being addressed during instruction, and (3) the manner in which services are delivered. Ss clearly stated their rationale for what they considered appropriate and least restrictive about settings and instructional content. Ss also expressed their views on how district personnel should interact with their children, though specific teaching strategies to enhance their children's learning were not articulated as clearly.

Waggoner, K. & Wilgosh, L. (Feb. 1990). Concerns of families of children with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23(2), 97-98, 113.

Abstract: Parents of learning-disabled children from eight families were interviewed. Seven fields of concerns emerged, including parental involvement in education, parent-school relationships, support for parents, social concerns for the child, concern for the child's future, emotional strains of parenting and effects on the family.

Westling, D. L. (June, 1996). What do parents of children with moderate and severe mental disabilities want? *Education & Training in Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities*, 31(2), 86-114.

Abstract: Twenty-five studies were reviewed that surveyed parents of children with moderate to severe, mental disabilities concerning such issues as what parents wanted their children to learn, desired school setting, type or degree of desired involvement with the schools, level of satisfaction with services and needs and plans as adults.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Lange, C. M. & Gorney, D. J. (Feb. 1994). Parents of students with disabilities and open enrollment: Characteristics and reasons for transfer. *Exceptional Children*, 60(4), 359-372.

Abstract: This study examined characteristics of students with disabilities who participated in Minnesota's open enrollment, reasons for participation, information sources, and the decision-making process. Surveys of 347 parents revealed 3 primary reasons for transferring their children: special education needs being better met, more personal attention from the teacher, and dissatisfaction with the resident school.

Zetlin, A. G., Padron, M. & Wilson, S. (March, 1996). The experience of five Latin American families with special education. *Education & Training in Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities*, 31(1), 22-28.

Abstract: Accounts are presented from five Latin American families concerning their attitudes toward and experiences with the special education system. All indicated high degrees of commitment and involvement, but responses varied concerning understanding of Individualized Education Plans, awareness of rights and options, and willingness to challenge school systems decisions concerning their children.

APPENDIX B

The Five Core Principles of Special Education Leadership

The Five Core Principles of Special Education Leadership

1. Ethical Practice:

- (a) Ensuring universal educational access and accountability.
- (b) This domain deals with moral and ethical principles of justice, and, being an advocate for children to ensure that every learner has a full educational opportunity.

2. Individual Consideration:

- (a) Addressing individuality and exceptionality in learning.
- (b) This domain focuses on ensuring individualized consideration for each student whose exceptional learning characteristics require the extraordinary response of specialized instruction.

3. Equity under Law:

- (a) Providing an appropriate education through equitable public policies.
- (b) This domain addresses the legal protection given to children with exceptionalities under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and, the standard of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through equitable public policies. It also encompasses financial options and public policies that support individual educational benefit.

4. Effective Programming:

- (a) Providing individualized programming designed to enhance student performance.
- (b) This domain deals with supervising and evaluating programming that is demonstrably effective in improving individual student performance in the areas of academic, social, and behavioral outcomes.

5. Establishing Productive Partnerships:

- (a) The focus of this domain is "communicating, negotiating, and collaborating with students, parents, professionals, and communities to foster high expectations, support research-based strategies, and target positive results for exceptional learners".

(Crockett, 2002).

APPENDIX C

Graphic depiction of four decades of journal articles on parent-educator relationships
sorted by type of article in each decade

TYPE OF ARTICLE BY DECADE

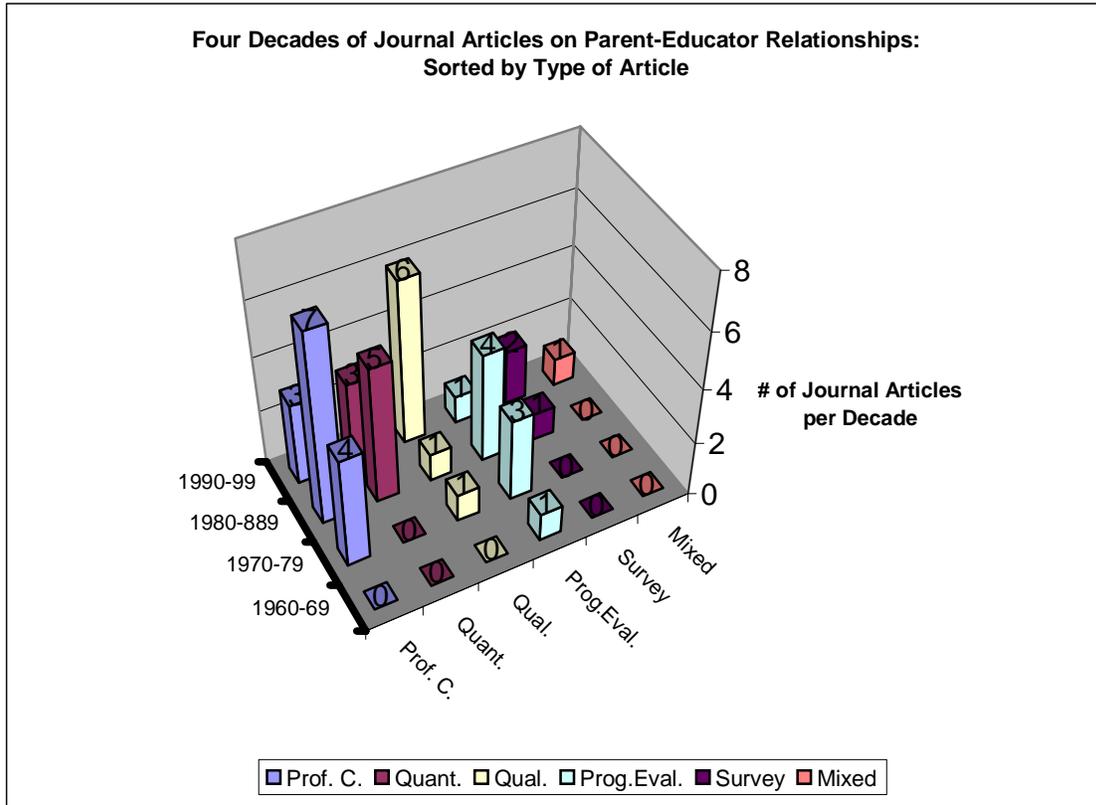
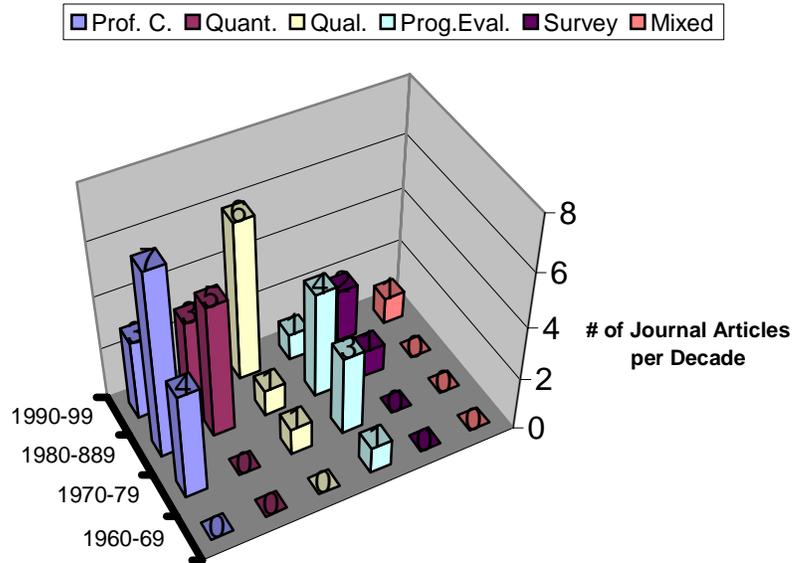


Figure: Journal Articles Sorted by Type of Article

**Four Decades of Journal Articles on Parent-Educator Relationships:
Sorted by Type of Article**



	1990-99	1980-889	1970-79	1960-69
Prof. C.	3	7	4	0
Quant.	3	5	0	0
Qual.	6	1	1	0
Prog.Eval.	1	4	3	1
Survey	2	1	0	0
Mixed	1	0	0	0

Figure: Journal Articles Sorted by Type of Article

APPENDIX D

Parental Voices from the Present: Data coding

PARENTAL VOICES FROM THE PRESENT

Groups:

There were three groups of parental voices from the present: the group interview participants; the open meeting participants; and the individual interview participants. The coding of all participants follows.

1. Group I: Group Interview

[Name of County]FGI: [Name of] County Focus Group 1

W1: Refers to the first woman to speak.

M1: Refers to the first man to speak.

Quotations from each participant were cited on the back of the data cards with name of county and either W1 or M1.

2. Group 2: Group Meeting - Open Parent Meeting [Name of County].

Coding was OPM [County Initials] W 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6, or, OPM [County Initials] M1,2.

Data from eight women and two men were recorded.

3. Group 3: Individual Interviews [Name of Counties].

Coding was [County Initials] W1 or M1. Three women and one man were interviewed individually.

The total number of participants was fourteen.

APPENDIX E

IRB Documentation for Research Involving Human Subjects:
Application, IRB Approval, & Informed Consent Forms

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: How Parents of Exceptional Children Describe Their Partnerships
With Educational Professionals.

Investigators: Kathleen M. Gibb Brown (primary investigator)
Jean B. Crockett (faculty advisor)

Justification of Project

The purpose of this dissertation research is to explore relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in order to have an understanding of what constitutes a partnership between these two groups. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) sets out parental rights, but cannot address the substantive question: Do partnerships exist between professionals who provide special education services and parents of children with exceptionalities? In the 1997 amendments to the IDEA, Sec. 687 (c)(5)(B) states that:

Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by...strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at home and school. The Code of Federal Regulations, Appendix A to Part 300, Part I.I, Involvement of the Parents and Students, refers to the IDEA amendments as expanding the opportunities for parents and educational professionals to work in new “partnerships”. A review of the relevant literature revealed that very little research has been done concerning what constitutes partnerships between these two groups. Especially lacking are references to parental input. For the purposes of this inquiry, data collection methods include a content analysis of journal abstracts published over four decades portraying the historical trends and conceptual themes concerning relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals found in the educational literature.

In order to find out how contemporary parents of exceptional children describe their partnerships with educational professionals, they will be asked for their input via group interview procedures. The constant comparative method will be used to analyze their responses. The resulting schema of partnership drawn from the analysis will be taken to appropriate educational professionals (those mentioned in the focus groups as having a partnership with the parents) who will then be asked for their comments using an individual interview procedure. Records and documents to be reviewed as part of this study will include only those that are available to the public. An example would be handbooks for parents that set out their rights and responsibilities.

There is both an immediate practical application for the results of this study as well as a more theoretical leadership application. In practical terms, the parents involved in this study can use the results to enhance their relationships with educational professionals on behalf of their children with exceptionalities. The response of educational professionals to the schema of partnership formulated from this research could be used in creating policy to develop or enhance partnerships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in their specific jurisdiction.

A more theoretical application of the results, would be to use the schema of partnership developed in this study to inform the preparation curriculum for both special and general education leadership, contributing to the development of partnerships between parents and professionals.

Procedures

The primary investigator will contact directors of special education in four surrounding counties outlining the purpose and requirements of the study via an informational letter. Follow up will be by personal phone contact and a face-to-face meeting if requested. Once the directors have been informed about the research, contact will be made with the director of parent resource centers in each county via an informational letter. Follow up will again be by personal phone contact. A request will be made from the parent resource centers in each county for volunteers to participate in focus groups consisting of parents of exceptional children. Research participation is equally open to both male and female subjects. The only criterion is that they be a parent of an exceptional child. The age of the parent and/or the child are not part of the criteria.

Risks and Benefits

There is no more than minimal risk to the human subjects in this research. Benefits to the parental subjects include using the results to enhance their relationships with educational professionals by building upon existing partnerships or developing areas of partnership that may be lacking. Educational professionals can use their responses to the schema of partnership formulated from this research in creating policy to develop or enhance their partnerships with parents of exceptional children.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

Human subjects in this study will be assured confidentiality. Subjects will be identified by a code. The primary investigator will have the code sheet, and only she would be able to associate any individuals with particular data. Audiotapes of the focus groups and individual interviews will remain in the personal possession of the primary investigator except when being transcribed by a professional secretary. The tapes will be secured in the primary investigator's home in the office file drawers. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed.

Informed Consent

Each participant will complete an informed consent form. Please refer to Attachment 1.

Biographical Sketch

Kathleen M. K. J. Gibb Brown is the primary investigator for this project. She is in her final year of doctoral studies in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department. She has been a graduate research assistant within the Administration and Supervision of Special Education program area, and is currently a graduate assistant for the Department of Teaching and Learning. In addition to recent training in qualitative research methods, she has ten years of public school teaching experience and prior experience as a registered nurse. She will be conducting this research under the direction of Jean B. Crockett, faculty advisor, and her dissertation committee.

ATTACHMENT 1

Informed Consent for Participants

In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project How Parents of Exceptional Children Describe Their Partnership With Educational Professionals.

Investigators Kathleen M. Gibb Brown (primary investigator)
Jean B. Crockett (faculty advisor).

1. Purpose of This Research / Project

The purpose of this dissertation research is to explore relationships between parents of exceptional children and educational professionals in order to have an understanding of what constitutes a partnership between these two groups. In order to find out how contemporary parents describe their partnerships with educational professionals, they will be asked for their input via group interview procedures (focus groups). The total number of subjects involved in the focus groups will be no less than three and no more than ten for each of the four proposed groups. The only requirement of any focus group participant is that they be a parent of an exceptional child. The number of educational professionals to be interviewed individually will be determined by the responses from the parents. The estimate is from approximately 5 to 15.

II. Procedures

By agreeing to take part in this study I understand that I will participate in a focus group consisting of parents of exceptional children. [Note: Educational professionals will be interviewed individually to capture their responses to the findings of the focus groups. Guidelines re: Procedures; Risks & Benefits; Anonymity/Confidentiality; Compensation; and Freedom to Withdraw will be the same as those for the parents of exceptional children.] The group will be held at a time and place most convenient to the participants. I know that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this research study at any time. Duration of participation is limited to the time necessary to complete the focus group, which is estimated to be about 90 to 120 minutes. Participants will only participate in one group. As a participant I will be asked to describe my partnerships with

educational professionals both in writing and verbally. The verbal portion of the focus group will be audio-taped and the tapes will be transcribed. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. Audiotapes will remain in the personal possession of the primary investigator except when being transcribed by a professional secretary. The tapes will be secured in the primary investigator's home in the office file drawers. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Participants will be identified by a code. The primary investigator will have the code sheet, and only she would be able to associate any individuals with particular data. I also understand that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained if/when the findings of this research are published and shared in journals, articles, speaking engagements and/or conferences.

III. Risks

I understand that there is only a minimal risk to subjects associated with participation in this study. "Minimal risk" means that the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering the probability and magnitude, than those encountered in daily life or during performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests (45 CFR 46.102i). The risk in discussing partnerships with educational professionals is that memories of some interactions may be unpleasant. Safeguards to minimize this possibility are as follows: (1) Participants can withdraw at any time during the group interview. (2) Much of the focus group takes place in silence. All participation, both vocal and non-vocal is voluntary. (3) The names of any individuals mentioned will remain confidential and will not be used in any reports of the research. (4) A summary of the research will be available to me at the end of the study, should it be requested by any of the participants.

IV. Benefits

It is hereby stated that no promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage anyone to participate. The primary investigator considers the benefits to participants to include using the results to enhance their relationships with educational professionals by building upon existing partnerships or developing areas of partnership that may be lacking. Educational professionals can use the responses of focus group participants in creating policy to develop or enhance their partnerships with parents of exceptional children.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants will be assured confidentiality. Individuals will be identified by a code. The primary investigator will have the code sheet, and only she would be able to associate any individuals with particular data. Audiotapes of the focus groups and individual interviews will remain in the personal possession of the primary investigator except when being transcribed by a professional secretary. The tapes will be secured in the primary investigator’s home in the office file drawers. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Participants will be identified by a code. The primary investigator will have the code sheets, and only she would be able to associate any individuals with particular data. I also understand that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained if/when the findings of this research are published and shared in journals, articles, speaking engagements and/or conferences.

VI. Compensation

I will not receive any type of monetary compensation or course credit for participation. Depending upon the time of day, appropriate refreshments may be served of which participants may partake should they so desire.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

I have the freedom to withdraw at any time from this study without penalty. I am also free to not answer any questions or respond to any situation that I choose without penalty.

VIII. Approval Of research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of _____ and _____(if others, i.e., school or school system, hospital, daycare center, multi-institutional project etc.).

IRB Approval Date

Approval Expiration Date

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

To participate in a group interview, the duration of which will be approximately 90 - 120 minutes.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent.

_____ Date _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects).

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Kathleen M. Gibb Brown 540-381-3382/ kabrown6@vt.edu
Investigator Telephone/e-mail

Jean B. Crockett 540-231-4546/ crocketj@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor Telephone/ e-mail

David M. Alexander 540-231-5642/ mdavid@vt.edu
Department Head Telephone/e-mail

David M. Moore 540-231-4991/ moored@vt.edu
Chair, IRB, Telephone/ e-mail
Office of Research Compliance
Research & Graduate Studies

This informed consent is valid from _____ to _____.

APPENDIX F
CURRICULUM VITA
of
Kathleen M. Brown, Ph.D.

KATHLEEN M. BROWN, Ph.D.
P. O. Box 293, 8 Highlander
Niagara-On-The Lake L0S 1L0

Telephone (905) 262-1510

e-mail: kbrown@niagara.eu

VITA

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

- 2005 July 29th Ph. D. Defense; Administration and Supervision of Special Education,
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic
Institute and State University
- 1978-79 Ontario Teacher Education College B. Ed.
- 1973-75 University of Toronto M.A.
- 1971-73 School of Nursing,
Toronto General Hospital R.N.
- 1967-71 Trinity College,
University of Toronto B.A.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Current Teaching Certificates:

Commonwealth of Virginia: Postgraduate Professional License
01-339178, Valid to June 30, 2006, Endorsements in
Psychology and Mental Retardation.

Ontario Teacher's Certificate No. 297394
Current Member of the Ontario College of Teachers

Previous Nursing Registrations

State of Maryland (#R-81967) Province of Ontario (#74-1353-7)

HONORS AND AWARDS

- 1973 J.E. Sharpe Award for Surgical Nursing
1967 Ontario Scholarship
1967 Admitted as a Scholar of Trinity College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

HIGHER EDUCATION

Niagara University, New York

2005 – Present: College of Education; Assistant Professor, Special Education. Courses taught: Characteristics of Students with Exceptional Needs (Graduate & Undergraduate); Assessment (Undergraduate); Independent Studies (2) (Graduate & Undergraduate); Honors Enhanced (Undergraduate).

2004 - 2005: College of Education; Assistant Professor, Special Education. Courses taught: Educational and Assistive Technology; Characteristics of Students With Exceptional Needs & Assessment (Graduate & Undergraduate).

University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

2004 Summer: College of Education; Instructor of Special Education for students seeking Advanced Qualifications.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia

20003-4, 2000-02: Department of Teaching and Learning, Field Supervisor of Student Teachers in Montgomery County Public Schools and Roanoke City Schools for Dept. of Teaching and Learning.

February 18, 2004: Scheduled Guest Lecturer. “Classroom Management”. Presentation to pre-service teachers, Department of Teaching & Learning.

October 30, 1997: Guest Lecturer. “Circle of Friends”. Presentation to Teacher Education Course for Dr. B. Bilingsley.

1996-2000: Graduate Research Assistant in College of Human Resources and Education, Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies, Administration & Supervision of Special Education, and Department of Teaching and Learning,

K-12 TEACHING

2002 - 2003: Special Education Teacher in Craig County Public Schools, Virginia, working as both a resource teacher (e.g. for students with learning disabilities) and with a small group of self-contained students (moderate disabilities and behavioral difficulties). Duties include: educational testing; site-based eligibility hearings; monitoring inclusive practices and compliance with Individualized Education Programs; individualized and group teaching from kindergarten to grade five across all disciplines.

1987 – 1996: Special Education Teacher in Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia, working with children in the following programs; High School - L.D. Resource; Elementary School – Mild to Moderate Developmental Delays; Severe & Profound Exceptionalities; and Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

1986-87: Instructor in Vocational Skills at Woodmont Center for Developmentally Disabled Adults, Arlington, Virginia.

SCHOLARLY PRESENTATION and PUBLICATIONS

January 30, 2002: Symposium Organizer & Speaker Recruiter. “Ensuring Options and Opportunities for Children with Special Needs and Their Families”. Blacksburg, VA. 4-H/Family & Consumer Sciences In-service, Donaldson-Brown Conference Center, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University.

October 14, 2000: Doctoral Research Presentation. “Productive Partnerships? Relationships Between Parents of Exceptional Children and Educational Professionals”. Baltimore, MD. Seventh International Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Mental Retardation, Developmental Disabilities.

February 26, 2000: Co-Presenter & Discussion Panel Member. “Special Education: Is It Just a Matter of Discipline?”. Clearwater, FL. EERA, Annual/Regional Conference. Lead Presenter: Dr. J. Crockett.

April 17, 1998: Co-Presenter. “An Activity-Based Introduction to Inclusion”. Minneapolis, MN. Council for Exceptional Children, International Conference.

March 27, 1998: Co-Presenter. “Crossing Boundaries: Integrated Service Systems”. Blacksburg, VA. Inquiring Voices Graduate Research Conference, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Co-presenters: D. Conrad, M. Hirsch, P. Hoover & B. Stenkin.

October 27, 1997: Co-Presenter. “When Inclusion Is Not The Least Restrictive Environment”. Roanoke, VA. Conference on Legal Issues for Inclusive Schools, sponsored by the SOVRAC Leadership Academy and the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
Co-presenter: M. Koegler.

March 8, 1997: Co-Presenter. “Inclusion: Creating A Caring Environment”. Charlottesville, VA. Phi Delta Kappa Leadership Skills Spring Conference on “Inclusion: Its Impact and Ramifications”. Co-presenter: M. Koegler.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

2005 – 2006: Member of Committees on Childhood, Special Education and Faculty Quality & Professional Development at Niagara University. Inclusion of adult with Down's Syndrome in undergraduate class as a visitor continues.

Fall 2005: Chair of Portfolio Defense Committee for master's student in the area of special education.

2004 - 2005: Member of Committees on Childhood and Faculty Quality Development at Niagara University. Inclusion of adult with Down's Syndrome in undergraduate class as a participating visitor.

January 2002-2004: Board of Directors, New River Valley Agency for Persons with Mental Retardation, Inc., Leisure Directions.

1998 & 1999: President, NRV Chapter 1043 of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC Member, 10 years, Chapter President, 2 years).