

A Descriptive Analysis of Parent and Teacher Perceptions
Regarding Parent Involvement in a Program for the
Preschool Handicapped

by

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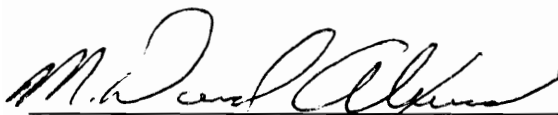
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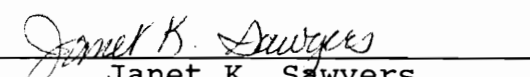
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Committee Chairman: Philip R. Jones
Administration and Supervision of Special Education

(ABSTRACT)

The 1986 Amendments to the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (P.L. 99-457) require that the individual education plans for students ages three to five, "must include instruction for parents so that they can be active and knowledgeable in assisting in their child's progress" (U.S. House of Representatives Report, 99-860, p. 20). Expansion of special education services to preschool children, will require educators to increase their efforts to involve parents in the child's educational program.

Because schools have traditionally focused on child needs, additional insights into the parent involvement process are needed to effectively implement broader-based models more likely to result in active parent involvement. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher and parent perspectives on involvement to better understand the involvement process. Teacher and parent interviews were conducted in a large well-developed public preschool program. The interviews, together with observations and program documents, were analyzed to gain

a better understanding of involvement practices. The teachers interpreted the parents' level of involvement according to how well they complied with teacher prescribed activities and teacher expectations. Parents rated as most involved were seen by the teachers as cooperating with child-level activities, expressing an interest in participating and providing positive feedback for teachers' efforts. However, parents identified as least involved were viewed as not initiating contact with the teacher or showing little interest in participating in program activities. Most teachers relied on positive feedback from the parents to continue their efforts with them and use it to define the relationship with them. The teachers attributed the variations in involvement to family characteristics and to their belief about the family's concern for the child's development.

The meanings which the parents gave to the involvement practices were distinct for the least and most involved groups. How the parents conceptualized the child's development and their belief about their impact on it appeared to contribute to parents' perceptions about their role in the involvement process. These differences in role perception can explain their interactions with the teachers as well as their level of participation in activities. Levels of involvement can be further explained by the degree to which activities were relevant to a particular family's needs and the control they felt to act on their own behalf. The understandings

gained from examining parent and teacher perspectives of the involvement process can help ensure effective involvement practices with families.

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I dedicate this study to my mother, the late Pearl B. Watson and my father, Delmar J. Watson.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

An interest in parent involvement within the educational process has seen a resurgence during the last two decades. Powell (1989) identified several important influences which have contributed to the current emphasis on parent involvement. Powell described these influences as being: (a) a heightened awareness among professionals for the importance of higher quality staff-parent interactions in early childhood programs, (b) federal, state, and local initiatives to intervene with the young child, (c) increased interest in the interaction between child's development and child-rearing practices, and (d) the recent changes in family demographic characteristics.

The numbers of parents and early childhood professionals who believe that the responsibility for the child's education should be shared between both parties are increasing (Linder, 1984; Vincent, 1988). Advocates of parent involvement, especially as it applies to educational interventions with the young handicapped child, are arguing for a partnership relationship between the parent and professional (Dunst & Paget, in press). Commenting on the evolving attitude about relationships between parents and professionals, Linder (1984) has said:

Parent involvement in its broadest context implies shared responsibility for the child's educational process. It also implies that as a member of a dynamic family unit, the handicapped child has as great an impact on the family as the family has on the handicapped child; it is a reciprocal relationship. The family is a critical factor in the child's environment, and thus, parent involvement implies an ecological approach to handicapped children. (p. 154)

Preschool programs, such as Head Start and the Handicapped Children's Early Education Programs (HCEEP), which provide services to young children with at-risk or handicapping conditions, have taken the lead in involving parents since their initial beginnings in the 1960's (Peterson, 1987). Research suggests that attempts to create a meaningful and lasting impact on these children require active parent involvement. As early as the mid 70's, Bronfenbrenner (1974) concluded from his review of outcomes of early intervention programs that child performance was positively correlated with the amount of parent involvement in the child's program. His highly publicized findings have influenced the development of practices designed to increase parent involvement in programs serving young handicapped children. These practices have continued to expand within the federally funded HCEEP projects where a parent involvement component is required as a prerequisite for funding.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) provided a legal basis of parent participation in

special education programs with the implementation of the informed parental consent and due process requirements of the Act. These requirements essentially obligated public schools to inform and involve parents in the decision-making process regarding the identification and placement of children ages 3-21. Special education services for preschool children have remained optional in many states because the PL 94-142 statutes require states to serve only 6-17 year olds, if 3-5 and 18-21 year olds were not included in existing state statutes. Most state legislatures have been reluctant to expand services to children ages three-to-five because of the high costs of expanding special education services to all children in this age group. The twelve states in which services are mandated and programs where federal preschool incentive moneys are used, have been required by PL 94-142 to document procedures to involve parents.

The recent 1986 Amendments to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 99-457) are intended to extend a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to preschoolers, ages 3-5, needing special education and related services nationwide by 1991. These amendments have strengthened the requirements for parent involvement on behalf of these children. The report accompanying these statutes states that:

Family services play an important role in preschool programs and that whenever appropriate and to the

extent desired by the parents, the preschooler's individualized education plan (IEP) written for each identified student must include instruction for parents so that they can be active and knowledgeable in assisting in their child's progress. (House Report 99-860, 1986, p. 20)

Increasing levels of support for the importance of active parent involvement in the child's educational program is also being generated from leaders in early childhood special education (Dunst & Trivette, 1988; Gallagher & Vietze, 1986; Odum & Karnes, 1988; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). This positive value placed on parent involvement has gradually heightened as professionals become more sensitive to the needs of families with a handicapped child. Today support and assistance to the family are viewed as a major goal of intervention efforts with young children requiring special educational services (Smith & Strain, 1988). As programs serving the preschool child who has special education needs expand, administrators and teachers report many attempts to involve parents in the educational process through activities such as writing parent newsletters, using parent volunteers in the classroom, conducting parent group meetings, and conducting home visits.

Peterson (1987) recently outlined a number of goals for parent involvement which range from sharing information about child development with parents to providing systematic family support. Peterson, like other leaders in the field, views parent involvement as a dynamic process which has advanced

well beyond a standard menu of activities which was typical of parent involvement practices twenty years ago. She proposed the following operational definition of parent involvement to guide parent-professional interactions:

Parent involvement or participation denotes a process through which parents are brought into contact with (a) the staff that has responsibility for giving service to the handicapped child (and parent) for purposes of educational intervention, and (b) activities involving the child, which are created to inform parents and to facilitate parent roles with their own child. Involvement implies a variety of alternative activities that vary from program to program. Differences in the options available are affected by the unique features of a program, the geographical setting, the population of children and parents to be served and resources available. (p. 434)

While active parent involvement is highly valued in the early intervention process, little is known about the nature of the involvement process or about its effects on families as it has been practiced (Odum & Shuster, 1986). Descriptions of parent involvement practices with the families of 280,000 children whose special education programs are being supervised or delivered by the public schools are lacking. Likewise, teachers have reported that their attempts to promote effective practices have met with varying levels of success. A state-wide survey of Headstart and preschool teachers in Oregon, who work with young children with handicaps, indicated that they view issues related to parent commitment second to salaries as a significant stressor in their jobs (Stile, Wright, Davis, Moore, Templeman, Toews & Wilson, 1987).

In the past, evaluations of the benefits of parent involvement have used measures of child progress as the indicators of success (Dunst, 1986; Odum & Shuster, 1986). These narrowly defined outcome measures have prompted critics and advocates of parent involvement to challenge those working in the field to search for more comprehensive delivery systems and evaluation procedures to measure the benefits of parent involvement in early intervention programs (Casto & Mastropieri, 1986; Dunst & Snyder, 1986; Strain & Smith, 1986; White, Mastropieri & Casto, 1984).

Background

Powell (1989) identified several broad premises upon which parent involvement practices have been based. The premises are: (a) that the doctrine of parental rights gives the parent the responsibility for determining the child's best interests, (b) that familial influences are more powerful than school in predicting and influencing a child's academic performance, and (c) that parent participation in decisions and programs which influence their child is ensured within the value system of a democratic society.

Recently, leaders in the field of early childhood special education have begun to search for more effective approaches to parent involvement which are sensitive to needs of the family. Interest has stemmed largely from the recent

theoretical and research bases which support viewing human development from an ecological or system's perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Dunst, 1986; Foster, Berger & McLean, 1981; Hobbs, Dokecki, Hoover-Dempsey, Moroney, Shayne & Weeks, 1984). These systems' theorists argue that more potential for child development can be realized when interactions between a program and the family are focused on family-level needs.

If one believes that the family needs and resources play a major role in child development, intervention the justification can be made for directing energy toward supporting the family unit to respond to family-level needs, such as better housing or suitable day care. From a systems or ecological perspective, both of these family-level needs impact on the child's development. When they are met the likelihood that the child's needs will be met also increases.

Foster, Berger, and McLean (1981) were among the first to challenge their colleagues to extend beyond child-focused intervention practices to accommodate family-level needs. They took the position that intervention practices must take the needs of the family into consideration to be effective. Zigler and Berman (1983) also claimed that a family-centered approach would promote development and enhance functioning within the family unit and would, in turn, enhance the child's progress. As Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of the

interactive nature of development became more accepted by the field of child development, the notion that the needs of the family unit interacts with a wide range of factors such as: parental well-being; family integrity; parent-child relationships; and child behavior and development has received greater acceptance.

Thus, an argument for parent involvement practices which are responsive to the needs of the family can be made if it is recognized that the needs of the child, parents, other family members, and significant others, reside in the social unit or system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dunst, 1986; Minuchin, 1985; Sawyers & Moran, 1985). Dunst (1986), expanding on the ecological perspective advanced by Bronfenbrenner and others, has stated that "a fundamental tenet of social systems theory is that ecological units do not operate in isolation, but interact both within and between levels so that changes in one unit or subunit reverberate and impact upon other units" (p. 114). By attending to the structures, hierarchy, and life-cycle differences within the family, the professional can successfully address a family's needs and support them in ways which are mutually beneficial to the child and his or her family (Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987).

Dunst, Trivette, and Deal (1988) have provided a set of principles for practicing family-center intervention and have documented successful experiences using this approach for

meeting child-level goals within the context of family needs. This Family-Center Model of Assessment and Intervention developed at the Family Infant Preschool Program (FIPP) at Western Carolina Center in Morganton, North Carolina, exemplifies the concept that all families are capable of growth and learning to improve decisions for their own behalf. Using this family-centered model the role of the professional becomes one of enabling and supporting the family unit through effective help-giving strategies. The model, which is derived in part from social network theory (Cohen & Syme, 1985), subscribes to mobilizing the family's informal support system to meet their needs. Principles set forth in the help-giving literature (DePaulo, Nadler & Fisher, 1983) are used to guide the professional in attending to family concerns which became the basis of needs the family identifies as being important. For example, since the family sets the agenda the professional engaging in effective help-giving behavior must be willing to accept that the family has the right to accept or reject help that is offered by a service provider.

Other researchers and program developers who are incorporating the constructs of a family-centered approach into practice have also reported success in their efforts (Bailey, Simeonsson, Winton, Huntington, Comfort, Isbell, O'Donell, & Helm, 1986; Kjerland & Kovach, 1986; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). Experimentation with these approaches shows

promise for bringing about active parent involvement within programs serving the preschool handicapped child. These research and development efforts are providing much needed insight into the many variables affecting the extent to which the family becomes involved in the child's early intervention program.

A series of investigations by Dr. Carl Dunst and his colleagues at the Family Infant and Preschool Program provided evidence that levels of parent involvement in early intervention programs are linked to family-level needs. Research findings reported by this team of researchers also indicated a family's perception that resources are inadequate to meet their needs is significantly related to increased stress and lack of parental time, energy, and personal commitment to carrying out child-level interventions (Dunst & Leet, 1987).

Conversely, the findings showed that the amount of support available to families of young children can positively influence a host of family- and child-level outcomes (Trivette, Deal, & Dunst, 1986). Realistically any number of demands on the family system can influence the behavior of family members at a given time and the interactions between the professional and the parent. Dunst and Trivette (1988) have substantiated claims that involving the family in child level interventions can add additional stress to the family

when the activity did not meet family needs or was not offered in such a way that promoted the family's feeling of competence.

These parent involvement models responsive to family needs have been developed in several experimental programs and are demonstrating positive results. However, at a point when the public schools are assuming major responsibility for implementing special education services for preschool children, little is known about the process for involving parents. For example, it is not known what teachers believe about their role, what their attitudes and expectations of parents are, or their communication skills and interactions with parents. These factors may explain how successful they can be with parents from differing socioeconomic groups.

Schools nationwide implementing services by 1991 under the provisions of PL 99-457. As previously indicated, in addition to extending the provision for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) guaranteed under PL 94-142 to the 3-5 year old, the 1986 Amendments require additional efforts on behalf of parents designed to result in their active participation (U.S. House of Representatives, 1986). With the report accompanying the legislation emphasizing parent education as a related service in preschool programs the concept of involvement will need to be expanded. As defined in the PL 94-142 regulations, a related service is employed

when it is needed for the child to utilize special education services. Thus the drafters of this landmark legislation judiciously considered the influence the family exerts on the young child and made provision for incorporating parent involvement activities into the preschool handicapped child's IEP as one of the related services.

Educating students has always been the primary mission of schools and parents have supported these efforts. For the most part, they have been expected to carry out professionally developed or prescribed activities such as homework, drill and practice, or therapy exercises. The stream of commissions and reports focusing on improved student achievement have renewed the emphasis in securing parent involvement in the educational process in general. For example, the October, 1989, issue of Educational Leadership was focused on the need to develop and strengthen parent-professional "partnerships." While parent involvement would seem to have come of age, the long established history of professionally directive interactions with parents makes it unlikely that schools will embrace family-center interventions without a major philosophical shift in the relationship between parents and schools.

Likewise, attempts to measure the effectiveness of involvement efforts with families are inconsistent and incomplete. In many instances, the evaluation of parent involvement has been limited to counting the number

participating in activity-oriented group meetings or parent conferences. This narrow definition of parent involvement causes one to ask, what should the parent involvement process consist of and what standards do teachers have for evaluating effectiveness. Bricker (1986) observed that while objective data are lacking, it is likely that parents who are actively involved represent a biased sample of better educated, middle income families.

Our lack of knowledge regarding how the parents view their involvement within publicly operated preschool programs is equally troubling. In one of the few studies conducted in this area, Winton and Turnbull (1981) reported the results of their efforts to investigate aspects of the parents' perspective about their involvement. These researchers interviewed parents of young handicapped children who were participating in a private day care program selected by the parents. The results showed that professionals operated on the assumption that they were acting in the best interest of the child by encouraging parents to be actively involved--that is taking part in program activities such as parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences. However, these inducement were not necessarily seen as helpful by the parents. The researchers found wide variability in parent attitudes about involvement. Contrary to the popular assumption that more is better, the parents in this study

expressed a need to exercise the option of minimal involvement. The majority of parents in the sample wanted informal contacts with teachers. For example, they preferred the natural interactions associated with drop-off and pick-up time over more formal activities such as conferences and teaching sessions.

Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) have systematically examined the assumptions underlying parent participation in the educational process and found that professional understandings regarding active parent participation are not based on sound research data. These researchers concluded that parent involvement practices have been founded on assumptions formulated by advocates, policy makers and legislators. Likewise, the teacher's ability to work with minority groups and their respective value systems has been questioned (Winetsky, 1978). Kjerland and Kovach (1986) have observed that the teacher's attitudes and priorities affect their involvement practices with parents. In the absence of a parent involvement model that is responsive to families' needs, it was speculated that teachers are more likely to impose their standards for involvement on families with whom they work. Additionally, they are parentalistic and act in ways which they feel are in the child's best interest. Also, teacher interactions with the family impact them in subtle and not so subtle ways depending on what assumptions they make

about the family (Dunst & Trivette, 1988). In fact, lower socioeconomic families may require greater support from professionals because they lack financial resources and self-confidence in their abilities (Dunst & Leet, 1987). The professional's skill in supporting the economically and culturally different family, in keeping with its values and in ways that promote competence, is seen as an important variable in the family's ability to be involved.

Assumptions of the Study

Because the family is regarded as the single greatest influence on the development of the young child (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke, 1984; Silber, 1989), parent involvement practices which respond to family identified needs can be justified as an important dimension of intervention practice. A family systems approach to intervention represents a sound theoretical base upon which parental involvement programs can be planned as early childhood special education teachers provide services to young children and their families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). It is assumed that low involvement is more likely when activities do not meet the parents' perceived needs (Dunst & Leet, 1987). Given the long tradition of child-focused programming in the public schools, a family-centered orientation with families will require a

redefinition of the beliefs and attitudes of public school personnel toward families (Schaefer, 1983).

Statement of the Problem

During a period of rapid expansion of programs for the preschool handicapped in the public schools, a better understanding of the parent involvement process is needed. Some first person reports (Featherstone, 1980; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1985) and a limited number of research studies (Dunst & Trivette, 1988; Dunst, Leet & Trivette, 1988; Winton & Turnbull, 1981) have explored parent involvement issues from the perspective of the family. Reports of wide variations in the levels of parent involvement warrant further exploration of teacher and parent perspectives about parent involvement. An interpretation of current parent involvement practices and the involvement process was needed to interpret the variations which teachers report in parent involvement. For example, understanding more about teacher and parent expectations and beliefs about the involvement process were needed. Also, since some families do not participate, there is concern that the activities have been professionally prescribed.

Interpretations of parent involvement practices which account for the family perspective are needed to ensure that necessary awareness and commitment is available to school administrators and program leaders to implement models which

are sensitive to family-level needs. It is reported that many professionals operate on the assumption that parents aren't involved "because they don't care" (Fuqua, Hegland & Karas, 1985) provided evidence to suggest that when professionals play a supportive role with parents and use effective help-giving behaviors they are likely to have success with involving parents (Dunst & Trivette, 1988). Currently, it is not known to what extent public school programs are practicing effective help-giving strategies.

Therefore, greater insight into the nature of the parent involvement process within public school programs and the extent to which it incorporates the parent's perspective is needed to ensure effective parent involvement practices within public programs. Additional insights into teacher and parent perceptions about their roles, beliefs, and expectations are needed to explain why outcomes of efforts to involve parents vary widely. Examination of parent and teacher variables can lead to a better understanding of how these variables interact in the involvement process. These understandings are needed by policy makers and program leaders to design, implement, and evaluate more effective parent involvement practices. Finally, more knowledge about parent and teacher perceptions of involvement is needed to develop better training procedures. The problem of this study was to examine teacher

and parent perspectives about parent involvement in a public preschool handicapped program.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher and parent perceptions of parent involvement practices to better understand the involvement process. Teacher perspectives about involvement activities and their roles with parents were expected to define the meanings they gave to parent involvement practices. As teachers applied the same expectations or standard to all families, a mismatch resulted between the expectation and what some parents demonstrated. This mismatch influenced teachers' attitudes and interactions with the parents.

The parents were seen as interpreting their interactions with the program according to how they viewed their role in the child's development. It is believed that a family's history with social agencies and their conceptualization of the child's development exerted considerable influence on this perspective about their role. When the parents perceived their role as being to enhance the child's development, their behavior more often matched the teachers' expectations. The teachers interpreted the behavior of these parents as indicative of them sharing in the responsibility for the child's program. When the teacher and parent views were

incompatible, teachers interpreted parent interactions as being uncooperative or lacking concern. The child-centered model being used by the program showed that many families were not actively involved. These families would stand to benefit most from a shift to a family-center involvement framework.

Several arguments were made for the merits of a family-centered approach which utilizes current family functioning to promote parent involvement in the child's program. Using the assumption that needs drive behavior, interactions reported by the parent and the teacher are thought to lead to greater child progress when family identified needs guide the interactions. Likewise, parents are more likely to commit to program goals and to spend time to achieve them if they are based on needs identified by the family.

Further, it was asserted that a family-systems model which uses help-giving strategies and family-centered involvement goals provides a framework through which teachers can develop the necessary attitudes and skills to meet the families' individually identified needs. This family-centered approach to parent involvement would result in increased opportunities to create shared responsibility at a level which is appropriate for an individual family.

The interpretations of the teachers' involvement practices and parents' involvement levels should have implications for implementing broader-based parent involvement

practices and for training teachers to expand their roles with parents.

Research Questions

Questions utilized to guide the organization of the data were:

1. How did teachers describe parent involvement activities and practices and what meanings did they assign them?
2. How did teachers view their role with the parents?
3. How did the teachers describe and interpret parent interest, communication between teacher and parent, parent input in educational planning, home visits, attendance and participation in program activities with parents they identified among the least and most involved in the program activities?
4. How did teachers account for the differences in involvement in the two parent groups?
5. How did characteristics of the two parent groups explain variations in involvement which were reported by the teacher?
6. What interpretations did parents give to interactions with the program?
7. How did the parents view the child's development and their role in contributing to the development of the child?

Justification of the Study

The programmatic effects of parent involvement from the perspective of parents and teachers working with preschool handicapped children is a dimension of involvement that has been overlooked (Odum & Shuster, 1986; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982). The qualitative method used in this study provided a means of identifying teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes not discernable from more traditional quantitative designs.

Interpretations derived from this investigation of the involvement process can be used to increase our understanding of how involvement practices affect families. The assertions developed from the analysis provide insight on why some families become very active in the program activities, while others show little interest in what the program has to offer.

Better understanding of the underlying reasons for the differences should lead to new strategies for developing more active involvement practices. Bronfenbrenner (1986) has asserted that, "The research reveals that the family is the most humane, most powerful and most economical system for making and keeping human beings human" (p. 7). Supporting the family to this extent necessitates developing approaches which have strong theoretical and empirical bases designed to improve parent involvement in preschool programs. Likewise,

equipping professionals to support families in this manner will require creating carefully planned training approaches.

Recommendations for family-centered assessment and intervention approaches with the families of the young handicapped and at-risk children are regularly appearing in current early intervention literature (Bailey, et al., 1986; Berger & Foster, 1986; Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988; Fewell & Vadasy, 1986; Gallagher & Vietze, 1986; Wachs & Sheehan, 1988). Most approaches now advocate using family-centered models to support family development and to promote parent involvement in programs.

A greater understanding of the multidimensional aspects of parent involvement and its relationship to family-level needs is needed to guide practice within the public school. For example, how the teacher and parent regard their roles, especially how they see themselves impacting on development, may influence the activities associated with involvement practices.

During the last decade more families have become vulnerable to low socioeconomic status, unemployment, marital stress, and teenage parenthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Healy, Keese, & Smith, 1985; Hobbs et al., 1984). It has been suggested that these additional demands placed on parents of a handicapped child make effective parent involvement practices in an early intervention critical to the family's

ability to maintain adequate functioning levels (Fewell & Vadasy, 1986). The early intervention literature indicates that families and children have the most to gain from support during the early years (Bronfenbrenner, 1985; Healy et al., 1985) and that parent/teacher relationships are an important link to successful parent involvement efforts (Schaefer, 1983).

Notwithstanding these important reasons for adopting a family-center approach, application of this approach to public school programs constitutes a major challenge to the school system given the operational realities of schools and the traditional, directive interactions with parents (Powell, 1989). Dr. Elizabeth Vincent (1988), known for her advocacy of parent involvement, has said that implementing a family focus in many instances will require that the school rethink the traditional relationship with the family. Findings from the recent statewide survey of preschool personnel in Oregon support her contention that inadequate family support in the programs were common stressors among the teachers. A summary of the rankings placed this issue second only to salaries among Head Start and preschool handicapped teachers. Stile and his colleagues (1987) reported a serious lack of congruence between what teachers expect from families and how families respond to those expectations. Further, the literature suggests that the teacher's skills and attitudes

impact on a parent's participation in the development and execution of programs for their child (Darling, 1983; Kjerland & Kovach, 1986).

There is also evidence which suggests that teachers' efforts to involve parents are not satisfying to teachers. The results of a statewide survey with preschool teachers in Iowa indicated that teachers rarely used parent support strategies in their programs, even though programs have been operating for several years. Ironically, teachers also rated parent support as an area that could provide them the most of satisfaction (Fuqua, Hegland & Kanas, 1985). Since these results indicated that teachers were not using the practices that they recognize as being effective, the researchers strongly recommended additional examination of the issues related to involvement. Principally, they recommended examination of the parent's point of view to determine if certain linkages between parents and professionals allow parents to be more successful in involvement activities (Fuqua, Hegland & Kanas, 1985).

When early intervention is conceptualized from a family-centered point of view, it can ultimately result in services for children and families becoming better integrated (Foster et al., 1981). The goal becomes one of supporting and enabling the family to identify resources needed to enhance its own development. As family needs are met, the members are

more likely to meet the developmental and emotional needs of the child (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988). For example, if a mother's need for free time is met by having the child in a center based program, she will have more energy to devote to working on a new skill such as toilet training.

In summary, examination of the parent involvement practices and processes within a well-developed preschool handicapped program was expected to yield a description of the extent to which the programs were responding to family needs. These understandings derived from teacher and parent perceptions can help school administrators evaluate current approaches being used in public school programs. Ultimately, these findings can contribute to the development and implementation of models which support families in ways which help them to be more active and knowledgeable in assisting in their child's progress. Defining what is meant by active involvement and making the involvement process operational so as to ensure that it will take place in ways which are beneficial to all families remains a challenge to public school program leaders.

Definitions Used in the Study

Early intervention: Special education and related services provided to young handicapped and developmentally delayed children, ages 0-5 and their families.

Empowering: Carrying out interventions in a manner in which family members acquire a sense of control over their lives as a result of their efforts to meet their needs (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988, p. 88).

Enabling: Creating opportunities for family members to become more competent, independent, and self-sustaining with respect to their abilities to mobilize their social networks to get needs met and attain desired goals (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988, p. 88).

Handicapped preschool child: In the Commonwealth of Virginia a child, ages 2-4, who meets the criteria for special education services under the rules and regulations governing these services. In other states where mandates have been passed the age range is 3-4.

Meanings: The linguistic categories that make up the participants view of reality and with which they define their own and others' actions. Meanings are also referred to by social analysts as culture, norms, understandings, social reality, definitions of the situation, typifications, ideology, beliefs, world view, perspective, or stereotypes (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 71).

Needs: Any perception of importance or urgency that results in a family allocating time, energy, or resources to reduce the discrepancy between what is and what is desired (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988, p. 15).

Program: The use of the word program denotes a preschool handicapped program. Because the program being studied was administered by the public school, the staff and parents frequently referred to the program as school during the interviews.

Resources: The material, financial, social, and psychological resources that a family can access during times of need.

Strengthening families: Supporting and building upon the things the family already does well as a basis for promoting and encouraging the mobilization of resources among the family's network members (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988, p. 89).

Delimitations of the Study

The study was confined to examining the parent involvement practices and processes within one program for the preschool handicapped children. While the qualitative research strategies were used to develop accounts of the perspectives and practices of teachers and parents, the account was not exhaustive. Data collection occurred over a two month period and did not present the opportunity to study all aspects of parent involvement.

Limitations of the Study

The findings from qualitative research should be generalized with caution to other populations. The value of such a study is that it permits greater understanding of the phenomenon of parent involvement. The explanatory value of current theory can be considered and new questions can be discovered to guide additional investigation into teacher and parent characteristics. The researcher unknowingly reverted to yes/no questions during some interview sequences when parents were offering little information. This experience confirmed a common frustration that teachers report regarding their attempts to interact with particular parents and further emphasizes the need for high level communication skills for professionals to successfully work with families.

Overview of Presentation

This study is divided into five chapters. In the present chapter, the rationale for the study has been discussed. Chapter II discusses the method used to conduct the study, selection of the sample, procedures and activities related to collecting and analyzing the data, and methodological issues associated with qualitative research. The environment in which qualitative research takes place is a key consideration in the interpretation of events. Therefore, the center-based program activities are described in Chapter II so that the

discussions of parent involvement practices can be interpreted within an overall framework of service delivery.

Chapter III provides a detailed reporting and discussion of parent and teacher descriptions of parent involvement. Descriptions specific to individual teachers and parents make up a significant portion of the findings sections. A discussion of general teacher descriptions of parent involvement activities provided a basis for examining teacher statements about involvement practices. Then the teacher descriptions of their activity with two parent groups were examined. Comparisons were made between two groups of parents--one group designated by the teachers as most involved, the other as least involved. These data, illustrative of how the involvement practices actually occurred with individual parents, were analyzed to develop understandings about teacher beliefs and practices with families. Chapter IV summarizes the study and provides interpretations and conclusions related to broader understanding of parent involvement. Chapter V discusses the insights gained from the in-depth look at the parent involvement process and provides recommendations for designing and implementing approaches to parent involvement into a public schools program. Considerations for preservice and inservice training for public school personnel serving the

young handicapped child are outlined. Finally, recommendations for further research are provided.

Use of Transcript Data

Translating the spoken word to written form was tedious. Certain accommodations were made to achieve clarity and to assist the reader. Several minor modifications of the quotations of the interviewees were systematically applied in this study.

1. Pauses, stuttering and stumbling utterances, such as "uh" and "you know," were omitted.
2. Phrases which repeated comments already quoted, false starts, and comments irrelevant to the point being discussed were omitted from the text. Such omissions are indicated by ellipsis periods.
3. The topical or summarized details of an account were bracketed to clarify the pronoun reference or semantic meaning.

The following system was used to ensure the protection and the anonymity of individuals participating in or referred to in the study.

1. A random designation of the numerals 1-10 was use to identify teachers.
2. The parents were, in turn designated as A or B and matched to the respective numeral used for the teacher. A was designated as most involved and B for least involved.
3. All references to a child's name were replaced by the capital letter "C".
4. In instances when the informant referred to another individual whose identity might be known, designations such as "P" for parent and "T" for teacher were used.

Chapter 2

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding parent involvement in a program serving preschool handicapped children. It was expected that by systematically studying teachers' perspectives of parent involvement, especially their practices with parents whom they identified as least and most involved, a better understanding of the involvement process would be possible. Likewise, analysis of the parents' perspectives regarding the child's program and their involvement in it could assist with interpreting the differences in involvement. Rather than testing for relationships within a quantitative paradigm, the objective of the study was to obtain a more comprehensive, teacher and parent perspective of activities designed to create parent involvement in a public school program. The findings were generated from interviews with selected teachers and parents in a program, participant observation, and review of program documents. These findings provided a systematic way to examine the differences in parent involvement within the program being studied and provided insight into why the teacher practices produced high level of involvement with some families and not with others.

Naturalistic Research

In the past, studies which examined child and family issues have used experimental or survey research methods (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Odum & Shuster, 1986). These quantitative approaches to conducting research are designed to verify relationships defined a priori. The challenge facing early childhood special educators is to individually plan for "instruction for parents so that they can be active and knowledgeable in assisting in their child's progress" (House Report 99-860, 1986). Researchers (Odum & Shuster, 1986; Stainback & Stainback, 1984) have encouraged the use of qualitative methods to explore issues in special education where a better understanding of the phenomenon is needed. Parent involvement is one such entity. While it is highly valued and clearly has a basis in the law, more understanding of the process of involvement can lead to more effective ways to measure its relationship to the educational progress of young handicapped children (Odum & Shuster, 1986; Stainback and Stainback, 1984; 1988).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) recommend the use of qualitative methods when a generalized account of perspectives and practices of a particular group is under initial investigation. Thus the qualitative research methods chosen in the present study provided a useful approach for describing

and interpreting the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding parent involvement in preschool programs serving young children with special education needs. Interviews with and observations of teachers and parents provided rich, contextual information about the participants' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about parent involvement practices. Insights into the involvement process derived from the descriptions and the meanings participants attached to them would not be possible using survey methods (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

Erickson (1986) has suggested that qualitative or naturalistic research also can be useful in interpreting what is really happening within a setting because the participants frequently fail to interpret events and processes as they are occurring. Direct service providers and program managers need more understanding of the nature of the involvement process and, in particular, its impact on the family unit. A holistic view of the involvement process can be arrived at through studying the "rich descriptions" available through qualitative methods. Finally, increasing the professionals' awareness of the premises on which they practice parent involvement as well as the resulting parent participation has the potential to promote shared responsibility between families and professionals.

Instrumentation

Initial research activity consisted of identifying components and elements of parent involvement from the literature and from personal experiences in order to develop a focused interview with teachers and parents. (See Appendix A for the guides.) The focused interview was the major method of data collection in the present study. Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggested a flexible, open-ended format for interviews, but also endorsed using an outline of questions to ensure the inclusion of key areas. A common core of questions allowed for the comparative analysis of the respondent's answers. Because a single interview with each participant would constitute a major source of data, careful attention was given to developing the questions in the interview guide.

Development of Interview Guides

A comprehensive listing of strategies for developing parent involvement was developed in preparation of the parent and teacher interview guides. Goals and activities described in the parent involvement literature were incorporated into questions. A common core of questions were developed for use with teachers and parents to permit comparison of responses of the least and most involved parents. The questions were clustered to create a logical flow of subject matter and to encourage conversation around broad categories. Supplemental

questions were included in the interview guide so that topics could be probed when necessary to elicit a response from the interviewee. Clustering the questions also made it easy to do a mental check to prevent redundancy and to determine if information or description in a given area was adequate.

The staff in a model infant and preschool program in North Carolina reviewed the interview guide for breadth and accuracy of content. Their suggestions were used to refine the guides. Two educators in that program participated in trial interviews with the researcher. Additional revisions were made following the trial interviews.

Pilot Interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted with a teacher and two parents in a preschool handicapped program in a local school division in central Virginia. These interviews allowed the researcher to field test the interviews in a center-based preschool program operating within the state system where the study was conducted. The researcher contacted the teacher who agreed to participate and two parents were enlisted to field test the interviews as well. The teacher was asked to arrange interviews with an actively involved parent and one with minimal involvement. Following these pilot interviews, some questions were reformatted to attain greater clarity.

Entering the Field

As discussed in the introduction to the study, public schools are responsible for supervising the delivery of special education and related services to the preschool child with a handicap or developmental delay (PL 99-457). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) advised that the site chosen to research a problem ought to be characteristic of the organization being studied. Virginia has had a mandate since 1976 requiring special education services for all eligible preschoolers, ages two through four. Since the programs in the Virginia system had been operating for more than a decade, these programs provided an excellent opportunity to examine parent involvement practices. The spring of the year was thought to be an ideal time to study the results of a year long effort to involve families in the child's educational program.

Site Selection

In the spring of 1988 two large, well-established programs which provided services to preschool handicapped children were contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the research. School officials from the first program indicated that they could not accommodate the project during the current year, but invited me to file a request to conduct research the following school year. At that time my dissertation advisor intervened and contacted the Director of

Special Education in the second program. The Director was a former student of my advisor and she willingly agreed to endorse the study. I followed up with a written request to conduct the research with the Superintendent of Schools. (See Appendix B.) An overview of the study and an outline of the proposed research plan were also provided to the superintendent for review.

The program is one of the five largest programs in the state and serves approximately 180 preschool handicapped children and their families. The program was large so it was anticipated that sufficient data could be generated to make assertions about the involvement process. An additional advantage of studying this program was that the entire program was housed at one site under the supervision of one building level administrator, decreasing the likelihood that differences existed in types of involvement activities.

Site Access

After a letter was sent to the Superintendent, I telephoned the Director of Special Education. She was interested in having more information about the parent involvement process and felt that the study would yield useful information to assist the school district in evaluating the effectiveness of their parent involvement program. We made

informal agreement that I would share the results of the study with school district personnel.

Following approval of the research project by the Director of Research and Evaluation, the Director of Special Education provided instructions for initiating contact with a program supervisor. The Program Area Supervisor arranged for me to attend a meeting with her, the Coordinator of Programs for the Preschool Handicapped and the Principal at the program site. The Program Area Supervisor was designated as my contact person for the duration of the study.

During the meeting, the principal and the preschool coordinator reviewed the preschool program with me, and I provided information about my purpose in conducting the study. I indicated that I would need to interview ten teachers and two parents with whom each teacher worked. Demographic information was gathered about the teachers' experience and background to generate a participant pool from which the sample of ten teachers would be randomly selected. School officials made it clear that teachers' participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The principal arranged for me to meet with the school staff the following morning.

To avoid anxiety among the staff and to reduce unnecessary speculation about the research activities, all program staff are briefed on the purpose of the study. It was explained that little information existed on the parent

involvement process from a teacher or parent perspective. I indicated that a better understanding of parent involvement was needed to refine the parent involvement practices within programs serving the preschool handicapped child across the country. I explained that Virginia was one of a dozen states where services to the preschool handicapped were mandated and observed that an examination of parent involvement practices in a large program like theirs would be very valuable as other programs were being implementing under the new provision in P.L. 99-457. I said I understood how busy their schedules were toward the end of the school year and assured them that I would respect that their time was valuable.

The teachers' role in enlisting parents, including the need for them to make an initial contact with the parents to obtain permission for me to contact the parent, was explained. I then provided a general description of the interview process to the teachers. The importance of keeping the specific information shared during the interviews confidential was stressed. I told them that a pool of fifteen teachers had been identified as possible participants based on their tenure with the program. Their cooperation was solicited and all the eligible teachers indicated a willingness to participate in the study.

Sampling Procedures

Because the researcher did not enter the site in the true ethnographic tradition, which would have required a continuation of data collection until no more new meanings were discovered, it was decided to develop a teacher and parent sample which would maximize the scope and range of information available (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). To provide representativeness in the sampling process, the ten participating teachers were randomly selected from the stratified sample of 15 experienced teachers. The designated number of teachers and parents was also a practical consideration for the researcher. Because the research was being conducted for a doctoral dissertation, time and resources to carry out the study were limited. Given the richness of the data derived from the interviews, the purpose of the study was not comprised.

Selection of Teachers

The pool of 15 teachers from which the sample was drawn excluded first year teachers and interim/substitute teachers. Teachers who had worked less than half the academic year were also excluded. The interim teachers and those recently employed had not had sufficient time to establish stable relationships with the families. Likewise, first year teachers are reported as needing a year to become acclimated

to their role as well as sufficient time to refine their skills (Glickman, 1985). Ten teachers were randomly selected from the pool to participate in the study. Since all eligible teachers were willing to participate, the remaining five were asked to serve as alternates in the event any teachers in the original sample were unable to participate.

Selection of Parent Groups

Because one of the purposes of the study was to examine parent perceptions, parent participants were selected to represent the extremes of involvement in order to provide an opportunity to study these extremes within an individual classroom. The opportunity to document unique variations of involvement was possible by selecting parents designated by the teachers as being on the extremes of most to least involved in the child's program. Selection of parents from the extremes of involvement served two functions. First, it minimized the differences within each group. Secondly, by choosing from the extremes of the continuum, the differences in involvement for the two groups were maximized. This procedure increased the likelihood of identifying factors to explain differences in involvement (Glaser & Strauss, cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

During the previously described staff meeting, the 15 teachers who could potentially participate in the study were

asked to list each child in their class on individual cards. Next, they were asked to order them from most to least, according to how much their family was involved in the child's program. Usually, each teacher had eight children which was the class load by state requirement. However, new children enrolled in the program throughout the school year. Because of insufficient time to establish working relations with the parent, the teachers were instructed to omit the students who entered the program after January 1 of the current year. The omission of these students resulted in one teacher ranking five children, and another ranking six.

The rankings from most to least parent involvement were used to randomly select one parent from the two lowest parents (ranked as less involved), and one from the two highest parents (ranked as more involved). I supplied the participating teachers a letter to use in enlisting participation of the 20 selected families. The letter (Appendix C) explained the study and requested permission for the researcher to access school records and to contact the parents. It is felt that the teachers' endorsement of the activity was very instrumental in accessing the parents.

Data Collection

As indicated in an earlier discussion, open-ended, focused interviews were the primary method of data collection

used in the study. All interviews were recorded using a portable tape recorder and were later transcribed to maintain accuracy of reporting. Throughout the data collection period, I spent time at the program making observations about parent participation, particularly the interactions between the staff and parents. At the end of the data collection period, I reviewed each child's cumulative folder and special education folder thoroughly to obtain additional documentation on the frequency and nature of teacher and parent contact. Documentation of parent input in the placement and planning process is required under the Virginia Rules and Regulations of Special Education (Virginia Department of Education, 1987). Therefore, these records also provided a written record of parent participation in the IEP meetings.

Teacher Interviews

Most teacher interviews took about one hour to conduct. Since the teachers had a very busy end-of-the-year schedule, they were afforded the flexibility of choosing the day and time for the interview within a four-week period. They scheduled their interview appointment on a calendar at the sign-in counter in the school office.

The teacher interviews explored general perspectives about parent involvement and specific experiences with the two families participating in the study. To introduce the

interview, the researcher provided the teacher with a copy of Peterson's (1987) definition of parent involvement noted in Chapter 1. The definition provided a stimulus to initiate conversation. Particular attention was given to the idea that involvement "denotes a process through which parents are brought into contact with (a) the staff that has responsibility for giving service to the handicapped child (and parent) for purposes of educational intervention and (b) activities involving the child, which are created to inform parents and to facilitate parent roles with their own child" (Peterson, 1987, p. 434). By focusing on "service to parent" and "facilitate the parent role," portions of the definition, it was anticipated that the teachers would provide the maximum information on their role with the parent. As we talked about the definition, I emphasized that parent involvement activities span a broad continuum and stressed, "that involvement often implies a variety of alternative activities that vary from program to program," and "differences in the options available are affected by the unique features of a program, the geographical setting, the population of children and parents to be served and resources available" (Peterson, 1987, p. 434). These cues were also designed to prompt the teachers to talk about all aspects of their work with parents.

Following some informal conversation with the teacher, I asked her to describe her efforts to involve parents. As the

interview proceeded, each teacher provided a description of her center-based classroom. Questions were posed to elicit teacher comments about her role with the children. It was thought that insight into how the teacher sees her role with the children affected how the teacher viewed her role with parents. The teacher was also asked to describe the classroom activities. Incorporating this description into the interview provided a way to become familiar with the daily routine and provided a natural transition for shifting to the discussion specific to the most and least involved families. During this segment of the interview, the teachers enumerated characteristics and described the behaviors of the families identified as being least and most involved. The teachers' responses were very spontaneous and rich in detail. In short, they eagerly "told their story" to the researcher and rapport was easily established with the teachers. This acceptance may have been influenced by the fact that the researcher was known to the teachers from her role as a coordinator of a regional preschool technical assistance center in another area of the state. The researcher had interacted with several teachers at statewide conferences. They also had positive interactions with the coordinator who served in their region. This positive backdrop appeared to create trust among the teachers and maximized the validity of information obtained in the interview.

Parent Interviews

After written consent was received from the families, contact was made with the individual who signed the form. Nineteen of the 20 participating families initially were contacted by telephone. One family had no telephone so I went to their home to make initial contact. In addition to providing a means to schedule the appointment for the home interview, initial contacts provided an opportunity to talk with the parent and to explain why I was interested in meeting with them. They were very responsive when I told them that I would be happy to come to their homes to conduct the interview. A number of experiences working with families from diverse social and cultural backgrounds proved an advantage. As with the teachers, rapport was easily established making contact and interactions with the families very natural and relaxed.

I conveyed to the parent during the initial contact and again during the interview that they could make an important contribution to helping teachers work with them by sharing what they think and how they feel about the activities in the program. Knowing how important it was for the parent to trust my motives, I assured the parents that all information would be anonymous and that they would not be personally identified in the written account of the study. I also reiterated my

commitment to keeping any information they shared confidential. Additionally, since families might have concerns about their services and resources from social service agencies, they were assured that no information would be shared with any agency. Parents were given a local number to call if they needed to cancel the interview.

The twenty interviews were scheduled at the parents' convenience and 19 were conducted in the family home. Some took place during the day, while others occurred late afternoon and early evening. In most instances the mother was the contact person and the interview time was arranged with her. She was encouraged to have whomever she wanted present at the interview. Two interviews were scheduled so that fathers could participate in the interview. They were in families identified as most involved.

The parent interviews took from thirty minutes to an hour to complete depending on how interactive the parent was and how successful I was in keeping the parent on the topic. Parents sometimes went into long descriptions of frustrating encounters with agency personnel. The stories they told provided additional insight into parent beliefs and attitudes. Following the introductory remarks the interview began with asking the parent how he/she became aware of the preschool program. Then a series of questions were asked to arrive at the parent's understanding of why the child was enrolled in

the program and of the events occurring during the day while the child attended the half-day center based program. The remaining portion of the interview was targeted at the parent's interactions with the program, their beliefs about their role with the child's development, and their understanding of the child's development.

Use of School Documents

The program administration required teachers to log all parent contacts. These detailed records of teacher/parent contacts were made available to the researcher.

Participant Observation

I had ample opportunity to observe the day-to-day operation of the program during the data collection phase of the study. This awareness of the program structure and the daily routines was valuable in conducting the teacher and parent interviews. Having a context in which to place questions made the interaction during the interview more natural. During the second visit to the program site the researcher participated in school-wide, preschool special olympics. The day long event was well-attended by parents and extended family members. Participation in a morning of games and a picnic lunch provided an opportunity to observe teacher-

parent interactions and to personally meet several of the families scheduled to participate in the interviews.

Center-based Program Description

Placing the involvement process in the larger context of the center-based program is important to relate to the findings presented in subsequent sections. This is particularly true for understanding parent and teacher comments used in direct quotations. Information gathered about the program through observation and information provided by the teacher was used to develop a description of the program in the paragraphs that follow.

The preschool center which served handicapped and developmentally delayed children, ages 2-4, occupied a former elementary school building. The entire facility had been renovated to house the preschool program. The program was concurrent with the school term in the school district and operated daily, from 8:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. One teacher and an assistant were assigned to the nineteen classrooms in the building. A school nurse, speech pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, an educational diagnostician, a psychologist, and a social worker functioned as a part of the assessment and intervention team. A Head Start program was also housed in the center. The majority of the children served by the program rode mini-buses which were

adapted with child safety seats to accommodate the younger and smaller children.

The children's day began each morning at 8:45 a.m. when teachers, support personnel and teacher assistants met the buses in a central area in front of the building. Some children went directly to the classroom and others proceeded to the cafeteria for breakfast. Along with attention to toileting needs and breakfast, teachers and assistants checked the children's "book bags" for supplies and notes from parents. With these young children regular information exchange about feeding, toileting, and health issues is very important to the child's daily routine. During the interviews, teachers reported that the daily communication with parents was very important in communicating the children's needs to the staff.

The children were heterogeneously grouped, and most classrooms served children ages two through four. The teachers provided extended descriptions of the daily routine. These descriptions were very similar from classroom to classroom. Some teachers indicated that they used more structure than others. These differences seemed to be influenced by the age and behavioral characteristics of the group. All teachers reported having a circle-time activity that focused on language development. Several teachers said they kept this group time very brief, but felt that it served

"to get the children used to the idea that we don't always play."

As is common in many programs serving the preschool handicapped child, a specific time was set aside for each child to work on his structured individual education plan (IEP) goals. Each child worked on skills across various developmental areas. Teachers reported that the day frequently included an art activity which required individual help from staff. Outside play and free play in the classroom were a part of the daily routine. Free time play included allowing the child to choose among several activities, such as cooking or dress-up.

Lunch was served late morning and the day concluded with quiet time, in which either a story or music was presented. The teachers wrote notes to parents while the assistant prepared the children for home. Individual teacher comments provided a description of how they viewed the day, "It goes really fast, sometimes I look at the clock and I haven't done half of the things that I wanted to do for that day, but the time is gone. It is an exciting day" (10). As another teacher reflected on the day she stated:

When I think about my day, I think about self-help, feeding, a lot of them don't feed themselves. It takes a lot of time . . . I write in the notebooks about what happened that day, or write a quick newsletter and run it off, and then it's time to go. Goes real fast. (3)

The climate created by the school staff was very relaxed and friendly. The school principal was available to the parents and often interacted with them upon arrival to the program. She was observed spending time with individual children and parents. Likewise, the program staff seemed eager for the parents to spend time at the program. The principal reported that many parents volunteer and provided a copy of the volunteer sign-in log to the researcher. Volunteering was regarded as positive and teachers made frequent comments regarding parent's attendance at the special events.

The parents also expressed positive feelings about visiting and participating in program events. Many parents, regardless of perceived involvement levels, commented about enjoying going to the program. They were especially impressed that the program staff knew them personally and greeted them and their child by name. Although some parents were unable to attend activities at the program, they reported feeling welcome and indicated that they would like to be able to attend.

Characteristics of the Participants

A description of relevant parent and teacher characteristics is presented next to provide a larger context

from which to understand and interpret the teacher's interaction with the least and most involved parent groups.

Characteristics of the Parent Groups

The characteristics of the two groups of parents designated as high and low involved are summarized in Table 1. A review of the information for the two groups indicates differences in several areas that led to speculation about why teachers might be reporting wide differences in parent involvement levels. The child factors indicate differences in the two groups. Seven children from the most involved group had received services from an infant program which used a parent training model, as compared with three of the least involved families. The other three highly involved parents initiated the referral to the school district for special education services for their child's communication delays and behavior and attention problems. All three mothers expressed frustration that they had to prevail on school officials to provide services to the child.

The children of the least involved parents were reported to have milder developmental delays which appeared to be more environmentally based. Several of these children's mothers reported that a public health clinic or physician referred them for services. Teachers indicated that they anticipated

Table 1
Child and Family Characteristics

CHARACTERISTICS	Family ID									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Child Condition/ Disability	Communication Disorder	Hearing Imp. Severe delay	Down Syndrome	Blind	Premature delay	Attention Deficit	Blind Cerebral Palsy	Attention Deficit	Severe delay	Failure to thrive
Years in Program	2	4.1	3	1	3	2	1.5	1	2	2
Age: yrs. & mos.	5.6	F	4.8	3	4.11	5	4.10	5.6	3.9	4.6
Sex	M	F	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	M
Position in Family	Youngest of two	Youngest of three	Youngest of four	Adopted Youngest of three	Twin also delayed	Oldest of two	Only child	Second of four	Only Child	Youngest of two
Source of Referral	Mother	Inf Prog	Inf Prog	Inf Prog	Inf Prog	Mother	Mother	Mother	Inf Prog	Inf Prog
Infant Prog	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes ¹	no	yes	yes
Next Placement	Full-time Sp. Class	Preschool	Generic K	Preschool	Generic K	Full-time Sp. Class	Special School	Kindergarten	Preschool	Preschool
Family Structure	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact	Single	Intact
Age of Mother	Late 20s	Late 20s	Late 30s	Late 30s	Mid 20s	Late 20s	Mid 30s	Mid 20s	Mid 20s	Early 30s
Primary Caregivers	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother	Mother ²	Mother ²
Availability of Father	Sea Duty Participates	Sea Duty Participates	Participates Supportive	No direct Involvement Supportive	Regular ³ Participant	Involved ³ Supportive	Sea Duty Supportive	Participates ³	Fiance	Doesn't ⁴ Discipline
Mother's Work Status	No	No	No	No	No	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Full-time	Full-time
Housing	Navy Base	Navy Base	Officer's Base	Own small ranch	Own small home	Own Condominium	Navy Base	Navy Base	Apartment ⁵	Own home ranch
Ethnic Group	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	N

¹Out of state
²Child lives with grandparents during the week
³Participated in interview
⁴As reported by mother
⁵Only interview at program site

Table 1 (Continued)
Child and Family Characteristics

CHARACTERISTICS	Family ID										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Child Condition/ Disability	Spina Bifida delay	delay	Cerebral Palsy premature	premature delay	premature delay	delay	delay	hearing impaired	delay	delay	delay asthma
Years in Program	1	1	2.5	1	1	3	3	1	1 ¹	1 ¹	1.5
Age; yrs. & mos.	3.9	4.6	4.7	3.9	2.11	5.0	5.5	3.1	4.6	4.2	4.2
Sex	M	M	F	M	M	M	M	M	F	M	M
Position in Family	Youngest of two	Oldest of four	Oldest of three	Only child	Oldest of two	Middle of three ²	Middle of three	Third of four	Oldest of three	Pregnant with second	Pregnant with second
Source of Referral	Doctor	Clinic	Inf Prog	Inf Prog	Inf Prog	Mother	Clinic	Clinic	Clinic	Clinic	Clinic
Infant Prog	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
Next Placement	Preschool	Preschool	Full-time Sp. Class	Preschool	Preschool	Regular K	Generic K	Preschool	Preschool	Preschool	Preschool
Family Structure	Single ³	Single	Single	Divorced	Single ³	Intact	Single ³	Single	Grandmother has custody	Grandmother has custody	Single
Age of Mother	Mid 20s	Early 20s	Early 20s	late 20s	Late teens	Mid 20s	Mid 20s	Early 20s	Early 20s	Early 20s	Early 20s
Primary Caregivers	Mother Grandmother	Mother	Mother Grandmother	Mother Sisters	Mother Grandmother	Mother Grandmother	Mother	Mother	Grandmother ⁴	Mother Grandmother	Mother Grandmother
Availability of Father	no info	no info	sometimes with family	little interaction	No	participates	no info	another static	no info	no info	no info
Mother's Work Status	In comm. college	No	No	Yes, 2 jobs	Yes	Yes	Yes, works nights	Seeking	No	No	night school for GRE
Housing	Modest public apt. ⁴	rent apt. in poor repair	rent small apt. ⁴	rent comfortable apt.	comfortable rental house ⁴	navy base	rent small house	modest public apt.	own comfortable house	own comfortable house ⁴	comfortable house ⁴
Ethnic Group	N	N	N	N	N	Puerto Rican	N	N	N	N	N

¹Originally in Headstart

²Oldest Child Handicapped

³Mother Expecting Second

⁴Family Lives With Grandparents

⁵Mom Has Support of Male Friend

⁶Mother Occasionally Visits

fewer of these children would require special education services beyond the preschool program.

If housing is used as an indicator of socioeconomic status, the families identified as most involved were the working, middle class. These families either owned their homes or were provided comfortable housing through the military. Also nine out of ten of these families were white with intact family structures. The one single mother had the support of two grandparents who kept the child during the week while the mother worked. In the case of the one black family rated as highly involved, the family was intact and they owned a home in a middle class neighborhood.

All of the least involved families were black. One of these families was operating within a two-parent family structure. Seven of these mothers did not indicate regular support of a male partner. These mothers were much younger, but had the support of their mothers with primary caregiving responsibilities. In four instances these young mothers lived with her extended family.

Teacher Background and Training

Five of the teachers participating in the study were white, and five were black. The five black teachers did not report greater success with the least involved families, all of whom were black. Teacher's comments led me to speculate

that their values and attitudes were reflective of a middle class orientation. Overall, the evidence with respect to differences in interaction with the two groups of parents is supported by Winetsky's (1978) earlier findings which showed unless the parents were Anglo, middle-class or both, teachers' and parents' expectations did not match.

As a group, the teachers were experienced in working with the preschool handicapped population. Four teachers initially trained and worked in special education, and another four moved from regular early childhood to early childhood special education. The other two teachers held undergraduate degrees in English and Theater Arts. Nine of the ten teachers held Master's Level certification in preschool handicapped. The tenth teacher held a Master's degree in the area of Severe/Profound Mentally Handicapped. One teacher had worked with preschool handicapped children for 10 years; the least experienced, three years.

There is an increasing concern about the need to train professionals to work with parents of handicapped children (Healy et al., 1985). The participating teachers reported having some courses and workshops in working with parents, but the value placed on training varied from teacher to teacher. Three teachers agreed that training had helped them to be more effective in their interactions with parents. However, most said that "experience is the best teacher." Explanations

about how they developed skills for working with parents included accounts of training experiences, such as working in a model demonstration program for two years. Several teachers made statements that "they learned by making mistakes." One teacher, who considered the needs identified by parents to a greater extent than the other teachers when planning activities during the home visit, also reported that "classes do not prepare you for teaching parents; you learn from experience" (6). Clearly the teachers lacked consensus about the effective ways to learn to work with parents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a series of steps that were used to scrutinize the interview transcripts. Initially all parent and teacher interviews were transcribed verbatim. With the first reading of the transcripts, the researcher began to note impressions about teacher and parent responses in the margins. Each interview transcript included the questions and comments that the researcher used to elicit information. These questions were used to group the interview responses into several initial categories. Also, a list was developed as the broad patterns and themes started to emerge from the data. During the second reading, the transcripts were edited in conjunction with the computer version. During this process the narratives were labeled and irrelevant or extraneous

material was eliminated. As these segments were labeled and coded for the original source, they became the structure around which interview data were sorted. Use of the computer to manipulate the data and separate it by category made the sorting process manageable. This activity produced a print copy that could be cut apart and used to continue the sorting and categorizing process.

Teachers and parents frequently provided more information than the interview guides called for, so additional categories were added to accommodate new information. Likewise during the second reading, the interviews were paired as an individual teacher/parent unit for the purpose of gaining additional insight into the differences in teacher interaction with the two parent groups. The researcher continued to listen to the interview tapes throughout data analysis.

Miles and Huberman (1984) provided an illustrative guide to the analysis of qualitative data which aided in managing the categorizing process. These researchers suggest that the process actually consists of the three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawing/verification. The data reduction process helped to sharpen the distinctions in the data; helped to focus on the critical areas; and facilitated the discarding of extraneous data.

Themes emerged from the data through a series of inductive strategies as the data were reduced and summarized. During this process the researcher moved back and forth in the data. Moving from the overall structure to small pieces and back again became a useful way to refine the categories. These categories were used to explore patterns which ultimately led to a conceptualization of some preliminary themes.

The researcher also took direction from Lofland and Lofland (1984) in the organization of approximately 30 hours of interview data into relevant units and in the creation of a general design for reporting the findings. This design presents a balanced description of the data and interpretation of the results.

Organizing the data in such a way that interpretations could be drawn and verified was a lengthy process. Matrices were used to visually represent participant data and were very helpful in identifying themes and in verifying initial impressions from the data. Key quotations and major concepts within the categories were recorded for each teacher or parent response. Comparisons were made across teacher descriptions, across descriptions about the most and least involved parents, and across descriptions given by the most involved and least involved parents. The display of relevant data promoted the

interpretation of the data and aided in drawing and verifying conclusions.

The description of the data reduction process and data display lend creditability to the interpretations of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest arranging for peer debriefing for credibility of the findings. During the data reduction activities, regular corroboration took place with an ethnographer to help maintain the integrity of the findings.

Demographic data, which described the experience and training of the teachers, were compiled from the teacher interviews and a short teacher survey. The compilation of family and child characteristics provided a profile of the least involved and most involved families which was useful in interpreting differences in involvement. Information collected from the examination of school documents was useful in clarifying and verifying various portions of the teacher and parent accounts, and added to trustworthiness of the data.

By comparing the activities associated with parent involvement with two families served by the same teacher, results of the differences in involvement levels could be interpreted. Differences in the teacher's reports about practice with and the responsiveness of individual parents were analyzed. Aspects of the teachers' perspectives of the involvement process were compared to the parents'

perspectives. Interpretations of these differences provided additional insight about parent involvement activities.

Methodological Issues

The naturalistic inquiry method has the advantage of allowing the researcher to make inferences about important aspects of a culture (Spradley, 1979). It also carries an equal number of limitations. In the traditional sense, validity and reliability are sometimes viewed with suspect. Potential bias is introduced in any study that uses the perspective of a narrowly selected population. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend the maximum variation sampling employed in the present study as most useful in obtaining data. Building rapport with interviewees, biased questioning, and preconceived ideas about the existence and relative importance of certain factors in the analysis of the data are all potential threats when the researcher becomes the primary instrumentation. As indicated in earlier descriptions of the methodology, several steps were taken to reduce these sources of bias. The interviews were audio taped, the data were triangulated with information from school documents, and a core of questions guided the interviews with both groups.

In the absence of inter-rater reliability, data were coded by source. The availability of original data and the detailed explanation of subsequent data manipulation make it

possible for other researchers to examine the data for their assessment of the analysis and interpretations.

Another concern of qualitative methodology is the inability to generalize from the small, non-probability sample to a larger population. The purpose of the study was not to generalize findings, but rather to increase the understanding of the parent involvement process by developing greater insight into meanings that participant groups give to the practice. As interpretations were arrived at, their plausibility and confirmability were measured against theory and research results available within and outside the field of education. By using theory from related disciplines to explain the process of parent involvement, a greater understanding of the outcomes of efforts to involve parents is possible.

Presentation of the Findings and Interpretations

The findings are presented in a descriptive narrative. Interpretations have been interspersed in the descriptive categories identified from the teacher and parent interview data. Where efficient to include them, tables provide additional explanatory examples to various aspects of teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes. A separate chapter is reserved for the interpretations derived from the insights and explanations about the differences in levels of parental

involvement. Recommendations for improving involvement practice within preschool programs serving handicapped children and suggestions for future research on involvement practices conclude the report. The recommendations are intended to challenge professionals to direct their efforts in ways that serve the best interests of the family unit.

Chapter 3

Findings and Discussion

Teacher's Perceptions of Parent Involvement

The preschool handicapped program being studied offered a variety of opportunities for parents to become knowledgeable about and involved in their child's program. Activities included: bimonthly teacher visits to the child's home, opportunities to volunteer on field trips and in the classroom, observation in the classroom, topical workshops, PTA meetings, special events (such as preschool special olympics), daily communication notebooks, telephone exchanges, and periodic newsletters. In several instances teachers reported writing newsletters as though the children were talking about their day. The following sections examine categories of parent involvement practices which seemed most representative of the involvement process. The meanings teachers attached to involvement practices are also discussed.

Ongoing Daily Contact

Teachers relied on daily contact with parents as a means of keeping parents informed about child activity and progress. Two major techniques for maintaining contact with families were a communication notebook for each child and regular telephone calls to the parents. A spiral bound notebook

functioned as a communication device by which the teacher and parent shared child-level information in note form. Teachers reported exchanging messages between home and school daily by way of the notebook. It was, in one teacher's estimate, the "biggest thing" used for involving the parents. She reported using the notebooks to "list suggestions or comment on a child's activity" (8).

All teachers except one said that they provided the parents with their home phone number. Teachers and parents reported communicating regularly by phone when they needed to discuss child routines, illness, accomplishments and problematic situations. During the course of the interviews, teachers commented on various phone conversations with parents which took place beyond the school day. The teacher who did not provide her phone number to parents reported calling parents after hours when she thought there was a need. Overall, teachers regarded telephone communication as part of their role with parents. During the course of data collection I frequently observed teachers in the office calling parents to set up meetings, to arrange for home visits and to discuss child-level interests or concerns.

Center-based Activities

A second aspect of parent involvement centered around the face-to-face contact with parents in the program environment.

These activities included attendance at workshops and meetings, visiting and volunteering in the classroom, and volunteering for field trips. The teachers said that parents were always welcome in their classrooms. They reported extending an open invitation to visit throughout the school year. The teachers reported encouraging parents to participate in holiday activities and special occasions, like preschool special olympics and graduation. Several teachers emphasized the importance of classroom learning and expressed a desire to have parents to spend time in the classroom. They observed that the time parents spend in the classroom allows them to learn more about the child and to know how to work with child-level skills. One teacher expressed that it was important to explain her expectations for child behavior to parents:

In most cases we were able to work through helping them [the parents] to understand that it is a school environment, and when they are in the classroom, I'm going to use the same type of techniques that I would use if they were not in this classroom. It's hard for parents. Sometimes, they tend to want to baby and want to give the child whatever they want. I think most kids do act a little differently when mom and dad are around, and that's almost expected.
(7)

Another teacher gave endorsement to classroom visitation as an ideal way for parents to become more objective about the child's handicap or learning deficit. She stated, "Especially with behavior things, they really need to see it. It would

be great [to have an observation booth] . . . for the parent to come and observe without their child knowing" (5).

Although the teachers were generally enthusiastic about classroom visitation, several reported that many of their families do not visit the classroom except for special occasions. They recognized that a significant number of parents must "put forth the effort to get someone to bring them here" (10). The teachers added that many parents probably visited the classroom infrequently because they lived some distance from the program, had transportation problems, needed child care for siblings in the household, or were employed. Although these were seen as barriers affecting parent involvement, four of the ten teachers when giving recommendations for ways to improve involvement continued to emphasize the importance of parent participation in the center-based activities, especially the visits to the classroom. These teachers felt that providing transportation to the program site would increase participation.

One teacher reported on a parent-group meeting that she planned for her families during a particular parent conference day. This meeting, which she evaluated as very successful, focused on assisting parents to understand and effectively manage child behaviors. The teacher reported that the parents benefited greatly from the emotional support which they received from other parents:

How to deal with different behaviors in a positive way, and that what they're [the children] doing is not necessarily bad, it's just their age level that they're functioning on. . . . They were able to discuss their problems, and a parent who had a similar problem was able to say, "Well, this is what I have tried at home and this is what worked." It was great because I wasn't the one who had answers. . . . They got to talk to each other and share their experiences, as well as me sharing mine. . . . It developed a support base for them as parents because the parents exchanged phone numbers. When one needed to talk to someone else about something, they could call; and they helped each other out. Some parents provide babysitting for each other. (4)

Although other teachers observed that behavior issues were frequently a priority for parents, especially those with the younger children, they did not report providing parent an opportunity to network with other parents to discuss mutual concerns. The teachers were primarily interested in having the parents observe in the classroom to gain knowledge and increase their awareness of the child's learning needs. Overall, the teachers indicated that additional knowledge about the child's delays would result in increased parent commitment to work on skill development. A second incentive for teachers was parents' assistance of parents with various program activities such as parties, field trips, and field days.

In addition to wanting a commitment from the parent to assist with student goals and objectives, the teachers also wanted the parents to acknowledge and appreciate their efforts on behalf of the child. As they recalled instances when the

parents made positive comments, the teachers expressed pride in their ability to relate to the particular parent. Thus the teachers interpreted parents' expressions of interest and appreciation for the program, visits to the classroom, and support for child-level skills as an important indicator that parents were concerned for the child. As reported later, these interpretations of the expressions of concern entered into the teacher's explanation of the differences in parent involvement levels. The teacher's belief about the level of parent concern also influenced their behavior toward the parents.

Based on the teacher's general descriptions of parent involvement activities available at the center, it appeared that they were evaluating participation or involvement in relation to the support they received in carrying out the child's educational program. They valued parents knowing more about child development and skill and believed that this awareness would result in the them becoming more involved. They also expected the parents to show appreciation for their efforts. One teacher reported positive outcome from a parent meeting indicating that she recognized the parent's need for and benefit from mutual support.

Home Visits

The teachers described their bi-monthly visits into the home in detail. These visits, which were required by the program administration, were held Monday through Thursday afternoons from approximately 2:00 to 3:30. This is after the children arrived back at home from participating in the half-day program. The teachers reported a common problem with the children napping during the early afternoon when the home visits were occurring. Teachers generally reported "making the best" of these circumstances saying that they always tried to redirect the visit, taking advantage of the time to talk with the parent about child-level issues. The teachers much preferred having the child available for an instructional lesson. Most teachers stated that their main purpose in conducting a home visit was to work with the child and to keep the parent informed so that they would work with the child. Most teachers inferred that time they spent with the parent was a compromise to working directly with the child, because they saw their main role as working with the child.

Summaries of individual teacher descriptions of the home visits, their focus and format along comments regarding their effectiveness are presented in Table 2. As these descriptions indicate, all teachers except one (6) described their home visit focus as being to work on activities directly related to program objectives. A second teacher (1) reported planning

Table 2

GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS OF HOME VISITS

	Focus	Value of Activity	Satisfaction With Efforts
1	Goals & objectives from classroom Build around activities Ps enjoy; necessary to get them motivated	P Seem to appreciate emotional support P part of program 50%	"That's worked beautifully"
2	Keep Ps informed about what's happening in school Try to have activity w/C Try to include parent	Yes, in working situation If disinterested question usefulness of home visits	I think I do pretty well I get a lot of good response
3	Share program goals spend time talking to Ps Use activities that are fun Have parent try activity	Real important in preschool Kids do more for their Ms than they do for me It's easier to work with C at home because it's quiet	I have just about half and half I don't feel uncomfortable any more I would like to spend more time getting materials for P
4	Solicits info from P on what do for them that goes along with goals Alternate activities from school	M helped T to feel relaxed in working with C with visual impairment	Could have been better than it was this year
5	Show them how we're working on things in the classroom. How can work at home Target 3-7 objectives Demonstrate strategies	If one really wants to be involved in the home visits work the best Make for better trust or honesty between P can give a lot of insight into where kid is coming from	Expressed that Ps relied on her a lot She allowed P to get too familiar, feels that she let them take advantage of her
6	Whatever their need is at home is what I teach to Set up conditions so that P addresses areas that are problematic	If the P feels that they can made a difference believe in themselves and in their child	I'm generally successful My most negative Ps have a positive attitude about what's happened this year
7	Emphasize behavior In most cases related to What's going on with child at school Ps & I sit and talk concerning child	Teach the Ps to deal with behavior It's difficult when dealing with P on their turf	Put in a lot of overtime Overall gone a long way
8	Informing P of child's progress Teach signs to Ps and siblings Sitting down & doing activity in most cases not applicable	Therapeutic for M, but turns into gab session	T expressed frustration about competing roles with center program then "run to home and do visits"
9	Objectives from IEP, but different activity Ask what do you want to see me do what I come on home visit	Completing activity encouraging for too	I'm very successful Sometimes home visits are a losing battle
10	Related to objectives and goals from IEP Take material and leave for practice	I try hard to show them that it's important that they do some of the things at home	Think we spend enough time in home I really try to encourage them

activities that parents enjoyed when necessary to get them involved. Impressions from the interview accounts about the nature of the activities were confirmed by teacher logs in which they maintained visit-by-visit accounts of teaching objectives and child progress information shared with parents.

As the teachers recounted the details of the home visits during the interview, indications of emotional support to some parents became apparent. However, most teachers did not describe instances of support to parents as related to the child or program goals. Rather, their accounts of support seemed incidental to the main objectives of the visit or were described in the context of a personal friendship with the parent. While teachers were more comfortable with family support issues than others, overall the time they spent attending to family level issues was not viewed by teachers as a part of their primary role. Additional discussion of the teacher's role in supporting parents is presented in a subsequent section.

Teachers articulated well-defined beliefs regarding the function of home visits, "Well, to me it's a way of keeping parents informed of what's happening in school . . . try to include them in what I'm doing and explain as I am going along" (2). Comments like the one above provide a good example of teachers' concern with child-level issues during the home visit. As with teacher expectations about parent

involvement with the center-based activities, they valued assistance from the parents with various child-level activities during the home visit. One teacher described her efforts to instruct parents on follow-through between home visits:

Then on a home visit what I typically do is, take a lot of materials that we use here . . . to show them how we're working on the things in the classroom. But a lot of the homes don't even have so much as scissors or crayons, and I try to show them how they can work on these things with what they have at home. . . . Assuming the child is awake, I'll show how I work on it with the child and try to tell them, "now you can work on it like this at home, maybe you don't have blocks but you could use [other stacking materials]." (5)

When asked about the value and results of the home visits, the teachers (see Table 2) indicated that they were an important part of the program. Teachers generally felt that the home visits were successful if the parents "want to be involved" and the environment was free of interruptions and confusion. Thus the success of the home visit was believed to be contingent on how responsive parents were to the teacher directed activities. While the general descriptions indicated that teachers were relatively satisfied with home visits, the accounts of their attempts to conduct them with the least involved families provided a sharp contrast.

Although teachers expected parents to practice activities and reinforce the skills presented during the home visit, they were not satisfied with the level of commitment parents made

to carrying out child's objectives. These doubts about parent commitment provided insight into the teachers attitudes and beliefs about parents. Their willingness to sustain interaction with some families or to continue their modeling seemed to be influenced by the teacher's belief about the degree to which the family was complying with teacher directives rather than a jointly planned endeavor. Similarly the teachers appeared to rate the parents who did not provide positive statements about their work with the child as least involved. Because the amount of parental feedback seemed to influence the teacher's behavior, the teacher's conceptualization of her role with parents was examined to learn more about the expectations teachers had of parents.

Teachers' Role with Parents

Although teachers concentrated their comments on child related issues, they also provided information about their support to parents. When specifically asked to talk about their roles with the parents, many teachers gave illustrations of their willingness to work with parents. A review of the information in Table 3 indicates that teachers varied in their role perceptions. Few activities of family support were reported by the teachers who did not perceive their role as including a the family unit. Other teachers expressed a willingness to listen or to encourage the parent.

Table 3
Teacher's Description of Roles with Parents

Statements about Parent Needs/Strengths	Belief about Role	Examples of Approaches	Examples of Support Given
1 Need for positive comments To deal with blame Ps who come across as knowing everything lack self-esteem Still learning to deal with adjustment to having a handicapped child, aren't interested in support groups P must be ready for information	Provides support, accounts sensitivity to former role Feel inadequate--I can't say I understand, because I don't Responsibility to teach Ps how to interact with child	"They do listen to what I say" Solicit family's "help" as strategy for getting involvement even though child can actually perform task Empathetically listen and let know I care. Use humor to build trust between them and myself	Provides respite care for Ms when they need relief Find resource materials esp. sign language Emotional support when F at sea
2 Doesn't matter whether or not family has diagnosis	Doesn't become emotionally involved Sometimes hear about problems during HIV--try to maintain neutral attitude and get back to real reason for visit	"I'm a good listener, don't have that problem of them wanting to talk that much" Would like to see full-day program for children with Ps here at school	
3 "Some Ps don't care for us to go into home. Don't need me to teach them anything but they like me coming out" Some completely deny; others accepting Ps not competent to work with child	Although Ps are not very "nice"--I'm on their side . . . Could never tell them Used to be a lot harder Ps who don't come to school I don't know, others It's like they're friends of mine	Tell Ps to read notebook daily Expect them to respond Uses modeling to teach Ps Try to be sympathetic in difficult situations	Spends time finding activities and toys Give information about handicaps Answer questions about other children Not usually emotional things about the child's handicap, they tell me their problems a lot
4 Need help in parenting Ps aren't like they used to be Teenage Ps have unique needs Some Ps' occupation with personal problems prevent focus on child needs.	Provide emotional support part of job We have to do P education teaching their job Teaching Ps how to take care of Have to have excellent communication skills There are some situations that can't be worked with	Informal instruction Encouraged M--let her know she will be okay . . . Learned along with P You have to get personal with P enough to care They need listening ear Tell them how to handle child	Gave list of references Issues related to child Provides clothing for child and money to pay for special outings Doesn't bring up personal problems Ps reciprocated during a difficult period for T
5	Not comfortable with situation where Ps regarded her as friend	Demonstrate how to work on readiness skills to make them interesting	Provides money for outing

Table 3 (Continued)
Teacher's Description of Roles with Parents

Statements about Parent Needs/Strengths	Belief about Role	Examples of Approaches	Examples of Support Given
6 Need help with behavior--setting expectations	Emotional support is a factor in promoting P participation Teach to be better P Helping P to see child as human being although child cannot do many things	We're doing it together Working with P on toilet training and learning sign language Train P in use of stories to stimulate language	Work with P on what they want Give a lot of emotional support
7 P express that they can't deal with watching child struggle Family has hard time asking for help Dealing with child's behavior Ps have lives in addition to their role with child Important for them to have a time to feel like is their time	You teach the P to deal with behavior while they are young Have to be blunt about child's problems	Used outing with M as occasions to promote language in child provided a good model Set up opportunity for P to observe child. When P can't deal with direct approach backs off and take things slower	Work with teenage M to promote independence Provides respite for Ms Makes arrangements to use resources in community--set up and then turns over to P
8 P have a lot of guilt that results in them giving in to child	Role is guiding P to get little bit past giving into child Set up some expectations for increasing their development	Tell P what T want child to work on Explained to M about importance of wearing hearing aids	Went through lot of work getting hearing aid
9 P wait on T to follow through Wait for you to initiate Constantly ask for emotional support	I feel that I'm not the Ps trainer, I'm there for child	Most of time I try to get back on track with what in doing with child	Give a source, phone number agency name
10 Other priorities keep them from working with child They want me to give advice Have difficulty with behavior Don't know how to work with their child. Don't see need to teach skills P are questioning each other	Not comfortable with giving advice Responsible to teach P to work with child To establish a positive attitude on their part To give encouragement	Takes indirect approach on questions that relate to information on securing resources	

A more complete description of how each teacher functions with families is available from the four categories as outlined in Table 3: (a) statements about parent needs and strengths, (b) belief about role, (c) approaches used with parents, and (d) examples of support. When these areas are examined for a more holistic picture, they help to interpret how the teachers' beliefs interact with the actual support they provide the families. Likewise, their attitudes about families appear to be influenced by how they view their role. Regardless of teachers' view of their role, their approaches with parents were mostly directive and didactic. For example, one teacher said that she was very empathetic and understanding of what parents had to deal with, but inconsistencies developed when she stated how important it was to get "the parents to listen to what she says" (1). These inconsistencies indicated the absence of a well-integrated approach to working with families.

One teacher who reported basing parent education activities during home visits on family requests, did present a sensitive approach with parents. She stated her commitment to work with the parent:

I feel like one [role] doesn't drop off and the other pick up, they're one and the same. I'm teaching the parent how to be a better parent . . . I have to do the same things, like potty training. Some people would say that's the parent's job; no, I'm teaching the parent how to potty train this child, I have to be a potty trainer too, because I have to find out what's most effective here in my

classroom, so I can teach the parent what works for home. (6)

Teacher Roles with Children

Teacher comments regarding their roles in working with the child gave additional meaning to how teachers perceived their roles when working with the parents. Teachers in this program begin working with most of the children as early as age two and continue working with them until they transition into school-age programs at age five. With the exception of one child who was separated from her twin sister at the beginning of the current year, the children from the participating families had had the same teacher since their entry into the program.

The role of the caregiver is known to have significant impact on the emotional, communicative and cognitive development of the young child (Bromwich, 1981). So it is reasonable that teachers working with the young child plays a variety of nontraditional roles. The teachers offered a variety of explanations as they described different roles that went beyond the traditional teacher role. One teacher who said that she had difficulty putting it into words said:

I feel like more than a teacher because there's just so much involved. I've had parents say to me "I'm just amazed. You toilet train the kids, you teach them how to eat, how to dress, then you turn around and you teach them how to write, how to read, my goodness." This particular program, to me, provides more than just a "teacher" teacher . . . because of

the types of students we have, the population, the age and the needs. (7)

Three teachers referred to their major role as "mothering," especially with the younger children. One teacher described the relationship as follows:

You're a mother figure to them especially when they're hurt or sick, not replacing their mother, but when their mamma isn't there and they're that little, I think you're their security. I don't think children that little know what a teacher is. . . . These are babies here. They need a lot of love. (1)

This teacher emphasized the importance of developing a positive self-concept in the children in the program since many of them had experienced failure as a result of their delays:

If they're just language delayed. Their brains are developing normally and there are no words coming out. They're starting to say I'm dumb and I'm stupid. I tell them a hundred thousand times a day . . . letting them know how truly wonderful they are, because sometimes they don't know. (1)

Teachers pointed out that children develop better socialization skills in a center-based setting. Also the teachers reported that the children were more independent as a result of being in the group setting. This was believed to help with the transition to school age programs. Teachers generally concurred that the child being in a center-based program helped parents to overcome being overprotective or have too high expectations of the child. Two teachers

commented on their ability to be more firm and less involved with the child than the parent was:

Children react differently to a teacher than to a parent. I think I can be less sympathetic, less involved, and it's not my own child. I think you can be a little bit firmer, be a little bit more stern with a child that's not your own. (8)

I don't get emotionally involved to a great extent. I never have had that problem. I worry about them and think about them a lot, but I don't get an emotional attachment to them. (2)

Teachers responded to a follow-up question about distinctions between their roles and the parents' role. In the main teachers expressed a strong commitment to having the children make progress. With the exception of the two teachers quoted previously, descriptions suggested that teachers became emotionally attached to the children and felt major responsibility for the child's development. As illustrated by the comment made by one teacher, some felt that there are instances when they needed to compensate for a lack of parental commitment:

I think parents have already decided in most instances that "teacher's going to teach my child and I'm just going to love it [the child]." Here, we do both. When I receive the kids in September, the first thing I'm thinking is, "while I'm going to love him, there's certain things I want him to accomplish." I don't think parents are that serious in most instances, I guess they feel there's plenty of time for that, . . . [the parent thinks] "but you do all you [the teacher] can as far as teaching him, then when he comes back, I'll just love him and let you teach them for tomorrow." (10)

Another teacher reported focusing her efforts on developing more independent behaviors in the child as a strategy to overcome some of the overprotectiveness practiced by parents:

My biggest thing is independence for the child. A lot of times the parents say "they can't dress themselves" or "they can't put on their jacket," and I say "they're doing it at school" Sometimes I have to show--let them go through it but I try to foster independence and a lot of time the parents will do for the child. When they come to school, they see the child and they say "they're not doing this at home." (9)

Numerous examples of their sensitivity and commitment to emotional security of their students were given by teachers. A final example serves to illustrate the high level of caring and concern the teachers had for the children:

If I have a child who needs to be picked up or held or rocked at this age, then I think at this age it should be done. Now I'm all for teaching the four year old how to walk in a line because they're going to exit next year to a new program or maybe to raise their hand, but not a two year old. (1)

In summary, the statements made by the teachers provide many examples of their efforts to enlist parents to participate in the child's educational program. They also described attempts to involve parents in the development of child-level skills. These child-focused objectives, primarily skills-based, were designed to promote developmental progress. The teacher expected parents to assist them in carrying out the child-level objectives as a result of observing how they work with the child. Visits to the program were also

encouraged so that parents could become more knowledgeable of the skills and activities being worked on in the program. Home visits were also valued as an opportunity to teach the parent how to work with the child and to enlist the parents to practice the child-level skills. Teachers regarded positive feedback from the parents as an indication that parents were concerned about the child's education. This positive reinforcement from parents was highly valued by teachers and appeared to influence the relationship with the family.

Although some teachers reported varying activities from family to family, there was less evidence that the teachers were actively facilitating parent roles, i.e. using knowledge of a family's needs to guide practice. The general interest in having the parents at the program site was directed toward helping them realize the importance of teaching the child and in instructing the parent on strategies for working with the child. Thus the teachers spent time and energy soliciting help from parents to implement teacher developed prescriptions outlined on the Individual Education Plan. When parents responded to teacher expectations they were frequently described as being interested and concerned. When the coaching with parents did not result in the parent following up on child-level activities, teachers attributed the

noninvolvement to the family's lack of competence or lack of interest.

The next section of this study includes an analysis of the degree to which the teachers were facilitating parent roles with the two families they identified as being least and most involved.

Teacher Descriptions of Least and Most Involved Parents

Contrasts to teacher perception of parent involvement in the participant families are examined in this section of the report. As indicated in the interview guide in Appendix A, a significant portion of each teacher interview was used to solicit accounts of their activities with the families designated as least and most involved. The descriptions developed during the interview provided information about involvement activities with the two parent groups. During the initial stages, analysis of all interview data were considered important in the search to understand the concept of parent involvement. A procedure suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984) was used to reduce the data and to construct categories. With the categorization of the data, several themes emerged within the two parent groups which facilitated the discovery of connections and relationships.

Since the rationale for parent involvement practice is to promote active and knowledgeable parents, a study of the

teacher's perceptions of the most and least involved parents was chosen to help explain differences in the outcome of activities employed to involve them. Likewise, a discussion of the changes the teachers perceived in involvement levels and their explanations for minimal and high involvement provided additional understandings of the parent involvement process.

At the time interviews were conducted, teachers had worked with both family groups for at least one school year and in some instances, as many as three years, suggesting that the teacher had adequate time to build strong relationships with the parent. The number of years specific children were enrolled in the program is contained in Table 1 (See Research Design and Methodology Section).

A number of themes or involvement categories evolved from the data. The following themes were used to examine particular assumptions, attitudes and beliefs held by the teachers:

- (1) The curiosity and awareness that parents showed relative to the child's condition or progress,
- (2) The daily communication patterns between the teacher and parents,
- (3) The perceived contribution of parents during educational planning and review,

- (4) The degree to which parents complied with the expectations surrounding the home visits, and
- (5) Parent interest and participation in center activities.

As observed earlier in the findings, communication patterns between the parents and teachers were used by the teacher to gauge the concern or interest level of parents' involvement in the child's educational program. The teachers' beliefs about parent concern appeared to directly influence teacher involvement practices. The interpretations that the teachers made regarding the responsiveness of the least and most involved parents were examined to gain additional understanding of the involvement process. The influence of the parent-teacher relationship on the teacher's assessment of attempts to involve parents became a major area of interest during the study. The contrast between teacher interaction with and behavior toward the two families created an avenue for addressing the differences in the teachers' views.

Parent Curiosity and Awareness of Child's Condition and Progress

Teachers reported that highly involved parents were curious about their child's condition in that they asked questions and offered information about their child's developmental delays and about the skills the child was mastering. Teachers said that some of these families expected

them to share information on a regular basis. One teacher said, "When he first started the program, you had to send a note home every day" (8). Statements illustrative of the families who exhibited high levels of curiosity about the child's condition were:

Her father is in the Navy so he comes and goes, but she's [mother] very, very, very, much involved in what's wrong with C, and getting the full story from every doctor they go to see, and reading things, bought a sign language book and is learning the signs. . . . She'll ask about functioning levels, but she's not asking in terms of test results she's just asking me what's my opinion. (2)

They've had many questions. Wanting to know, "Is he ever going to make it into a regular classroom? How long do you think that will take? What do we need to do right now to make sure that someday he goes on into regular education?" (6)

In another family where the grandparents had major caregiving responsibilities for the child, the teacher observed, "They saw him show some growth, then it was like, 'Oh we're interested, and what will be the next step, will he do this, will he do that'" (9). On a somewhat different note, another teacher commented that a highly involved parent, "never really has any questions for me." The teacher continued saying, "At IEP meetings she has a lot to contribute, but she'll say 'I don't really remember what comes next'" (3).

The teachers indicated an absence of questioning behavior with the least involved parent. A common response from the teachers when asked if the parents had questions was "not

really" or "no, never." One teacher said, "usually they would kind of wait for me to initiate something and then they would go from there. They didn't do a lot of the talking" (6). Another typical response from teachers regarding the amount of curiosity of the least involved parents was, "I've had very little contact with her. She doesn't have a telephone and it's one of those situations where we don't get together for visits very often" (2). When asked whether or not a particular mother took an interest in the activities a teacher was carrying out during the home visit, the teacher responded, "Passive interest. No questions. She's not the kind that would ask any questions [or] volunteer any information. She's young, real young . . . I think she must be about 21 now, she has another little one who's about 9 months now" (5).

One mother identified as having very little involvement expressed concern that her child had to be given a handicapped label before he could participate in the program. The teacher reported that she, "eased her mind, explained that he's come a long way" (4). Given the context of the teacher's comments, it appeared that the teacher was unwilling to address the issue of labels. She did not use a natural opportunity to respond to the parent's right to have information about eligibility requirements or to develop more understanding of the child's label. The teacher's failure to address the parent's concern resulted in a lost opportunity to provide

instruction to the parent on the relationship of the child's characteristics and the implications for intervention. Instances where the teacher was not straightforward with the least involved parent indicated a lack of skill to work with these parents.

In summary, the teachers valued the questions families asked about the child's condition as well as the amount of curiosity they showed in the child's development. These two areas functioned as an important influence in the overall interaction between the teachers and parents. Teachers regarded parents' curiosity as an indication that the parent was concerned about the child. Furthermore, these beliefs that teachers held about parents' expression of interest were a confirmation that parents were supporting their efforts with the child. The expression of interest in turn influenced the amount of energy the teacher extended to them.

When attempting to compromise the two extremes of involvement, one teacher's comment that the most knowledgeable and involved parents "did not need them" provided additional insight into how they viewed their roles as well as the importance they placed on responding to family needs. These expressions provided more validity to the notion that most teachers saw their roles as being primarily responsible to the child's needs and did not view them as being intricately related to family needs.

Routine Interaction Between Teacher and Parent

By examining the day-to-day communication patterns between the teacher and the parent another dimension of teacher-parent interaction was available. The teachers reported using an individual child notebook with parents as a systematic way of sharing information. Likewise, the telephone was used routinely to share information about the child. In particular, teachers reported regular telephone contact with parents designated as actively involved. One example of this strategy was frequent phone calls from the parent of one child who is on medication for seizures. The teacher thought that the mother also used the conversations to obtain feedback on recent child accomplishments:

Sometimes she'll say, "Has he done anything exciting for you lately?" She wants to hear good news about things we were going to work on. . . . I always try to have something positive to say. She's always called me at night. I've called her on occasion, because the bag with his papers and things go to the grandmother when he leaves here. . . . Mom has said that she doesn't get notices about things going on at a specific day and time. (10)

This example was characteristic of the teachers' overall willingness to maintain regular contact with their families when the parent shared the responsibility for initiating and maintaining contact. A feeling of trust appeared to exist between the teachers and the most involved parents as illustrated by the remark, "If there's a problem, she'll give

me a call and want to know how to handle it. We never used a notebook a lot with her" (6). One teacher commented on her highly involved family, who initiated a referral for services, "at the beginning they really demanded a lot of stroking, the phone calls, the communication notebook. She was one parent that wanted to see me every two weeks" (8). Another teacher indicated that she coached the mother in advocacy skills:

She was one of the parents that I was most concerned with, and she's really willing to work . . . I told her that if she feels that she doesn't agree, she has a right to call the principal or my supervisor and talk to them about it and let them know how she feels about it, because "you have rights as a parent . . . you are your child's advocate." (4)

The spirit of openness created by an atmosphere of trust and common goal was observed between the teachers and parents identified as highly involved. One teacher reflected on this openness:

I want them to be honest with me and to be just able to say "when you need help, please ask." I don't like to see anyone struggle; especially when you have a kid who's as neat as this one and as bright as this one. This child is going places. (7)

Another incident reported with a highly involved parent pointed to the mutual trust between teacher and parent. The teacher reported the mother became very angry concerning a recommendation that the child remain in special education during his kindergarten year. The teacher reported approaching the parent about her anger and assisted the parent in working through her feelings concerning the need for

continued services. The positive history between the highly involved parent and teacher had created a trusting relationship that allowed them to work through the conflicts related to parental acceptance of transitions. This example represents a marked contrast from the teacher who was uncomfortable explaining labeling to a parent.

A review of teacher logs confirmed initial impressions that the number of documented contacts with the most involved parents was greater than those with least involved parents. Likewise, the extent to which teachers were willing to extend themselves to the highly involved parents was qualitatively different. One teacher provided a concrete illustration of the difference in interactions with parents. She reported making a video recording for the highly involved parent so that older brothers could see what their brother/sister does at school, but offered no evidence that she made similar efforts with her least involved parent.

When the researcher was in the homes conducting the parent interviews, she observed many situations where the sharing of a video recording could have been extremely effective with the low involved family. Most families had video units creating a viable alternative for the teachers to share program information during home visits with parents who could not attend the program activities or go to school to observe child behaviors.

One teacher's statement about her least involved parent, "If she has a question about something, she'll write me a note; and I'll respond by a note. We don't communicate too much on the telephone, but when we do talk it's worth it" (4) show a willingness to work with the parent. This teacher persisted in her efforts to involve the parent and continued to invite the parent to participate despite the parent's poor record of involvement. The teacher gave the mother encouragement concerning the child's behavior and reported spending time explaining the basis of behavior, especially as it relates to the child-parent interaction.

However, indications of trust in the parents' motives were mostly confined to descriptions about the most involved parents. The majority of comments about least involved parents indicated that the teachers had low expectations of these families. As one teacher expressed, "It's very seldom that she wants me to know anything. I had a notebook and I would write in it, but if I write anything in it, it never gets read." (6). As another teacher described her interactions with a low involved parent she said, "She sends notes only if there's something she needs, not in terms of information, but just in response to something I've asked. I'm a bit surprised that she does as well at that as she does. But she doesn't initiate anything" (2).

Thus the communication patterns and the extension of interaction to promote and strengthen the involvement process revealed a wide discrepancy in the day-to-day interaction between the most involved and least involved parents. The interactive behavior of most involved parents appeared to produce a positive feedback loop which had a positive influence on the teacher's behavior and attitude. These parents frequently sought information and engaged in interaction which the teacher interpreted as parent interest and concern. This regular contact characterized by a strong positive interaction style promoted shared responsibility between parent and professional. By contrast, the least involved parents primarily reacted to communication initiated by the teacher, failing to provide the positive feedback needed to reinforce the teacher to continue attempts to form positive linkages with the families.

Parent Cooperation During Educational Planning

Since services to the preschool handicapped child are mandated in Virginia, all of the legal provisions of due process are required in the planning process. Rules and regulations of the Virginia Department of Education (1987) and the Education for the Handicapped Act of 1975 and the 1986 Amendments govern the delivery of services to handicapped children. These regulations specify that the parent has a

right to input into the development of the individual education plan (IEP). The parent must be afforded the opportunity to take part in a planning meeting on behalf of the child at a time and place that is mutually agreeable to the school and the parent. Looking at the nature of the interaction between the parents and the teacher as they engage in these activities calculated to create input was a very practical way to assess how the involvement process was realized within the program being studied.

In order to address this issue, inquiry was made into the type of input or contribution parents gave during the formulation of the individual education plan (IEP). Teachers reported that there were large variations in the amount of parent input for the two parent groups. A content analysis of the teachers' depictions failed to show significant differences in contributions of the two parent groups to the plans. In actuality what teachers were reporting was the amount of cooperation they believed they received from parents when they were formulating student goals. Although, teachers reported variability in the input between the two groups, their belief about the amount of input was more of a feature of how the parent was perceived than the actual contributions. Teacher perceptions that most of the involved parents contributed significantly more than the least involved was not substantiated.

At least one teacher had the awareness that a parent's ability to have input as a learned process. She said, "The first IEP is real hard for parents because they don't know the teacher. Once they get to know you they warm up and are able to ask you questions and give input" (6). This teacher reported that both groups of parents provided limited input at the first IEP. Her strategy for increasing parent contributions was the use of parent suggestions for planning home visit activities.

Based on an assessment of the interaction patterns between teachers and the most involved parents, trust levels were conducive to the development of a parent/professional partnership. However, insufficient evidence surfaced to indicate that teachers were successfully operating within partnership relationships. One teacher articulated that it was a common belief among parents that the teacher knows best, "It's still like the teacher knows, and everybody else that works with C knows more than I [the parent] know" (9). However, this teacher gave no indication that she realized that her behavior might be perpetuating that belief. In fact, most teachers appeared to accept the common assumption that "I am the professional, I am trained and I am the expert."

The teachers thought that the most involved parents gave valuable input into the planning process. One teacher reported receiving excellent cooperation from her highly

involved parent, but felt responsible for telling the parent what to do:

With C's mom, we have IEP meetings, she has what she wants us to work on listed. . . . things that we inform her, "Well, this is how you should handle this at home." It's good because she's actually taken the time and thought about C. She observes her at home . . . in fact mom and I have a language list; and as C has been using the words . . . she's been circling them. (4)

The same teacher expressed frustration and dissatisfaction when attempting to work with her least involved parent. She placed importance on having the parent identify academic areas for developing skills, but failed to recognize the behavior issues the parent was dealing with:

She's shown up for every IEP. . . . She would tell me things C is doing with her at home and basic behavior, and I would give her suggestions on how to handle it. . . . She was mostly concerned with behavior . . . whatever I wrote down on the IEP, she was happy about. I asked her for input each time. After about three objectives I discussed with her, she didn't have any. She was questioning more and speaking more of what he does with her and how she's handling it. (4)

This teacher lacked sensitivity to the parent's need for help and failed to recognize that the parent's feelings of competence in parenting were influencing interactions with her.

A second teacher provided another contrast in the perception of input given by the two groups of parents. Commenting on a child who exhibited behavior problems

associated with attention deficit disorders, she made the following statement about a highly involved mother:

She was always was very active in developing his IEP with me, very attuned to anything she could put her hands on, the IEP, the end-of-the-year report, updating the IEP; anything she could touch because C's a baffling child. (1)

One parent considered least involved expressed interest in two developmental areas, yet the teacher reported that the mother and grandmother have failed to give input. She said, "They didn't make it [to the IEP meeting]; they elected not to come. No [input into goals], besides the global potty training and talking" (1). The teacher did not use these two skills to extend the parent's understanding that the self-help and language delays were a feature of child characteristics.

A third teacher provided an example of how much she valued having her highly involved parent available. Her comments suggested that she could always count on the parent to attend meetings:

She sure did. She came here. C receives occupational therapy, physical therapy, itinerant vision services, a lot of related services, so our IEP meetings consisted of a lot of different people, and Mom was here always . . . all I had to say is when it will be, "are you available" and if not we'd rearrange something, but she was always here . . . I tease her all the time "where did you get that head on your shoulders." She will let you know. (7)

More is implied by the above description than a matter of setting up an appointment to plan an IEP. The positive working relationship between this teacher and the parent

created an atmosphere conducive to share responsibility for the child's program.

This account presented a sharp contrast in the way a meeting was handled with one minimally involved family when the feeling of shared responsibility did not exist:

She'd had her three contacts . . . and we had to go ahead and try to implement. . . . Once you sign the eligibility form . . . these IEPs are due the 5th. . . . Only have two weeks to work on them . . . during the course of the school year you kind of juggle . . . something that has a deadline you have an either/or. (9)

This teacher's behavior was very different when her motivation was to meet the legal requirements to document three attempts to secure parent participation in the educational planning.

Additional descriptions of the teachers' interactions with parents during the required IEP process highlights some rather frustrating, nonproductive episodes where teachers felt forced to carry out the requirement to plan with the minimally involved parent:

We went into the kitchen, I thought that would get her away from the TV, and I've asked her to turn the TV down before. I've just never asked her to turn it off, I guess I should. But I'd go into the kitchen and she kept looking over my head to see what she was watching. She didn't have any input. If I'd ask her about a goal we had thought of and she'd say, "Yeah, okay." A few things she would say, "Oh, she can already do that," which was helpful and that was maybe a little input, but she didn't give a whole lot. (3)

Thus indications of the low expectations and lack of confidence in the least involved parents were common among the

teachers. One teacher expressed surprise when a particular parent followed through on requests or responded to an invitation to participate:

I sent home the necessary documentation or letters informing her of when the meeting was and the time. This is a period when there was no phone so I was heavily relying on paperwork, no, she showed up an hour late, and she didn't utter one word until the end, and she said, "where do I sign?" But I was impressed that she showed up. (7)

Another description of efforts with a minimally involved teenage parent and the maternal grandmother, who share caregiving responsibilities, reflected teacher frustration when the mother failed to give input:

No, when we did the IEP in the fall, that's when I was having contact with the mom, who, as I said, is a very young mom. Even though I'd begged and pulled teeth and tried to get input from her she just had nothing to offer me. . . . The only time they've come . . . we just had his IEP meeting and Grandma came to the meeting. . . . We were getting some general ideas from her over how does she feel that he's progressed over the school year and she was real pleased because he is doing so much and he's made so much progress over the school year. (5)

The teachers' general lack of confidence in the parents' ability impacted the credibility of parent information. One teacher questioned the accuracy of information which least and most involved parents gave about skill levels observed at home. The teacher reported that she later saw the child of the highly involved parent perform skills in the home. Because she did not see the other child perform the skills,

she maintained that the minimally involved parent had incorrectly reported skill levels.

Although it was more exaggerated among the low involved families, teachers generally doubted that the parent could report information accurately or manage the child's learning at home. The belief that parents had to be told what to do is contradictory to the mutual decision making process between the parent and the teacher and curtails the ability to establish a partnership. Another teacher who failed to recognize that a child may respond differently from one environment to another said the parents were reporting the mastery of the skills incorrectly. This teacher did not value information given by the grandmother during the IEP conference. She said, "It's wonderful that he does that at home, but we'd like to see him generalize it over to the school setting" (5). This example illustrates a failure to acknowledge parent reports and results in missed opportunities to support the parent and help them develop confidence in their ability to have input into the planning.

Evidence from the teachers' comments shows that encounters with the least involved parents might have reinforced existing negative beliefs and attitudes about parents' inability to direct the learning experiences. Teacher comments regarding the parents' role in planning supported many observations from the field that the process

is heavily controlled by professionals. Overall the teachers valued the parents' faithful attendance at the meeting and their cooperation with the teacher. This observation is consistent with Brinkerhoff and Vincent's (1986) report that parents show passive participation in program activities.

Historically, efforts of educators have focused on child outcomes. The structure and implementation of the IEP across the last decade has reinforced the child-focus in special education. The current legal requirements for participation can easily become ends in themselves when schools are faced with deadlines and parents do not know how to provide input or do not have fundamental knowledge about development sequences. With minimal expectations of parental input, the professionals proceed to make a plan. One teacher's description provides a good example of this status-quo practice within the program under study:

The IEP committee came up with a lot of suggestions for her and they told her what they plan to do next year and I think they made it clear and asked her if she had any questions and she seemed very satisfied with what they planned to do. (10)

One teacher reported active involvement of one family who participated in a four hour IEP meeting. This family who sought out services for their hyperactive child provides an example of a parent who knows how to actively participate in the planning process.

A final example illustrates the high degree of teacher control with a very minimally involved parent. The teacher identified areas she felt needed attention during a planning meeting in the home. According to the teacher the mother cooperated by working on activities, once an area was identified:

I sat down with her and I explained all the pages [results of testing information] and what was on each area. I told her that one of the areas I really wanted him to work on was dressing and undressing. I found that he really waited for me to do pretty much for him and so made the assumption that Mom was still dressing him at home, and she did work on that. (8)

The researcher had to persist in obtaining an interview with this particular parent. During the interview the mismatch between what the teacher wanted to have happen and what actually occurred became obvious. The parent expressed that she saw no need for the teacher to conduct visit after visit to report what she was working on with the child. This parent showed no ownership in the teacher's plan and she did not feel she had a part to play in the program. She sent her child to school to be taught by the teacher. Coming to understand why this parent perceived her role as she did goes well beyond the issue of teacher control of activities.

Given the high level of trust that many parents expressed in the teacher, conditions could have supported a partnership relationship during the planning process. In reality, the highly involved families were cooperating with the teacher

recommended activities more frequently than they were being urged to contribute to the goals. Although these parents had little control over the teacher directed activities, they persisted in their contacts and interactions with the program. The question of why teacher controlled intervention activities resulted in parent involvement with some families and not others is partially explained by the fact that these parents believed that they had a role in the educational process and sought opportunities to support the teacher in carrying out the program. Thus it is possible that parent role perception was influencing their behavior. This factor is discussed in the parent findings section of the report.

Descriptions of Home Visits

Activities associated with home visits in the two parent groups produced additional understanding about the involvement process. The teacher's recognition of parent concerns and the focus during the sessions helped to gain additional insight into the way they regarded the activity. The quality of the parent-teacher relationship was most pronounced during the visits.

Three teachers reported they had very productive visits with the most involved parents. Their descriptions of the frequency and quality of the visits were very positive. One teacher commented, "Oh, yes, [she had the visit] if she had

to cancel for a doctor's appointment or something real important. When I described the typical home visit, I was thinking of her" (3). The other two teachers indicated that highly involved parents were helping make decisions about what they wanted to work on during the visit. In an effort to overcome differences in child behavior between home and school, one teacher planned her visits at a time when she could best respond to the needs of the parent:

Yes, and probably some of the best I've ever made. What mom and I did was sat down and decided that there were so many aspects we could cover . . . but I wanted to touch on problems that she was having with C at home, because I didn't seem to be having some of those same problems at school. I thought this was going to be very important to get him to generalize it. . . . About mid-year this school year [we] moved our home visits to her dinner time on my scheduled days, which means I showed up right in time for dinner, and helped her get through the feeding with him. (7)

However, productive home visits were not reported for all families designated as highly involved. There was a sharp contrast in the description of visits with other highly involved parents. One teacher compared the session to a "zoo when you go there . . . right in the middle it's, 'C stop, now where were we,' but yes she is real interested" (5). Another indicated, "I went to the home, and the home is chaotic. There are other young children in the home" (8). Two other families identified as highly involved had infrequent home visits during the last year. Teacher illness and child or

family illness were given as reasons for inconsistency with visits.

One teacher reported that one of the mothers frequently strayed off the subject making it difficult for her to accomplish what she had planned. In another situation the teacher did not carry out her typical home visits because of the mother's work schedule:

I've worked more with the mother than working with C. She was telling me she was trying to get a job at night. I've only had a couple times of working with him in her home because he goes straight to her mother's when he leaves school. (10)

The following excerpts indicate that efforts to conduct home visits were nonexistent with some of the least involved parents:

I think I've been to the home probably twice. . . . The few times I've been to the home he's [the child] been asleep on the couch. The last visit we did I was talking about discipline, and I said, "You know for a hearing impaired child, he just cannot hear; and if you tell him no, and don't do this and why, he just doesn't understand." There were lots of people running in and out, and I don't know who's staying there. (8)

I have never actually had a home visit with her; I've gone there and she wasn't there. [The teacher reported feeling], "Oh, no, I come all the way out here." I wrote her a letter and asked if she preferred that I send home activities with C to work on at home. She said, yes, she would do it. (9)

Accounts of distractions in the home environment were a part of most teacher descriptions of the least involved parent. The environment in these homes were described as

distracting to the point of making the visit unproductive, if they occurred at all:

Not great, the television would be on, there'd be several people in the room and she moved around so many times. She was in with her mother and all her brothers and sisters. . . . There'd be 10 or 12 people in a house at the time, real small apartment. It would be so dark in there that I couldn't even see. . . . She's more concerned about the soap operas so I'd just go in and do what I had to do and try and involve her mom as much as I could; and sometimes she would sit and be interested. If I specifically ask her to help or say, "ask your Mommy to help you," she would participate for a little while. I just never got the feeling that she was not that interested. There were too many other things going on. Home visits with her were the hardest, and a lot of times she would cancel. I didn't go on that many. (3)

This is one of my hardest visits that I've ever had. What I usually try to concentrate on is things that C is concentrating on in the classroom. I bring a lot of materials with me. At that particular time, I ask mom to sit down with us at the table and the three of us are going to work on this particular task or we do some turn-taking type things. But usually what happens is . . . she's looking right over my shoulder at the TV instead of listening to what I'm saying or listening to what we're doing so basically the interest is not there. And it's very difficult, you can't force anyone, especially when you're in their home, to be interested. . . . I would usually send a reminder note and then I'd show up and there'd no nobody there. (7)

Two teachers who became very frustrated in their efforts to make home visits with the minimally involved families reported that they reoriented their approach. One teacher said that she been conducting direct teaching sessions with the child in all homes until she realized that one mother's needs were important to consider.

I talked to her about . . . giving him therapy because of his problems with fine motor skills; we worked on tracing his name. I just couldn't find enough time to work with C. She'd wanted him off somewhere to talk to me, but mom was very happy to hear that C was making good progress. . . . Because Mom needed that attention, it was real hard for me to sit down and work with C without being interrupted by Mom. C was getting so much at school anyway, that I just kind of go according to the parent. (6)

Another teacher felt that the grandmother and mother really liked her coming. However, she thought the family regarded the visit as a time to socialize with her and in the meanwhile the child became totally out of control. With advice of some colleagues she revised the types of activities that she planned with the child to make them more appropriate to the setting:

I really started to hate going over there. It's still not one of my favorites. I'll be in the middle of a sentence, and somebody will walk in, and they're all just laughing. . . . In the middle of the home visit, they took a plate of food and put it down in front of C. . . . It wasn't dinner time, I couldn't figure it out; I was baffled. I felt like saying "Why are you feeding him?" Nothing I tried seemed to work. . . . So I started bringing Playdough, cookie cutters, cooking activities right to the home and saying, "Today we're going to do this" and showing them how I elicit speech in the classroom hoping that they will learn from my example. And that is the way I conduct those home visits and probably will next year. (1)

The teacher descriptions of home visits indicated considerable disparity between what the teachers expected of the parents and how they responded. As noted in the general discussion of home visits, teachers operated on some basic

assumptions that the focus of the visit was the child. The most involved parents were perceived as being accommodating and giving strong indications of wanting to participate or at least have the teacher work with their child. In contrast, the teachers did not view the least involved parents as being interested in or benefiting from the visits. Teachers' attempts to conduct visits, especially with the least involved parents, were not very satisfying or productive.

The frustrations expressed about attempts to make home visits with the least involved families were the largest area of complaint among the teachers. Not all teachers viewed home visits negatively, but they did express a need for alternatives to the home visits. Some teachers promoted giving the parents choices, others advanced the notion of having the parents come into the center for more events. The teachers felt pressure from the program administration to conduct home visits. Consequently, they had produced a complete record of their attempts to schedule visits. This record provided a method for checking the validity of interview data.

Participation in Center Activities

Another method suggested in the literature for involving parents is participation in program activities and parent meetings. Teachers reported that eight out of ten of the

highly involved parents regularly attended program functions. Parent participation in center-based activities revealed a different picture for the least involved parents. The data collected from the teachers show a marked contrast in the frequency of participation between the two parent groups. Parent interviews confirmed teacher reports. The volunteer and teacher logs also substantiated the participation patterns reported in the interviews.

The preschool special olympics were viewed by parents and teachers alike as the most important program event of the year. Teachers placed a lot of value on attendance by the families. One teacher expressed that she was very pleased that one of her least involved parents made the effort to attend. Her comments are a strong reflection of her belief that support was important to the children.

She did come for special olympics, and I was so happy, I didn't expect it. She told me at the last minute she was going to come. I told her "this is the best thing that could have happened to your son for you to show up." All my parents showed up, I was thrilled; and children see this . . . After one IEP meeting, she came in the classroom, and C (said), "This is my mommy, this is my mommy." . . . it was just great because she hadn't been in the classroom any other time. (4)

The teachers reported a number of instances of highly involved parents regularly attending program functions. One teacher said, "Both parents would come rather than just one" (6). Others indicated similar attendance patterns among their parents:

She comes [to PTA]. She's come in [the classroom] and got down on her knees. If I'm trying to get him to put a ball inside of a box or take something out of it, she gets down to try and get him to do it too. . . . But mom has always come in; I've always made her welcome. (10)

She's been to everything; she's not a PTA board member but she's been to every program, every time I've invited her out she's always here, even when C use to act out. It hurt her feelings, and she'd say, "Maybe I'd better not come," and I told her to come and she did. (1)

When parents responded to the teacher invitations to attend program events, the teachers appeared to receive as much support from parents as the parents received from them. This reciprocal support system likely contributes significantly to teacher's satisfaction in working with parents. Two teachers related their feelings on the relationship:

Helping out when we have different class activities--parties, programs, PTA. She's been one of the faithful ones, you know, participate in basically all the aspects of the school program . . . [when the therapists ask her] coming in and seeing what the therapist, what the OT and PT did. (9)

She's always been just a great help, and she's even told me that if I was by myself, if my assistant was out sick, to please call her, she's always willing to help. I know that she knows how much we appreciate her and like her coming in. She always seems really happy to be here. . . . If we have a lecture she's always at the meetings. She spent a whole lot more time in the classroom last year, and she always apologizes for not being here this year; but she's got so much going on. Whenever she's needed to be at school, she was here--for any event--every field trip. (3)

One teacher's statements concerning parent visits to school reflect a spirit of shared responsibility where she and the highly involved parent worked through the child's behavior problems together:

At the beginning of this school year she was having some problems with C at home, behavior problems and him not being as independent as we both knew he could be, but just basically relying on mom and [he relied on using] his favorite saying was "I can't do it, you do it for me." (7)

The cooperative spirit expressed by teachers about the most involved parents can be contrasted with "one" time visits from the majority of parents who were identified as having least involvement. The teacher said, "She did come to one parent meeting, if I'm not mistaken, and that was with the other parent that will go and pick her up" (7). Another teacher indicated that, "I would try and get her to come to school . . . and the mother would sound like, 'oh, okay,'. . . . A few times she planned on coming out and then she'd get lost on the drive or something, so she's never made it to school (3).

Likewise, the positive remarks so indicative of the teachers' relationship with the most involved parent were noticeably lacking between the teacher and the least involved parents:

And then she dropped in one day with someone, and I never did figure out if it was a social worker or who she was with. They had something that they wanted. It was like a 5-minute visit. So she's

been here but not for any real . . . there still hasn't been much interaction between us. (2)

One of the families designated as least involved offers an interesting case example. During the interview, the grandmother who had custody indicated that she utilized all available time to work with the child. However, she said that many other responsibilities prevented her from spending time taking part in the program activities. The teacher ranked her among the least involved families. The teacher made the following observation about the grandmother's activity.

For the most part she hasn't actually been here for any PTA meetings, parent meetings, and I haven't had an actual home visit with her, but she is very supportive. If you send notes through the child, she's good about sending them back . . . but active participation . . . [teacher shakes head]. Tomorrow she says she's going to be here for olympics. . . . She'll have to leave so she may not be here the whole time, but she's going to try to show C that she's interested in what she's doing. (9)

It would seem that this parent did not meet the teacher's expectation for taking part in activities; therefore, the teacher thought of her as having poor involvement.

If parents expressed a desire to attend and participate in activities at the center, the teachers were more understanding and accepting when they had no transportation to the center. As discussed earlier, this area was one that several of the teachers wanted more assistance for the parents. One teacher described her most involved parent who lacked transportation to attend program activities:

I think she came to one last year. She has not been to any parent meetings this year. The one time she came was to buy a sign book. She did that pretty much on her own. . . . She's one of the ones I think of every time that I think about transportation. There's always something that comes up that prevents her from coming at the last minute or whatever. . . . It's an intact family. He has the car when he's on shore, so she doesn't have a car. . . . But she wants to be here a lot--she talks about volunteering, about working in the school, the whole bit. (2)

Summary

Five categories were used to compare the teachers' perceptions of the least and most involved parents. The parents' question-asking and information seeking behavior was viewed by the teacher as indicative of their interest in working with the child. The teachers placed importance on the interest that parents showed in the program. Routine communication patterns between parents and teachers were influential in how the teacher evaluated levels of involvement. Parents who initiated and shared responsibility for maintaining contact were regarded positively and were considered involved. Parent participation in the individual education plan was a third category which provided an indication of the value the teachers placed on interactions with the parents. Although there appeared to be little substantive difference in the input in the individual education plan from the most and least involved parents, the teachers perceived the input from the two groups as

quantitatively different. Given the child-focused approach to parent involvement, teachers had high expectations and made positive statements about input from the most involved parents but had low expectations and regarded input from the least involved parents as minimal or non-existent.

A review of home visit activity shows that this is an area where the quality of working relationships between the teachers and parents were most definitive. Likewise, the teachers directed the activities during the visits. In cases where the parents expressed interest and supported the teachers' efforts to bring about child progress, parents were reported as involved. If parents had a strong history of interest and regular communication, even without regular home visits they were still described as being involved. It was during the discussion of the home visit that several teachers expressed doubts about its usefulness and recommend more support to promote involvement at the program site. Thus participation in program activities was also highly valued by the teachers and as such had significant impact on the teacher's assessment of whether or not the parent was involved.

Differences in Involvement

The teachers developed explanations about the differences in involvement levels between the least and most involved

parents. They were asked to talk about "what explains the difference in the involvement of the least and most involved families?" One teacher described a highly involved parent as accepting the responsibility for the child's condition, displaying caring behaviors as they met the responsibility:

She realizes that having a child with special needs is going to require a lot of hard work . . . she feels she's brought these children into the world and she's responsible for them. Her culture's different, it's more like mine, like yours. (1)

Another teacher attributed the level of involvement to the parent interest, "I guess her maturity, and she really reads and tries to find out about C's condition, and I feel that has really helped her become involved as much as she has" (9). Still another teacher described the highly involved parents as, "Wonderful, they know how to raise their kids" (3). Most explanations focused on positive or negative parent attributes. Concern for the child and appreciation of the program were also areas frequently cited as reasons for high involvement.

A lack of awareness of the child's needs and no expression of concern were coupled with statements about the mother's youth. These qualities dominated the teacher's descriptions of the least involved parents. Descriptions given by three teachers further defines how noninvolvement was viewed:

I think it has a lot to do with the parent being so young. She had this handicapped child when she was

just a teenager and the fact that she's very shy. I don't know, maybe she's intimidated by the teacher coming over. It didn't seem that she was even excited about it [the teacher's offer to help with securing equipment for the child] or appreciative. I feel like I've tried. (3)

If there is concern, it has not been expressed to me. There's no commitment; there just seems to actually be no real concern that "my child is in a special education program, I am being provided with a person that comes to my home that I can use." (7)

They really feel they are meeting his basic needs by feeding and clothing. Children are to be seen and not heard. I've seen that a lot from the lower-income families, and I hate to draw inferences . . . It's environmental and cultural; not his handicap. (1)

Limited involvement was also attributed to living in "the city," and the socioeconomic status of many least involved families. In one teacher's opinion the circumstances associated with demands placed on the military families impacted on their involvement levels. The fathers were frequently on sea duty, leaving the mother to manage family matters. It was reported in an earlier discussion that several parents who lived some distance from the program lacked transportation to the program. Despite teachers initial concern about this barrier, only one teacher cited distance from the program as making a difference in involvement. The reader will recall parents from both groups were affected by the lack of transportation.

The reasons given for differences in involvement reflected a mismatch between the teacher's expectation and

what parents demonstrated. The cultural, social, and economic characteristics of the least involved families place them at a disadvantage to meet teacher expectations. Conversely, teachers attributed active involvement to concern, and caring which was equated to being good parents. They had values and skills compatible to the teachers' to support the professionally developed activities. However, the poor, black, single parents in the study did not fair as well. While the teachers had recognized the needs of these families, they generally stopped short of utilizing current family strengths or resources respond to need or to promote their interactions with families. As with the most involved, parent attributes or families' qualities were thought to be the primary reasons for minimal involvement.

Change of Levels of Involvement

Whether or not teachers felt they had been successful in creating more involvement with the least involved parents was of interest in understanding the involvement process. The most involved parents were described as "being more forward," "more comfortable," and in general were viewed as showing increased involvement in program activities. One teacher described her approach to bring about positive change in involvement:

We as teachers can't take all the credit; it may belong to us because we have accomplished so much

with these children, but if we take all the credit, then the parent is still at a loss; once they leave us, it's like, "what do I do now?" Where if they feel like they've done it, they're going to find out what to do next because they realize they had a part in it. I think they come in as if the teacher has to do it all because, "I don't know how." If we can teach them that, yes you can be a part of it and you do know how, then finally it makes them realize they can. I think that's the difference between Family B and Family A. Mom A always knew she could do it and wanted to do it, where with Mom B it's taken two years to even convince her that she could have any bearing on his education because she wasn't a teacher. So I really feel like now she's beginning to realize she can be a teacher. (6)

This teacher had operationalized the importance of developing a share responsibility with the parent so that they can assume an active role in the child's development. She also recognized that the most involved mother would be involved naturally, but the least involved would have to be taught to be involved:

A's mom wanted me to come on home visits, she was always there right on time. She would call me if she wasn't going to be there, and she was just the perfect little parent to work with. But the parent like B's is the one that's challenging. (6)

The teacher recognized that the parent's educational level and socioeconomic status influenced the differences in involvement level, but she also believed that parents' behavior could change with appropriate help-giving. She defined educational level and parent awareness as meaning working with parents moved them beyond the basic response to physical needs:

So I think we're even getting her beyond that again by the technique I'm telling you about trying to let her see that she's had a part in what's going on and

building her up through her working with her child. And I think that's [providing situations where the parent feels confident in working with the child] so important, because if they're proud of their kids, when he leaves this program he's going to go far. If they're ashamed of their child or feel like they can't work with the child, then once they leave here, I feel like I've accomplished nothing because they haven't taken anything positive with them. (6)

The other nine teachers reported no increase of involvement with their least involved parents. Rather, three of the teachers indicated a decrease in involvement (among this parent group). They reported feeling discouraged with their efforts with these parents. One teacher expressed that "there have been so few contacts that I don't know that it would be fair to say" (2).

Some teachers made concerted attempts to promote involvement with all parents. The following example illustrates how, despite her stated commitment to creating more involvement, one teacher did not maintain her efforts equally with the two families. Her accounts of her efforts with families, her description shows a high degree of flexibility in making home visits:

I put in a lot of overtime when it comes to parents . . . I make home visits on the weekends. I make home visits at night if I feel the need and if the parent has a good reason as to why they cannot meet with me in between 2:00 and 3:30. A lot of weekends, I have incorporated a lot of what I do. I think if I had to compare the extra time that I've put in to my parent involvement, I really don't think I would have gotten as far as I have at this point. I don't mind, I, as a matter of fact, enjoy spending a lot of my extra time with the parents. I deal with a lot of the younger parents. (7)

This teacher's description of the relationship with the highly involved parent illustrates a strong commitment to the parent. She indicated that she enjoyed activities with the parent and that she taught the mother to act as an advocate for the child:

Meetings that she would attend, I would attend with her; I would have to use that as our home visit time. So we did that, went a lot of different places together, the library. We really had a good time . . . but I would always let her know that "you are his mother," and you need to be that blunt and forward. Especially if it's something that you feel is very important, then you say that. Don't assume that we all know. Because some of these meetings can be very intimidating when you've got 13 people from the school building and the one parent. She really at this point has begun to speak up. (7)

This teacher wanted to understand her families and was attempting to respond to their needs:

I guess dealing with a lot of the disadvantaged family situations has also taught me that a lot of times these people have a very difficult time asking for help or accepting help. That's been the hardest part for me because I've had parents that just look at me and say "who are you to tell me how to raise my child." One of the things it's taught me is that it's certainly not easy when you're coming from the outside in--trying to get in to help. A lot of times that help is not accepted. You've got to find the right way for that individual parent. (7)

However, as she described the least involved family, the teacher focused primarily on providing for the child, since she felt the parents would not:

She does not have transportation; I've tried to incorporate as much participation from her when it involves coming to the school as possible; . . . the new baby, that's not been very easy for her. I have

another parent who . . . will bring her here and take her home. I pay for his field trips, and a lot of people fault me on that and say you're just teaching her for later on. When he moves on she's going to expect that teacher to pay for everything, but I just cannot stand the thought of him missing out. Well, she won't come up with the money for field trips or school related things that may possibly involve C going somewhere. I cannot let him suffer. (7)

In spite of her efforts to involve this least involved parent in home visits, the teacher decreased her efforts when the parent did not respond to the extra attempts she made to conduct home visits:

Yes, [tried night visits] at the beginning of the year. That's what I would do if she wasn't there at my scheduled time; I would come back here, and then I would leave here once I got off work and go back, just hoping that she forgot. And after a while it just got to the point that I had to keep in mind, I'm only being paid for the mileage that I'm supposed to go once and those types of things. I tried for a while, but it was very frustrating. (7)

The teacher's descriptions indicated that she had fully extended herself to working with the parent, however she did not carry it out to the context of a parent identified need. In failing to realize that the parent needed ownership in the activities, she expended energy which brought no measurable return. The teacher's belief about what was important to carry out with the parent brought little reinforcement from the parent. Ultimately her perception of the parent's lack of interest and commitment to helping her with program goals resulted in her evaluating not to continue her efforts. Thus, without feedback and positive reinforcement from the parent,

the teacher, who was very committed to involving parents, reduced her efforts. It will be argued that when teachers lack a systematic plan for assessing parent needs and responding to them, they will evaluate the results of their efforts and attribute the noninvolvement not to the wrong assumptions about what should be important to the family, but to the lack of parent concern or caring.

Some basic differences in interaction levels with the two groups of parents were observed when their general descriptions of parent involvement were examined. As an understanding of the importance of the role that feedback played between parents and teachers became more evident, the differences in teachers' perceptions of involvement were further examined. The parents identified as least involved seldom provided the teachers with feedback to help sustain efforts. Whereas the highly involved parents were very verbally expressive and provided them with the encouragement to continue practices like the home visits.

In the absence of a broad-based systems approach which incorporates the family needs as a part of responding to child level needs, most teachers interpreted the parents' behavior using broad generalizations. They explained their success with parents or lack of it by attributing the outcomes to influences over which they felt no control, such as socioeconomic status, the mother's maturity, and family

structure. Instead of thinking of these as barriers to involvement, the more appropriate question to guide effective involvement practice might be, how can knowledge about the differences which exist in family's needs and strengths become a part of the involvement effort.

Parent Perceptions about Involvement

The perceptions of the twenty families who participated in the study have been examined to gain more understanding about how parents interacted with the teacher and participated in involvement practices. These understandings derived from comparing responses of parents who were identified as least and most involved provided a basis for making additional interpretations about the nature of the involvement process. During the interviews the parents talked about their child's experience in the center-based program, the child's development and their interactions with the program. These descriptions were systematically examined to discover how the parent interpreted the program, how they perceived their role with child development, and how they interacted with the teacher.

Descriptive data compiled from school records and interview information about child and family characteristics were summarized in Table 1 in the methodology section. A review of these demographic data revealed distinct differences

in the characteristics of the two family groups. Attitudes and beliefs about classes of people are commonly used to explain behavior differences in various cultural and ethnic groups. Therefore, the teacher's explanations of differences in involvement levels reported in the preceding discussion were not surprising. Qualities such as socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, or family structure convey positive or negative expectations about a class or segment of society. Observations made by teachers indicated that they had higher involvement expectations for the most involved parents than they had for the least involved parents. The teachers reported corresponding low expectations of the least involved parents.

An analysis of the child's strengths, needs, and functional levels, as described by the parents, aided in developing a perspective on how the parents conceptualized development. Their conceptualizations about development translated into interactions with the child and the program staff. Likewise, observations were made about how the parent's viewed their role in the child's development and how this influenced their interaction with program activities.

Darling (1983) and Schaefer (1983) have speculated that the nature of the relationship with the family can directly impact teacher and parent interactions. The parents identified as most involved were described as maintaining a

close working relationship with the teacher. Conversely, when the teachers were unable to develop this reciprocal relationship with parents, they reported fewer interactions with parents. Since the interactive nature of the parent/teacher relationship appeared to be linked to variations of involvement, teacher-parent interactions were examined further with the parents. An understanding of how parents described their role in relation to their view of the teacher's role helped to further define the parent/teacher relationship.

Research results suggest that the availability of resources affects the amount of time and energy that a family has to give to child goals (Dunst, & Trivette, 1987). The participant's statements and the researcher's observations about family support, resources, needs, and aspirations were helpful in developing plausible explanations of involvement in the program.

General Background

Conducting the interviews in the family's home provided an opportunity to make observations of the family environment. These observations supplemented the parent and teacher interview data, increased the integrity of the findings, and provided greater creditability to teachers' interpretations about the family's interaction with the program.

As a group, the least involved parents were less verbal than their counterparts. When their responses were contrasted with the explanations of the most involved parents, it was noted that they rarely elaborated on their descriptions or offered information beyond the question or prompt given by the interviewer. By comparison, all highly involved parents offered numerous details and freely discussed their experiences, for example, with seeking a diagnosis or obtaining services.

Parents' Visits to the Program

A few parents reported being shocked at seeing the severity of the children's handicaps being served in the program the first time they visited. All parents expressed very positive feelings toward the program. They commented about the warmth and friendliness of the program staff when they visited the center-based program. Several parents expressed that they shouldn't expect to be as lucky in the future. They also talked about being made to feel important by the program staff. One parent remarked:

I think she's [another classroom teacher] wonderful. She's taken time to come up to me, and she'll say "you know what C did, he actually . . ." The fact that they even recognize you. I haven't been able to volunteer out there, yet the teachers make an effort to come to me, and will always seem to remember that I'm C's mother, and that means a lot to me. They actually do know C, and they're not just saying "oh, yes, I remember your kid." They

know him, and that is just amazing to me that somebody would take that kind of time. (1A)

Overall the parents had more positive feelings about the teachers than the teachers had for the parents. Least and most involved parents, alike, complimented aspects of the program and indicated that they were satisfied with the services and the child's progress.

Descriptions of the Program

The parent description of the program activities generally corresponded to how regularly they visited the program. Descriptions of the child's day indicated that all parents had a fundamental understanding of the daily routines. However, the descriptions given by the parents who frequently visited the program contained many more details about general classroom routines and about skills the child was working on. These parents indicated a thorough knowledge of the daily activities and indicated ownership in their child's educational program. In addition to time spent in the classroom, these highly involved parents reported using a variety of other strategies to keep themselves aware of the child's level skills. In every case these parents had been identified as most involved.

The least involved parents, on the other hand, did not initiate contact or regularly monitor child activities. They communicated that the program was providing a good experience

for their children and that the children were making the progress they expected. One parent spoke of the program in the following manner, "Ms. T at the school she helps him out really good . . . and things that he don't really understand, she's teaching sign language-he's very eager to catch on" (1B). I asked the mother if she were learning sign language. She said she knew a little bit but didn't indicate she was attempting to learn to sign. When asked about times the teacher asked for her help, she said, "Well, it's not so much asking for me to help. Like, he gets sick or something, she'll tell . . . She just tells you things, they had popcorn and candy today." Like most least involved parents, this mother viewed the contacts and interactions with the teacher as providing information about classroom events. They did not appear to use information shared by the teacher to interact with the child. This failure to use information to work with child objectives became particularly evident during these parents' descriptions of home visits.

Description of Interaction with the Center-based Program

During the data collection period I spent time at the program site. On these occasions, I regularly saw the parents talking to teachers and other school staff and spending time in the classrooms. Several parents attended school based committee meetings with the school staff. Parents were also

observed volunteering in various capacities such as assisting in the lunchroom or going on field trips. One parent conveyed how comfortable she felt to drop by the classroom, "She has like an open invitation 'whenever you get a chance come over here, C can do this' . . . so I never feel like I need to call up."

Excluding two parents who had no transportation to the program site, the highly involved parents regularly came by classrooms for short visits. These visits were valued by the teachers and seemed to promote the strong working relationship between the teacher and parent. One parent who was active on parent committees spoke of her routine visits:

If I have a meeting . . . over there [to the program]; then I try, I usually go a little bit early and look in the classroom on them and after I'm done with whatever I'm over there for, then I'll look in or go in and say "hi girls" or I'll go and eat lunch with them or something like that. (5A)

When asked about the importance of visits to the classroom, some parents said they thought the visits helped the child to feel good about themselves:

I've done that, and C is so eager to please when I'm there. . . . I've gone in there, and it's been "Mommy, look at what I've done. Look at what we did today." He really goes along well with the class when I'm there. . . . I've helped out on quite a few occasion like with the Halloween Party. (7A)

There was a marked contrast in the frequency of visits to the program among the least involved parents. Some mothers had never visited the program, others reported only attending

special events, such as the preschool special olympics or preschool graduation once or twice. As the teachers had observed, parents said that distance from the program, lack of transportation, and work schedules kept them from attending. These parents expressed that they really would like to be able to visit the program. One parent said if she could go she would observe and help other children.

Parent's Perception of the Program Benefits to the Child

All parents interviewed reported that their child had benefited from the program. They made many positive statements about child progress in behavioral, language, cognitive, and social areas. They consistently attributed child progress to activities associated with the program. In addition to making positive comments about the teachers, the parents also indicated how helpful the teaching assistants were and how much they liked them. Parents in either group who had children with developmental delays reported that their child was "just slow" and that they would catch up because they are getting help from the program. Likewise, parents from both groups remarked that their child had become much more independent since enrolling in the program. Their statements regarding the teacher's efforts on behalf of the child were very complimentary. One parent talked about how reassuring she found the program:

Oh yes, they do tremendous things with the kids, and teachers now, like his teacher, she always goes the extra mile. It's just been nice to be able to send him to school to know that they're really going to work with him. They're not just sitting there. But they're all involved, and they all get to do stuff.
(7A)

Two fathers participated in interviews. During one interview the father responded to most of the questions and offered additional information concerning how difficult it was to deal with his child's behavior. The child's program objectives focused on improving behavior and attention control. The father credited the teacher for helping implement a behavior change program with the child:

And not only did we, we had to work with T to follow the directions, you know, she setup, well this particular behavior pattern, this is what we agree on doing not only as a mother and father, but as a teacher. If he, say for instance, doesn't want to do one thing that anyone else is doing that is part of the educational process, then this is what we agree on as the teacher and as a family that is the course of action to take so that he'll learn something from it. (8A)

The attitudes that parents expressed toward the program showed little variation between the two parent groups. Although the teachers felt that least involved parents did not appreciate the program, these same parents regarded the teachers very positively. Parents indicated that they depended on the teachers and did not know what they would do without the program. When asked about desirable teacher qualities, one of the least involved parents said, "Only thing I can think of is nice and have a good attitude about it.

She's [the teacher] got plenty of ideas for working with kids. She's real creative, I love the way she does, especially Christmas time" (1B). This mother also indicated that the thing she valued most was being able to depend on the teacher to do "what's right." She also expressed that what she had to contribute was valued by the teacher.

Descriptions of Home Visits

Although there was consensus on the benefit of the program, the parents had very different opinions about the purposes of the home visits. The most involved parents regarded the visits as a time to share information and to work cooperatively on behalf of the child. These parents used the visits to exchange information, to obtain feedback and encouragement from the teacher and to learn new skills needed to work with the child. One parent described how comfortable the home visit was for her:

T is so unique. She sits down on the floor, and we just talk. It's not like you have to sit prim and proper and try to make everything, you know, like you would if it was somebody. . . . C never did anything there, you, what he was doing at home. And it was so nice to be able to have them come in and see. He talks up a storm here and talks in sentences and does all this stuff, where a lot of things he hasn't been doing at school. So that's what I like about the home visits. (7A)

Another parent reflected the cooperative spirit surrounding the home visit. She viewed it as a time when she

and the teacher had an opportunity to work together on the development of child-level skills:

We try to get C to do some of the things that he does in school like walking up and down the stairs and feeding himself and playing with certain toys instead of . . . pulling out the pots and pans and pulling out all the silverware and just completely destroying the house. Just to try to get him to play with his toys and to do constructive things.
(10A)

However, the parents identified as least involved reported difficulty accommodating home visits. A grandmother said that she had standing medical appointments which conflicted with the day of the week the teacher came on the home visits (9B). One young teenage mother said that the visits were always scheduled when she was returning from school, she was attending to complete the requirement for her high school equivalency certificate. She said that she tried to be there for the visits and that the teacher also cancelled some of the visits. When asked if more home visits would have made a difference in the child's progress, she said, "No, I think it would still be the same because I have all the information that I need on the IEP anyway. If it really was something important, it could be discussed over the phone if she couldn't make it" (10B).

One parent expounded on reasons why the visits were not needed:

Not really, but . . . I mean it's not like I don't like them or anything like that; but I just really don't see what the use in her coming out here every

month to talk about C, what he does in school and everything; and when I come out there [to the program] we talk about the same things. I would like to save her a trip from coming out here because a couple of time she got lost. She told me I could come to the school. (8B)

When home visits were conducted with the mothers identified as least involved, as with routine communication between the these families and the program, they viewed the visit as a time when the teacher "reported" on child skills. In other words, the parent thought the teacher is showing that the child can work a puzzle, build a tower with blocks, or make an Easter rabbit. One parent's description was typical of how the activity was perceived:

Oh, she sits there and plays games with him. She'll bring a puzzle and take it apart and let him put them back together. She brings him blocks and last time they made some pudding. She's very creative with children. They make things all the time. (1B)

This parent, typical of others who viewed the teacher's visit as one to work with the child, did not consider the teacher's demonstration as having any implication for them. They seemed to regard the home visit as another session in which the teacher spent teaching the child. These parents' reactions to the visit indicated that they probably did not see themselves as integral to the child's learning. This area is examined in greater detail in a subsequent section.

Parent's Adjustment to the Program

Discussions in the literature concerning the difficulties parents experience adjusting to the demands of a center-based program (Winton & Turnbull, 1981) have prompted questions about the difficulty of adjusting to the child attending a center-based program. Some parents expressed a few concerns about the child's transition into the program. For the most part, the parents reported trusting the program personnel and viewing them as someone with whom it was safe to leave the child.

When parents reported difficulty initially accepting the child's participation in the program, riding the bus to the program location was their number one concern. Most mothers said they had been afraid for the child's safety. They reported that they were relieved when they met the bus drivers and assistants who rode the buses.

One mother recalled an unusually difficult experience when she was expected to give the child to the bus aide the first day of the program. The driver and aide insisted that the child would calm down when the mother walked away. Because blind children reportedly do not develop secure attachments as early as other children, this two year old child probably did not need so traumatic a separation from her mother. Although the mother was very upset she complied with the program's request. Based on this mother's initial

anxiousness about the child's well-being, it is speculated that her participation in numerous functions at the program site may be because she needs a legitimate reason to be near the child.

Another parent confided that she had difficulty deciding to send the child across the city, the reason she gave was:

I'll tell you the only reason was because even though he was having all the problems, and even though deep down inside it was going to help him, I felt I was the only one that could really deal with it. I thought, if I send him away, he's totally not going to be able to be dealt with by anybody. The school is so far away. I thought if anything was to happen to him, I wouldn't get there in time because I knew how wild he could get, and I was worried more for the other person. (8a)

All parents, including the few who expressed difficulty adjusting to the program credited the teachers with being very successful with the child. None of the parents reported problems adjusting to the demands of sending the child to a five-day-a-week program. They were very pleased to have obtained services for the child. Some mothers expressed that it was also a relief to have the free time for themselves.

In summary, the parents were very complimentary of the program staff and appeared to be very satisfied with the services. Parents felt important and thought the program staff took a personal interest in their child. They recognized the effort which the teachers put forth and attributed the majority of the child's progress to the teacher and being in the program.

Parents identified as most involved valued the home visits and indicated that they wanted to participate in them. The majority of the least involved parents either did not see the home visits as being necessary and/or reported difficulty in being available for them.

Parent's Role in Development

Odum and Shuster (1986) have suggested some plausible explanations regarding a parent's commitment to carry out intervention with the child. These researchers suggested that factors such as the parents' beliefs concerning the causes of their child's disability or their expectations for future developmental progress entered into the interactions a parent might have with a program. Additionally, Sameroff and Feil (1985) have theorized that the parent's concept of the child's condition or handicap may influence how it is interpreted. Thirdly, the parents' belief regarding their ability to impact the child's development might influence their interactions with program activities. Sameroff and Feil (1985) observed, "The question for child development is whether differences in parent's thinking about development will translate into differences in parent behavior that will produce differences in the way their children will turn out" (p. 99-100).

Parents Conceptualization of Development

Because the parents' awareness and understanding of the child's disability or developmental delay was thought to influence the role they assumed with the child's development, this area was examined. A review of the descriptions of the child's handicapping condition or developmental delay indicated that there was a relationship between the parent's knowledge about the condition and how they subsequently used the understandings from the knowledge to involve themselves in the program.

The interview data suggested that a basic understanding of the course of the child's development varied between the two parent groups. As Sameroff and Feil (1985) suggested, the actual basis for a difference in parent involvement appears to be more a feature of the way parents conceptualize the child's development. Parents who believe that there is a relationship between their interactions with the child and his or her development progress appeared to actively seek involvement. One mother reported her attempts to interact with her deaf child, "So today I just sent in a list of signs I'm working on with C so she [the teacher] knows what I'm working on with her so we can keep--and I know the signs basically. She's taught her 'eat' 'drink' and a few others" (2A).

The parents designated as least involved provided fewer descriptive details about their child's delay. One parent of a child with cerebral palsy referred to the child's condition as stiffness of the legs. Although the child had surgery and continued medical care as the result of having cerebral palsy, this young mother gave no indication that she understood the medical diagnosis. A very important aspect of this mother's conceptualization of the child's development came to focus when she was asked to talk about some goals for the future. Insight about how she saw her role was gained when she responded to the question, "What can you do to help that along?" She said, "Well, take her to the doctor, keep her in school until she can walk by herself" (3B). Although she expressed that she wanted her child to walk, she did not appear to be aware that she had a role with physical exercises. The child's teacher reported demonstrating the exercises regularly for the mother. In fact, she said that she always exercised the child upon arriving for the home visit.

Unlike the mothers who were identified as most involved, this young mother failed to see that her interactions with the child impacted the child's development. If one can assume the parent's conceptualization of development was impacting on her actions, it is understandable why she did not perform the exercises.

The eagerness of a highly involved mother to find out what she could do to extend language presents a vivid contrast. She reported attending a session with the speech therapist:

Watching speech through the one-way mirror, I could see how she could handle him and what I was supposed to do. And it would blow C's mind when I would say things that [the therapist] would say. You can watch how T reacts with the child and vice-versa--T can see how I react with C. I mean, a lot of the phrases I use, she started using in school and a lot of the ones that she used, like the time-out chair, we brought home. (1B)

Parents' Perception of their Role in Development

Several of the least involved parents were using educational terms they heard the professionals use to talk about development. But as the response of the mother of the child who had cerebral palsy illustrates, a more fundamental difference was found in the interpretation of information by the least and most involved parents. Comments made by the least involved parents indicated that the information provided by the teacher was viewed as a report of the child's accomplishments or current goals. Rather than using the information to guide their interactions with their child, they viewed it as becoming informed. Comments made by the least involved parents indicated that they depend on the teacher to "teach" their child what they need to know:

I think that if he didn't go at an early age, he might have been still kind of slow. But now I see him progressing more faster, you know. I think the

school really help C more, so that's why the doctor signed him up to go to school early so he could learn now so when he get a certain age he will know some of it before he starts regular school. (1B)

Although the most involved parents used the information to engage in activities which supported the development of their child, they, nonetheless, attributed much of the child's progress to attending the program. These parents frequently reported that they used the teacher as a resource, that is relied on the teacher to tell them what to work on next or to show them how to practice a skill. And they did not credit themselves as making a difference in the child's functioning.

One highly involved parent described the difference in parents who were involved, "as people who are into their kids." The highly involved parents assumed that they should work with the teacher. One parent was asked to describe her role in the child's educational program. She reported practicing skills faithfully, but responded that she had the "second most important role" because:

I have to do what I'm told, and if I don't follow-up on what he's doing in school, then it's just a waste of time because you really have to do the things at home in order for him to learn. I mean, he's only in school from 9 to 12, and the rest of the time he's at home, and with his attention span as short as it is, he'll forget. I feel that he will forget what he's learned at school because at home it's different. (10A)

In addition to the parent's conceptualization of the child's development, other considerations about development influence how the parents were defining their roles. Children

show a large range of variability in their development so that it is natural for many parents to assume that the child who is showing developmentally delay will attain the major developmental milestones, such as walking, talking, and bladder and bowel control, within individual variations. One grandmother who shared the caregiving responsibilities for her grandson with his teenage mom, expressed this belief, "I raised three; but they were supposed to be normal kids. You don't know when slow is slow, because his mamma didn't start walking until she was 18 months and one started walking when he was a year old. You sort of need help" (5B).

Profiles of Involvement

Three parents designated as least involved interacted more freely with the researcher and extended their comments beyond the context of the interview questions. Two mothers had primary care-giving responsibilities for another child with disabilities which were more severe than the child targeted for the study. These parents shared a number of comments during the interview which indicated that they were very interactive with their child. However, they reported other demands on their time and energy which appeared to leave no time for the early afternoon home visits or visits to the program.

The third mother, a single parent who had two jobs, presented an interesting contrast in the parent and teacher perceptions. She provided examples of times when she worked with the child's learning objectives and reported scheduling her work so that she could participate in home visits. The teacher's evaluation of this mother's efforts was "she could give more love, attention, and emotional support that he needs" (4). The teacher was not satisfied with the mother's level commitment and appeared not to empathize with competing demands on the mother. This teacher's expectations about the parent's level of commitment to the child resulted in a negative evaluation of the mother's competence to respond to the child and defined why she had identified this parent as having minimal involvement. This mismatch between the expectation and the parents perceived performance illustrates the rigid standard the teachers held for acceptable involvement levels.

The mother's perspective on her involvement was quite different. She evaluated home visits in the following way:

One-hundred percent. I really do because, like I said, it's like everybody's doing the same thing and . . . he's seeing the same thing. It can't get any better than that. They were really good about that. And then too every week, they would send a schedule home at the as to what they were going to be talking about. (4B)

Sparling and Lowman (1983) reported that promoting learning and development in the child is seen as a top

priority need of all parents. Although the parents in the least involved group did not provide evidence from the teacher's viewpoint that they had taken responsibility for promoting the child's development, they were interested in the child's performance. As indicated earlier most parents identified as least involved were primarily focused in being informed about the child's progress, but did not consider the information as implying a need to work with skill areas. With few exceptions they were relying on the program to get "the child ready for school." Thus the least involved parents provided evidence that they did not recognize an active role for themselves in the child's developmental process. Whenever their child's development did not occur naturally they relied on others to bring it about.

The most aware and responsive parents in the study expected to share responsibility for the intervention process. But they also realized that they are not child development experts. The college educated mother who had four older normally developing sons, was perhaps the best equipped to handle the challenges of her child's disability. She was willing to form a partnership with the teacher but relied on the teacher to show her activities. She knew how to use the teacher as a resource and relied on her expertise to help her be involved with her child:

[She] really helped me a lot because I'm good at following directions, but I'm not real creative or

even think of things some times to help his development. If someone gives me an idea I can go with it; but if I had to think back to when the other kids were young . . . , "What should they be doing?" (3A)

The teacher who worked with this parent questioned the parent "really needing her." She said, "He's [the child] probably one who would be just the same if he didn't come here all the time" (3). This teacher's comment reflects the degree to which she practiced a child-focused approach.

Statements made by the parents aided in an understanding of how they defined the role they attributed to themselves as well as how they viewed the teacher's role in bringing about progress for the child. Another factor closely associated with the way parents defined their role in the "learning and development" of the child is related to how much control the families thought they have of their lives. This phenomenon as frequently referred to in the literature as locus-of-control. In a large measure having control of one's life necessitates the ability to problem solve. Problem solving implies having the necessary resources available and knowing how to use them. The seven families in the study who appeared to be least involved were poor, black and young.

Given our social services system it is common, if not predictable, that individuals within this social class behave as though they have no control over life events. These feelings of lack of control result in a passive yielding to

the institutional goals. During their youth they are socialized accordingly by the public agencies. Since all were former clients of the public schools they would particularly feel the authority exerted over them by schools. This belief was expressed by one of the young mothers, "You know, I won't say they will sit right there and tell me something wrong or just lie to me so I said, 'if they tell me that's best for him to go to school, he'll go.'"

Family Resources and Support

Other researchers have identified the availability of resources in the formal and informal networks as creating basic differences involvement (Dunst & Leet, 1987). Visits to the homes during data collection provided a first hand look at the environment of the families. Circumstances varied markedly between the two groups. One-half of the least involved families lived in low rent apartments in inner city, black neighborhoods. Two of the teenage mothers within this group lived with the extended family. In a third instance a grandmother had custody of the grandchildren. This family also lived in a deteriorating neighborhood in the inner city. More often than not these families had to travel 30-45 minutes from the city to the suburban area where the program was situated.

The least involved mothers expressed that they wanted to have regular contact with the program, but felt that the travel distance kept them from attending. Those who had no private transportation indicated that visits to the program were extremely difficult to accomplish. One low involved mother who had never been to the preschool program shared that if she could go to school, she would observe and help other children. Then she added, "When she do go to kindergarten, it's right down the street, I can just walk there" (3B). The inavailability of resources was one more factor which impacted on the family's ability to participate in the activities which the teachers judged important to involvement.

Summary

The parents shared information which was valuable in understanding about their perspective of involvement. The role which they assumed in their child's development was examined. The perceptions, particularly how the parent conceived the child's development and the amount of control they felt they had over life circumstances in general, seemed to influence the extent to which they were involved in the program activities.

Regardless of level of involvement, mothers expressed pride in their child. During the course of the interview they were asked to share something that the child had recently

accomplished which made them feel proud. Invariably the parent's facial expression changed as they reported a skill or behavior the child had mastered. The parents did want progress for their child. However, their skills and abilities to participate in bringing it about was the "real" difference in the parent involvement.

Chapter 4

Summary and Interpretations

The fact that she's always around, that she's always calling, she asks questions. I like that; I really do appreciate her. She wants to know what's going on all of the time. She's sought out, she wanted to talk to the therapists to know what they were going to do to help with him. (10)

These remarks made by one of the teachers in the study illustrates the level of enthusiasm the teachers expressed toward the most involved parents. Positive interactions with these parents appeared to be powerful in sustaining teachers' efforts with the families in the study. Although the teachers expressed commitment to involving parents, the absence of positive feedback or parent cooperation appeared to be discouraging and they frequently described the activities in the context of meeting the "legal requirements" for involvement. Some teachers reported trying alternative strategies when the parent failed to respond to their efforts to involve them. These strategies included things such as returning to the home later in the evening to attempt home visits, securing transportation to the program, or adapting a child-focused activity during the home visit.

Despite their efforts to create more involvement with the least involved parents, only one teacher in ten described increased parent involvement. A better understanding of the involvement process was derived from an examination of teacher

and parent descriptions of involvement practices. These findings from the teachers' and parents' accounts of involvement practice were discussed in detail in the previous sections.

Teachers used parent involvement activities which were designed to involve the parent in working with child-level skills. Many of the activities provided opportunities for the parents to observe and subsequently carry out professional recommendations thought to be best for the child. Parent and teacher descriptions showed that parents were frequently passive observers, not active participants during involvement activities, especially during the home visit.

Overall the teachers expected the parents to model their behavior and routinely practice skills between home visits. Teachers indicated that dealing with the parents identified as least involved was frustrating, especially their attempts to conduct home visits required by the program administration. Sustaining interactions with the families, in a large measure, defined how much teachers felt parents were committed to program goals. The working relationships which existed between the teacher and the most involved parents also appeared to be a product of the naturally occurring match between teacher and parent values, rather than the systematic employment of strategies to bring about a working relationship and shared responsibility. Except for one teacher who

operated on the assumption that parents must feel good about themselves as parents to make a positive impact on the child, none of the teachers provided evidence that they had increased involvement with the minimally involved parent.

Overall, teachers did not express high levels of confidence in parents' ability to recognize or act on the child's learning needs. Teachers felt that it was their responsibility to act on behalf of the child. And they appeared to overlook opportunities to support the parent toward sharing the responsibility with them. A basic lack of confidence was pronounced with the least involved parents. Teachers articulated an awareness of the needs and strengths of the family, but generally failed to use these factors to guide their activities or interactions with the parents. Neither was there evidence that they were actively working to sustain or enhance the parents' feelings of competence in their role as a parent. Taken together teachers did not indicate that they took a family perspective as they engaged in involvement activities.

Could it be that as the child's special education needs are identified and services implemented, the teacher's assumptions about the parent and practices with them are creating new opportunities for families to feel more competent or do they result in debilitating feelings of incompetence? Many teachers' interpreted the parents' level of participation

as an indication of how they felt about them personally. For example, they described parents as liking or not liking the home visits. References were frequently made about the least involved families "not wanting" the teachers to come on home visits. Thus teacher interactions with parents were influenced by the assumptions they made about the family's ability and the way they saw their role in relation to the family. When teachers did not recognize family level needs, they did not think of them as relevant to the involvement process. In addition to the assumptions teachers made about families' abilities, they failed to incorporate family-level needs or to employ strategies to ensure that the least involved parents "can be active and knowledgeable in assisting in the child's progress."

Rather, the teachers cited family characteristics and functioning style as reasons for noninvolvement. Family circumstances, such as nontraditional family structure and poor socio-economic status, were evaluated as deficits indigenous to the class of people. The teachers generally viewed families with few resources as having low involvement. While the teacher's assessments may be accurate descriptions of reality for many families, they represented a static view of families and do not assume that further development is possible. Further, the attributions which teachers assigned to parents were influenced by middle-class values held by the

teachers. They held these attributes are their standard for the adequacy of involvement. The teacher's explanations about the variations in involvement were expressed in a "concerned" parent, "unfortunate situation" dichotomy. Summarily, it would appear that teacher beliefs and values interacted with parent beliefs and values in ways which affected teacher appraisal of involvement outcomes either positively or negatively.

With the exception of some initial adjustment problems, all parents reported being pleased that their child was being served by the program. Implicit in their assessment of benefit of the program was an indication of relief. Progress experienced in the program brought families reassurance that they had not caused the child's problems "after all." Parents reported receiving many benefits from the program and placed a high value on these benefits. Although it was primarily expressed as a benefit to the child among the least involved, all parents expressed getting more support from the program than teachers thought they felt. One difference seemed to be that the most involved parents frequently visited the program site, attended the activities there, and told the teachers how much they appreciated them. Without this reinforcement, teachers assumed that the least involved parents did not appreciate their work with the child, which in turn affected interactions with the parent.

How parents viewed the child's development seemed to influence the role they assumed with the child's development and the program. Parents who were aware and interactive knew how to use the teacher as a resource expressing that they needed the teacher to tell them what to do. All parents subscribed to the longstanding image of the teacher as the one who "knows how to teach my child." The most involved parents sought information and support from the professional in carrying out child level activities.

As a group the young, black, single mothers were identified as having a poor record of involvement. These young mothers brought some unique developmental characteristics to their role as a parent. With the exception of one teacher, who reported responding to needs identified by the teenage mother, encounters with these mothers challenge the teachers beyond their skills or willingness to respond. The factors, as well as the low socioeconomic status, confounded even further the explanation for their low involvement. Influenced by the cultural and socioeconomic status of the parent, the variation in levels of parent involvement reported by the teachers depended largely on whether or not they had developed a working relationship, i.e., shared responsibility, with the parent.

It appears that one way of interpreting this phenomenon is that the teachers' designation of the two parent groups

was, in part, a measure of the parent's readiness to form a positive working relationship with the teacher. The teacher-parent relationship was strongly influenced by the characteristics of parent groups. Building the relationship with the intact, middle class family whose value and belief system were similar to their own did not appear to be difficult. This working relationship failed to materialize for the parents who were poor, black, and single.

These characteristics of the least involved, given the traditional low expectations of this social group, provided the teachers in the study a logical explanation for why low levels of involvement were occurring in these families. On the other hand they portrayed the most involved parents as being concerned and caring, because they consistently responded to requests by the teacher, initiated communication with her and interacted with the program activities. While it is human nature to work with people who reciprocate, teachers are professionally obligated to interact with parents on a different basis. Suppose physicians only continued to treat patients who were grateful.

The researcher was interested in interpreting the variations of involvement in order to understand how the differences could be used as an intervention variable. Based on the findings, it appeared that the parents who did not identify with or support teachers' involvement practices, did

not perceive an active role within the professionally designed plan. While their inability to see a role can be attributed in part to educational level and socioeconomic levels, how they regard the child's development and the degree of control they feel they have is a more important variable.

These families traditionally have had low status and little power within human service agencies. They are not accustomed to having a role in decision making or in having choices, instead they are placed in subservient position when dealing with service agencies. Their lack of opportunity to develop skills interfered with growth in the ability to conceptualize the child's development on a high level. Feeling more in control of their lives, the middle class family actively makes decisions and makes choices about events which effect their lives. Hence their active pursuit of the teacher's knowledge and experience resulted in their growth and development.

What is the difference in a teacher's ability to arrive at a highly successful parent-teacher relationship in one instance and not in another? When the parent does not have an expectancy for sharing responsibility for the child's development, then a part of the answer also lies in how the teacher defines her role with the parent. Teachers who are skilled in playing a variety of roles with the family increase the likelihood that families who are not ready to focus on the

more traditional child needs will respond. As demonstrated by one teacher's use of broader help-giving behaviors to respond to expressed needs of the family increased the probability for family ownership and increased involvement in the program. The teacher who reported successfully increasing involvement by focusing on the expressed needs of the parents, systematically used helping behaviors that resulted in increases in involvement.

The outcome of involvement efforts then would be influenced by the variety of help-giving behaviors a teacher uses to maintain a relationship which is responsive to parents. Doing so requires that the teacher take a help-giving perspective about her role with the parent. Teachers can engage in a variety of roles with the parents which include giving support and providing other resources without feeling that they must function as their life-raft or fear becoming "over involved." It was observed that some parents who were showing high involvement were not necessarily being involved in ways which resulted in the parents feeling competent and capable of charting the future development course of the family.

Because services are delivered within a school environment, parents will continue to be influenced by the longstanding belief that teachers are the experts and that they know what is best for the child. Vincent (1988) observed

that this is a rather troublesome paradox since the early intervention practice has subscribed a teaching role to parents. This incongruence in role perception is all the more reason why public school programs providing services to the preschool child with handicaps need to address the issue of support to family development--to use a term which parallels child development.

In the main, when school officials have invited parents to get involved, the motivation has been to benefit the school, i.e., improved achievement scores demanded by the public. As we observed earlier, schools have viewed "involved" parents as those who provide support to the teacher in his or her teaching role with the child. Teachers in the present study were typical in their expectations of support from parents. However, leaders in early intervention and recent policy groups continue to endorse the practice of giving support to the family (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988; Fewell, 1986). How teachers deal with the issue of support to rather than support from parents is at the very crux of any evaluation of how effective teachers are in their attempts to involve parents. This issue has implication for parents who are already involved as well as those who are not perceived as involved.

Early intervention practice was founded on the belief that parents can benefit from the support of professionals

when dealing with behavior or development that is not progressing normally. Dunst and Paget (in press) advocate operationalizing the concept of support within a parent/professional partnership, in which the balance of power is in favor of the developing individual. For teachers, this approach to working with parents will mean that they must broaden their perspective and search for ways to enhance the development of the family unit as it relates to progress of the child.

Given what is known about the influence of the family, it would seem efficacious for the early childhood special educators to understand more about the perspective and skills the parent brings to the program. This perspective should take into account the families' beliefs about their role, and in more subtle ways an understanding of aspirations and beliefs about their ability to use resources and supports to meet needs. If the family has not developed the skills to make things happen on its own behalf, then the professional helps most when they employ help-giving strategies which enable the family to assume responsibility for its members, i.e., active involvement.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

In this chapter the major insights gained from the examination of the parent involvement process are discussed and related to plausible explanations from relevant theory. Implications for incorporating parent involvement practices which are responsive to the family in the schools are discussed. Preservice and inservice training needs for public school personnel leading to incorporation of help-giving strategies within a family-centered approach are discussed. Specific recommendations are made for refocusing parent involvement practice in the program being studied. Recommendations for further research are outlined.

The time honored adage that "knowledge is power" requires modification when the involvement of the parents identified as least involved is considered. The preschool teachers being studied reported various attempts to engage these parents in activities for the purpose of involving them in the child's program. Teachers described their efforts in such areas as sharing information about the child's developmental levels, interpreting test results, and modeling techniques for teaching skills during the home visits. Despite the teachers repeated attempts to provide knowledge and involvement opportunities, they did not feel positive about the levels of

parent participation nor did they feel successful with least involved parents.

One explanation for parent's level of participation can be found in the work of psychologists like Bronfenbrenner (1986), Cochran and Henderson (1986) and Dunst and Trivette (1986, 1987, 1988) who claim that one correlate of involvement, is the degree to which parent needs are met. These researchers have suggested that families put their energy into meeting needs that are most immediate. Since a family has a given amount of energy to devote to meeting needs, it has been successfully argued that lower level needs become priority. Reasonably, families, where basic needs for food, shelter and clothing are pressing, have little time and energy to devote to meeting higher level needs. Likewise, a need will frequently go unidentified if no solution is evident. Although the data from the present study on the perceived needs of families as well as the resources they had available to them is not exhaustive, observations of the family context and their descriptions were sufficient to provide support to the notion that perceived needs and expectations about solutions influence an individual's actions.

When considering the limited model that the teachers were operating on, the relationships and ongoing interactions which existed between the teachers and parents can also be partially

explained by reinforcement and attribution theory. When the parent cooperated with the teacher and met her expectations, these responses reinforced the teachers' practices and resulted in them feeling positive about the parent's involvement. Feelings of success with parents reinforced the teachers to continue what they were doing in the belief that their efforts were worthwhile. When the parent did not respond, the teachers did not receive sufficient feedback and reinforcement to continue their efforts. Because parents lack of involvement had to be accounted to some reason, most teachers attributed it to the family characteristics such as not caring or knowing enough to act. When teachers attributed the behavior to weaknesses within the family, they did not need to be responsible for intervening with families.

Earlier in the study it was suggested that the parent's conceptualization of development may influence how the parents responded to the teacher, the use they make of information, or how they interpret child behavior. Sigel (1985) has reported the work of several researchers who have studied parent belief systems. Among them, Sameroff and Feil (1985) outlined the four conceptual levels analogous to Piaget's stages of cognitive development which they believe explain the differences in parents' interpretations of behavior and their use of information on child development to interact with the child. Relevant aspects of these levels are summarized:

I. Symbiotic. Parents respond on a here-and now fashion to the child's behavior. They do not see themselves as separate from the child because they interpret the child's behavior as being directly tied to their own activity. The lack of differentiation between one self and one's child makes the ability to reflect on the developmental process impossible.

II. Categorical. Parents are able to see their children and themselves as separate entities. The children's actions are viewed as being intrinsic to the child and not solely the result of the parent's activity. Parents operating at this level assign positive or negative labels, such as good girl, bright child, or bad boy which are used to characterize the child in much the same way that he has blue eyes. Parents tend to see behavior as having single causes, any specific outcome will be viewed either as part of the child's nature or as a result of the environment.

III. Compensating. Parents view the child's behavior as related to a stage: infants cry;, toddlers are hyperactive. The parent is able to use a much broader context for valuing the true child. Developmental outcomes are seen in the child's nature and the environment, but a full appreciation of the relationship between variables and outcomes is lacking. The normative behavior at each age is considered a characteristic of human development. When a behavior extends beyond the normative period it is considered deviant.

IV. Perspectivistic. Parents interpret the child's behavior in a context which they see as stemming from an individual experience with a specific environment. When the experience of the child is changed the parent assumes the child's behavior will change. (Sameroff & Feil, 1985, pp. 86-88)

When Sameroff's framework is applied to the least involved parents, their responses can be interpreted as reflecting behavior associated with lower conceptual levels of development. This interpretation provides a reasonable explanation for why these parents did not give indications that their actions made a difference in the child's developmental progress. The most memorable example was the mother who responded that she could help the child most "by buying school supplies." Based on how the most involved parents described their role with the program and with child, it seems likely that they viewed their interactions with the child as being a part of the reason the child was making progress. Their thinking is more like the higher perspectivistic level.

Sameroff and Feil (1985) reported that their research had shown that simpler concepts of development are frequently found in lower socioeconomic status groups. As these researchers observed, differences in conceptualization might be accounted for by the common assumption about lower levels of intelligence within this group, but they argued that the

lack of choices, high levels of conformity to authority, and feelings of little power with social institutions were more likely responsible for parents functioning at the lower conceptual levels. When their environments and social contexts as well as their relationships with social service agencies are considered, these arguments would appear to have merit.

Sameroff gives a caution from his earlier work about the relationship between the way parents understand development and the way children progress, which suggests that the complexity of parental thought has meaning only when entered into the same equation with the specific contexts of thought and the characteristics of the child (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). The liabilities created by a child's handicapping condition make the limitations in a parent's thinking an important variable in the developmental equation.

Although the most involved parents were perceived by the teachers as taking an active role in the child's development, these parents were attributing the child's progress to being in the program. The child-focused narrow approach used by the teachers is more likely to impact negatively on the parents' belief about their competence. By maintaining control over the interventions, the teachers and other service providers can unwittingly promote dependency in the parents which can affect how the families account for developmental progress.

This control issue can be extremely detrimental to low socioeconomic status families and contribute to their feelings of low competence.

Peterson (1987) views parent involvement as a process in which parents interface with two important elements, the staff and the activities involving the child. The perspectives and beliefs held by an early intervention staff and the strategies they employed with families became the key to whether or not any activity resulted in active involvement with a particular family. During the last twenty years best practice with young children has evolved from a directed, didactic approach with children to an approach that views them as active, initiating participants in the learning process. An equivalent evolutionary process is being promoted relative to our view of families. As suggested by the results in the present study, some families like some children already have the skills and knowledge to act on their own behalf, others need to be enabled and supported toward more self-sufficiency. The expectations, beliefs, and abilities of the least and most involved parents to engage in the involvement process present are interpreted and applied to both groups in Table 4. When the parent attributes are conceptualized in this manner, they can be used to define the way a family is currently functioning and can be used as the basis for helping teachers to define needs and strengths on which to plan interventions,

Table 4

Summary of Parent Expectations, Beliefs and Abilities
To Engage in the Involvement Process

All parents:

- Made positive statements about the program and credited it for child's progress.
- Indicated that they received more support than teachers assumed they do.
- Wanted honesty and straightforwardness from teachers.

Most Involved

Least Involved

Knew how to use the system to develop resources to meet needs.

Waited for the system to respond to them.

Were solution-oriented.

Had few expectations about developing self-solutions or identifying needs.

Expected to share responsibility.

Yielded to professional judgment and expects professional to control.

Wanted direction and support so invited instruction and demonstrations to learn how to help child.

Believed teacher should report child progress but did not see relevance of teacher's instructional sessions.

Expected to take an active role in development.

Saw role as one of providing for physical needs.

Viewed the teacher as a resource.

Viewed the teacher and other agency personnel as having the answers.

Verbalized interest and appreciation to teacher concerning program.

Pleased with program but did not express interest or appreciation to teacher.

Felt that they had benefited from program.

Expressed benefit to child but not for themselves.

Initiated communication.

Responded to teacher initiated communication.

and as such have direct implication for parent involvement practice.

The concept of special education is based on the belief that some children need a specially designed education program in order to receive an equal educational opportunity. If this concept of equal educational opportunity is extended to parents as result of the professional's knowledge of their influence on the young child, then most teachers will need to reorient their thinking about parents. This reorientation can result in the teachers' assuming the appropriate help-giving roles to ensure active involvement from all parents. From a systems perspective, the supports available at one level impact the system at other levels:

Parent's perceptions of and their responses to their children are influenced by larger social systems beyond the parent-child relationship. Whether parents can perform effectively in their child-rearing roles within the family depends upon role demands, stresses and supports emanating from other settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 7).

Likewise, district-wide changes are indicated so that the necessary supports are available to teachers to assist the family in understanding its needs and in meeting them.

Implications for Practice

Also viewed from a systems perspective, the feedback cycle and the teacher-parent relationship reasonably are elements which can impact on child development. The teacher

is a primary provider within the parents' formal network. When viewed as a part of a formal system of support, teachers affect the family unit in positive or negative ways as they carry out the roles associated with their position. When the position is conceived as including help-giving functions to families, in addition to the more traditional teacher/therapist role other roles such as empathetic listener, consultant, resource, enabler, mobilizer, mediator, and advocate can enhance the teacher's potential to impact the family in positive ways (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988). Dunst, Trivette, and Deal propose 12 guidelines derived from the work of Fisher, Nadler and DePaulo (1983) on help-giving deemed most likely to enable, empower, and strengthen families as well as promote acquisition of the competencies necessary to meet needs (Dunst & Trivette, 1987). These guidelines (Appendix D) have major implications for implementing a systematic approach to effective parent-teacher interaction which can lead to an attitude of shared responsibility between the family and professional.

While it is essential to expand the role of teachers working in a preschool program, considerations should also be given to balancing roles among the staff within public school programs like the one being studied. To realistically plan for programs to properly implement services to families, program administrators would be wise to consider using family

specialists to support the teacher in his or her efforts to respond to families level concerns. Teachers usually function as a member of a multidisciplinary program. In addition to their responsibilities with children, they frequently carry the major responsibility for ongoing contact with families. In this program, as in most programs currently in operation, other team members like the physical therapist or the speech and language specialists primarily serve on assessment teams and do direct child-level interventions, but have minimal responsibility for promoting parent involvement. The family specialist's role could include responsibility for case management activities similar to that required in the family service plan under the Part H regulation for infants and toddlers. Instead of recommending a new professional during a period of budget restraints, school social workers and home-school coordinators presently employed within districts could appropriately serve in such a role. Thus in order to move away from the present view of parent involvement as a support to teacher directed activities to a systematic inclusion of family needs, teachers and other program staff need to develop broader perspectives regarding their role with parents. Such a shift has implications for training with program staff.

Considerations for Preservice and Inservice Training

At the present time, the need to train personnel to work in the expanding early intervention programs is being widely discussed. Developing skills and attitudes for working with families is viewed as a high training priority in early childhood special education. In a recent position paper by the personnel subcommittee of the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (McCollum J., McLean, M., McCartan, K. & Kaiser, C., 1990), a strong background in family systems and family development with the accompanying knowledge about assisting families in the use of community resources was recommended for educators working in early intervention program serving children, birth to age five. Bailey (1989) has indicated that personnel training must be built upon a new framework which recognizes unique characteristics of the populations, goals for intervention, contexts of intervention, and the family roles.

During the fifteen years since the enactment of PL 94-142, parents have petitioned the Supreme Court to interpret the meaning of "appropriate education" for a student with handicaps. With the increased focus on parent involvement, will the parents demand that provisions like "whenever appropriate", "to the extent parents desire" and "active involvement" be interpreted? An equally appropriate question is how much "instruction" is required, for example, to

increase parent decision making skills so they can be proactive. The issue of instruction has implications for training decisions with parents and teachers. Brinckerhoff and Vincent (1986) report that a number of surveys and observational analyses of IEP meetings with parents suggest that parents in general are not actively participating nor are they informed about various aspects of the meeting. In an experimental study conducted by these researchers, they were able to demonstrate increased participation by intervening with parents of three and four year old handicapped preschoolers and school staff. The parents in the experimental group received support and coaching as they gathered information on their child and their family routines for presentation in a planning meeting. During the subsequent meetings, the parents from the experimental group were included in decision-making more frequently than the control group. However, these researchers report that both parent groups reported high levels of satisfaction because the questionnaires used to measure perceptions were not sufficiently sensitive to measure differences. Another interpretation of these results is that until parents are taught to be consumers they have little experience on which to base the degree to which they are being involved. Therefore, measures of their satisfaction levels are invalid for evaluating the success of involvement practices.

The need, as further demonstrated by the results of the present study, to reorient practicing early childhood special educators to be responsive to the needs which families identify in ways which will promote participatory involvement and informed decision-making will require a major reconceptualization of the teacher's role. According to Dunst and Paget (in press) the definition of active involvement will need to be expanded to mean "parents increased understanding of child and family needs, and self-attributions about the role family members played in meeting needs" (p. 122). This definition suggests that program staff are responsible for developing working relationships with all families. The most comprehensive approach available to accomplish such a relationship is the family-center model like the one developed by Dunst and his colleagues. The model and the corollaries on which it is based subscribe to the philosophy of human behavior advocated by Hobbs et al. (1984) that supports and strengthens family functioning as a way of empowering the family to acquire the competencies necessary to negotiate its developmental course in response to both normative and non-normative life events (Dunst & Trivett, 1987).

Recommendations of Implementing Practices Responsive
to Family Needs

Based on interpretations of the teacher and parent perceptions within the program being studied, the following recommendations are proposed to the school district to refocus the parent involvement practices to more systematically respond to family-level needs, as they relate to the child's development, creating a climate for shared responsibility. As such, the family should be viewed as an integral part in the early intervention process. While the results of this study cannot be generalized to other programs, it is believed that they represent issues that most public school programs serving the preschool handicapped child will need to examine.

1. The interpretations of the teachers' perspectives, particularly, their view of their role with parents, should be validated by the teachers in the program site.
2. The administrative staff should explore the legal and ethical basis for formulating policy and procedure which incorporates the family-level needs as it relates to providing services for the young child.
3. A needs assessment should be conducted with the program staff to more accurately determine staff perceptions about the degree to which the program is responding to family needs as well as their willingness to adopt a broader-based focus.

4. The concepts associated with a family system's perspective should be discussed with the administrative and program staff.

5. The attitudes and resources needed to expand staff roles and to engage in role release should be explored. Given the current staffing patterns in the program, consideration should be given to using the teacher who shows a high orientation to families as a family specialist while reorientation with the other teachers is in progress. Her successes can serve as a catalyst for changing the attitudes of other teachers and to present a model of interaction.

6. The parent's perceptions about expectations of involvement, beliefs about their roles, and assessment of their abilities should be used as the basis of empathy training to include topics such as: parent's conceptualization of development, needs and strengths identification, and attribution theory.

7. Administrative and program level personnel should engage in dialogue with other agencies concerning their willingness to cooperate in supporting family development. Contact with the Naval Family Support Agency will be one example of determining available resources to support Navy families.

8. Since the school district also administers a program for infants and toddlers, planning should include staff from the program.

Recommendations for Further Research

The insights gained from an analysis of teacher and parent perceptions have implications for additional exploration of determinants of active involvement.

1. Subsequent investigations need to focus on how factors associated with cultural beliefs held by the black community may influence attempts to build the relationship and promote shared responsibility between program staff and black parents. A key area which should be explored is communication patterns between child and parent.

2. Several of the mothers in the least involved group were young. Their perceptions highlight a need to explore the social and developmental needs of this parent group to gain a better understanding of their specific needs and to guide program personnel to evaluate approaches with them.

3. System-wide influences likely influenced the teachers' behavior and their willingness to explore a broader role with families. A greater understanding of these influences would be valuable in initiating dialogue leading to the expansion of district policy and procedure on parent involvement. For example, teachers indicated concerns about required home visits with the least involved parents. Because they often were unable to make them viable, they frequently resorted to meeting only the procedural requirements for conducting the

visits. Such a practice can threaten, not enhance, child and family development.

4. Finally, the field of early intervention is currently attempting to apply the principles of effective help-giving from social psychology. Further exploration of their appropriateness to the role of the early childhood special educators is indicated.

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Appendix A

Interview Guides for Teachers and Parents

Teacher Interview Guide

Teacher_____

Date_____

Start time_____

End time_____

INTRODUCTION

Goals:

For the Parent Interview:

Developing accounts from some of your families related to their involvement in the preschool program.

Greater insight into how parents view their roles in the education process and development of their child in general.

For the Teacher Interview:

First, I need to gather information about your experiences working with families

and your views about how parental involvement fits into the program goals.

Nancy Peterson has developed a description of the involvement process that will give us a common ground to work from.

[Share Peterson's (1987) definition and discuss its meaning, explaining that activities are expected to vary from program to program]

Parent involvement or participation denotes a process through which parents are brought into contact with

(a) the staff that has responsibility for giving service to the handicapped child (and parent) for purposes of educational intervention, and

(b) activities involving the child, which are created to inform parents and to facilitate parent roles with their own child

Involvement implies a variety of alternative activities that vary from program to program. Differences in the options available are affected by the unique features of a program, the

geographical setting, the population of children and parents to be served and resources available.
(p. 434)

Role of parent in your work with your children

-Tell me about the activities you use to involve parents

-what strategies are you using to involve parents in their child's program?

-are these related to the child's program goals?

-what opportunities occur on a daily or weekly basis?

-do families rely on you for emotional support?

-are you are resource to them in other areas?

Describe the ideal relationship or situation that you like to have with parents

What record do you keep of involvement activities?

Let's talk about the amount of time you spend with the parent related activities.

How much focus should be placed on working with parents?

-do you spend time outside the workday with parent related activities?

Do other school personnel have specific responsibilities with the families?

Are there other activities that you think would be effective?

Generally how successful have you been in involving families in the program?

Role with the child

The majority of your time is spent working with the children on your program. You are thought of as their teacher. But do you have additional roles with the children in your program?

(use is role play episode, if teacher is not responsive)

Pretend that I am your new principal and I had never had preschool handicapped in my building. Describe your work with the children to me.

You talked to me about your role with these very young children. What do you think the parents role should be?

How is your role different from the parent's?

How is it similar to the parents role?

Have you always seen the distinctions this way?

In what ways do you think having a child in the program affects the families routine?

What kinds of things do your families have to cope with that are particularly difficult?

Family with minimal involvement

Now I would like to specifically discuss the family that you identified as being one of your least involved.

Let's talk first about .

Why does C attend the program?

Is there a medical diagnosis?

How long have you been working with C?

What are some of his strength - what things you feel he has going for him?

What major goals are you working on at the present time?

Tell me about this family's interaction with the program

-what questions have these parents had about C's delay or handicap?

-what questions do they have about skills he is learning in the program?

-what have they requested help with?

-what types of things do you talk with them about?

- how often are you in contact?
- to what extent did the family take part in the initial assessment?
- what suggestions did they may or questions did they ask during the formulation of the IEP(s)?
- how often do you revise the C's IEP?
- does the family come to parent meetings or other group activities?
- what about group and/or individual training sessions?
- how frequently do you make home visits to this family?
- who is generally at home during the visit?
- can you recall some details from the last visit that you made?
- how does the parent regard the visits?
- has the involvement increased/ decreased across the time that you have worked with C?
- have certain events or circumstances influenced the change?
- can you give me an example of the interactions you have observed among family members?
- how do mom/dad (others in family) generally interact with C?
- how do you think they interpret their role in the program?
- what do they think the purpose of the program is?
- how does the parent let you know information about C?
- do the parents seem to be benefiting from the program?
- why do you think this family's involvement is limited?
- does this family have the resources that it needs to meet its basic needs?
- what most distinguishes this family from the family who is actively involved

-are there other parents in the program who have similar levels of involvement?

-how do you explain their behavior?

-can changes be expected within this families functioning that might make a difference?

Thank you for your insight into this family. This is very helpful information.

Let's turn our attention to one of your most involved families for a few minutes.

Why does C attend the program?

Has his/her problem been diagnosed medically?

How long have you been working with C?

What is a strength he has; what positive things stand out?

What are his/her major goals at the present time?

Tell me how this family interacts with the program

-what questions do they have about C's delay or handicap?

-what questions do they have about skills he/she is learning in the program?

-what do they request help with?

-what do you talk with them about?

-how often are you in contact?

-to what extent did the family take part in the initial assessment?

-what suggestions or questions do they ask during the development of the IEP?

-how frequently do you update the IEP?

-does the family come to parent meeting/group activities?

-how about group and/or individual training sessions

-how frequently do you make home visits?

- please recall the last visit you made to this family
- has the involvement increased/decreased during the time that you have worked with C?
- have certain events or circumstances directly influenced the changes?
- give me an example of the communication among family members?
- how do mom/dad (others) generally interact with C?
- how do you think they view their role in the program?
- why do they think C is in the program?
- how does the parent let you know information about C?
- do the parents seem to be receiving benefit from the program?
- why do you think this family is so actively involved?
- does this family seem to have the resources to meet its basic needs?
- what most distinguishes them from the family who is not very involved
- are there other parents in the program who have similar levels of involvement?
- to what do you account their behavior?

This information will be very valuable background for interpreting the family's perceptions of involvement. Thank you so much for taking your time to share your experiences with these two families.

Parent Interview Guide

Number _____ Date _____
Family members present: Start time End time__

Introduction:
(brief casual conversation; reassurance that interview will remain anonymous)

Introduction to the interview:

I will be making some notes as we talk so I'll know that we have covered all of the areas I want to talk to you about. As I told you I appreciate being able to record our conversation. I can't possibly remember all of the details unless I do. Having what we talked about on tape will help me when I write it up.

A few years ago we waited until a child was six years old before we started him into school. Now we realize that the early years are very important to learning and later development. The schools here in Virginia started programs for some preschool children about ten years ago, but no one has talked to parents about how the program is doing. In fact, we don't know much about what parents are thinking and feeling about the programs.

I plan to talk to about twenty families to learn more about what parents think.

Interview:

As we begin talking, I would like to know

-how you knew that there was a program to work with C?
-who referred C to the program?

As you know not all children may attend the program. Each child must qualify (meet certain guidelines) to be able to enroll.

-what information did the school need to know before _____ was able to start?

-how did C qualify for the program?

-was it hard to decide to send him/her?

-how long has he been going?

-has he had the same teacher?

-what did you think he would be doing at school?

Now, I would like to know some things about the program
If it would help, think about it as if you were telling a friend that you hadn't seen in a long time about him being in school.

Probes:

- how much time does C spend in the program?
- how does he get there?
- what does he do during the day?
- who works with C?
- anyone other than the teacher?
- what are some things he is learning?
- skills he is working on?

Have you had other child attend a program like this one?

I would like to know if your family's routine was effected because he went to the program

-tell me about the adjustments you had to make so C could attend the program?

When C first started in the program they made plans to develop areas where he was having some difficulty.

-what questions did the teachers or other school personnel ask you about his/her development?

-what are some of the things you remember telling them about C's development?

-did you also give them suggestions things you wanted C to have some help in?

-have any of your suggestions been used for working on skills?

-are these things you have been working on too?

I was wondering if you are involved in the day-to-day planning for.

Probes:

-when you have things that you would like for the teacher to work on how do you go about asking?

-have you gotten involved in working with specific areas (give example based on child)?

-how much contact do you have with Ms. _____?

-how do you and the teacher stay in touch with each other?

-how does the teacher let you know about things C is working on?

The program is there to work with your child but I am also interested to know what you have gotten out of it.

-what kinds of help have you been able to get from the program?

-what help from other sources?

-does the program help you contact other sources for services? In general, how did you fit into the school program?

-what part do you play in C's program?

The teacher makes home visits. Tell me about your home visits.

-what is the main purpose of the visits

-what does the teacher do during the visit?

-does she/he work directly with the child?

-what do you do when she is in your home?

-does the teacher work directly with you, too?

-are the visits valuable to you?

-what things has she helped you with?

-has the teacher worked with other family members?

Do other school personnel come to your home or do they work with you in other ways?

Some programs organize activities to help parents get together.

-have you had an opportunity to meet other parents?

-how much contact have you had?

-has this contact been helpful to you?

There are opportunities to take part in activities at school

-have you had a chance to go to group workshops or parent groups

-how about visiting the classroom?

-can you go by about anytime?

-what kinds of things do you do while you are in the classroom?

-do you volunteer to help with certain activities?

-is there any particular reason you like to volunteer?

The teacher is some one you work with.

-what is an ideal the relationship between you and the teacher?

Now I would like to get a general idea about how you get help with things you need.

-who do you look to for support when you need help in solving problems in general

-when you need help with managing the child(ren)?

-when you need help with C that is not related to education?

-can you count on our immediate family?

-how do you feel about asking for help?

-are there any particular things that you need help with at the present time?

-when would you call on the teacher for support or assistance?

Let's talk about some of the goals that you have for your child in the future?

-what are some things that have happened lately that you feel good about?

-who will be most helpful in working with you to make things happen for your child?

All families must have certain resources to provide for it basic necessities on a regular basis.

-are your family needs being taken care of at the present time?

-what things are interfering with meeting these needs?

Post interview comments:

It is really good to be able to talk to you about your child and to learn more about how the preschool program works with families. Can you think of other things that you would like to share about the preschool program before I go. Thank you so much for your time. What you tell me will help with recommendations to programs as they work with parents.

Appendix B
Introduction Letter

VIRGINIA TECH

Division of Administrative
and Educational Services

May 5, 1988

University City Office Building
Blacksburg, VA 24061

(703) 961-5925

Dr. Gene R. Carter
Superintendent
Norfolk City Schools
P. O. Box 1357
Norfolk, VA 23501

Dear Dr. Carter:

During a recent conversation, Dr. Shirley Underwood and I discussed the possibility of allowing Ms. Alma Davis, a doctoral candidate in Administration and Supervision of Special Education, to gain entry into your system before the end of this academic year to collect data for her dissertation. Ms. Davis, who currently serves as the Coordinator of the Technical Assistance Center for Teachers of the Preschool Handicapped in Southwest Virginia (TAC-1), proposes to examine the family's perspective of their involvement in programs for the preschool handicapped. We are aware that the family is the major influence in the development of the young child; however, there is little documented evidence on the parents' perspective of their role in the individualized education process. This topic is especially timely given new attention to the family's role in preschool programs in the 1986 Amendments of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, PL 99-457. The findings from this study will provide a greater understanding of the parents' view of their involvement which could, in turn, lead to more effective methods of responding to family needs.

Ms. Davis will need to have access to preschool teachers and to a selected number of parents so that she may conduct interviews with them. Dr. Underwood advised us that we should present the particulars of this request to you for consideration. Enclosed is a brief description of the study and an outline of the proposed implementation procedures specifying how the teachers would be involved in the research process. Ms. Davis is available to meet with members of your staff if additional clarification or refinement is needed.

An early response to this request would be appreciated to allow for data collection before the end of the current school year. Thank you for considering our request to conduct this study in the Norfolk City Schools.

Sincerely,

Philip R. Jones
Professor and Coordinator
Administration and Supervision
of Special Education

Alma W. Davis
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C
Permission Letter

Dear Parent,

My name is Alma Davis. Mrs. Greer and the teachers at Easton Preschool are helping me with a study about how parents view preschool programs. This letter is to invite you to take part in my study. If you agree, I will ask you to spend about 45 minutes talking with me. I want to ask questions about how you decided to send your child to the preschool program and what she or he does in the program. I also will be asking about ways that you take part.

I will need to tape record the interview so that I can remember what we talked about. Everything you tell me in the interview will be confidential. Nobody at school will hear the tapes or see typed copies of the interview. I will not tell them the things you tell me. When I write up the study I will not use your name or information that will identify you personally. I will do the interviews at a time and place that is good for you.

The information that I get from parents can be helpful in deciding how we can better work with young children and their families. Taking part in the study is voluntary for you and will not affect your child's present program.

If you are willing to take part I will need permission to contact you to set up the interviews. I will also need to look at your child's school records. The information that I use from the records will not contain your child's name.

I will be happy to talk to you if you have questions before you sign. You leave a message locally with Melanie at 363-2628 or call me collect in Blacksburg at (703) 951-1146.

Sincerely,

Alma Davis, Virginia Tech Doctoral Student
1101 Robin Road, Blacksburg, VA 24060

I understand the information about the study and agree to be interviewed. I give permission for Alma Davis to contact me.

She can call me at _____ . Time of day to call _____
_____ . My address is _____

I give permission for Ms. Davis to review my child's school records.

Signed _____
Date _____

Child's Name _____

Appendix D

Help-Giving Guidelines

Major Operatives (Guidelines) for Enabling
and Empowering Families

- Be both positive and proactive in interactions with families.
- Offer help in response to family identified needs.
- Permit the family to decide whether to accept or reject help.
- Offer help that is normative.
- Offer help that is congruent with the family's appraisal of their needs.
- Promote acceptance of help by keeping the response costs low.
- Permit help to be reciprocated.
- Promote the family's immediate success in mobilizing resources.
- Promote the use of informal support as the principle way of meeting needs.
- Promote a sense of cooperation and joint responsibility for meeting family needs.
- Promote the family member's acquisition of effective behavior for meeting needs.
- Promote the family member's ability to see themselves as an active agent responsible for behavior change.

(Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988)

VITA

Alma Louise Watson

Address: P.O. Box 1778, Morganton, NC 28655

Birthplace: Asheville, NC **Date of Birth:** October 31, 1942

Education:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Ed.D.,
Administration and Supervision of Special Education,
1990; CAGS, 1987.

Appalachian State University, Ed.S., Emotional Disturbance,
1982; MA, Learning Disabilities, 1977.

Lenoir Rhyne College, BA, Early Childhood Education, 1966.

Professional Experience:

Coordinator, Family Infant Specialist Training Program,
Adjunct Graduate Faculty, Appalachian State University,
Boone, NC, 1988-present.

Coordinator, Technical Assistance Center for Teachers of the
Preschool Handicapped, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University, Blacksburg, VA, 1984-1988.

Assistant Professor, Western Carolina University, Collowhee,
NC, 1983-1984.

Practitioner-in-Residence, Appalachian State University,
Boone, NC, 1982-1983.

McDowell County Schools, Marion, NC
Special Education Resource Teacher, 1980-1981
Director of Programs for Exceptional Children, 1974-1980
Principal, 1971-1974
Early Childhood Classroom Teacher, 1966-1971.


Alma Louise Watson